CHAPTER III

RAJA RAO’S NOVELS: THE COLONIAL PERIOD
Raja Rao (1908-2006), perhaps the most influential Indian writer in English, has left an indelible mark upon the Indian literary scene, and upon the writings of many of his contemporaries and the next generation of writers. Raja Rao’s contribution to Indian literature in English can be compared to Munshi Premchand’s contribution in Hindi/Urdu literature. Raja Rao was a pioneer of Indian writing in English and among his contemporaries like, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Kamala Markandaya, Sarojini Naidu, he is was deeply attached to the rural setting he uses in his fictional works. His literary works spring from the realities of rural life, but his stories connect smoothly to the realities in the entire length and breadth of India. C.D. Narasimhaiah, in his introduction to Kanthapura, observes:

When it comes to style, the breath-takingly long sentences, and repetitions of names and words, while sometimes necessary to build up the tempo of the commotion in Kanthapura, can also sound highly mannered and they do. But the author has enough stylistic devices to suit a wide range of emotional and mental states. In fact, an outstanding contribution of Raja Rao to Indian writing in English is to have struck new paths for a sensibility which is essentially Indian. (xviii)

Raja Rao has been active in the literary activities during the colonial as well as postcolonial days in India. The most prominent of his works during the colonial period are Kanthapura and a collection of short stories titled “The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories”. Kanthapura relates the story of Indian freedom movement that gained momentum under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. “The Cow of the Barricades” is a short story in his short story collection that narrates the way Indian masses were driven by their newly generated faith in national identity and how that faith could be tapped by Mahatma Gandhi to mobilize the masses to rise up in resistance to cultural and political hegemony of the British. Raja Rao’s prominent postcolonial novels are The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare, Comrade Kirillov, and The Chessmaster and His Moves. In the present chapter Raja Rao’s novels of colonial period are analyzed with a view to examine his perception of colonial rule in India and the socio-political resistance to cultural hegemony that people of India were aroused to. Thus, the novel Kanthapura (published in 1938) and the sort story “The Cow of the Barricades” (published in 1947) are subjected to critical analysis here.
Kanthapura: in Brief

*Kanthapura* is Raja Rao’s debut novel. The novel was published in the pre-independence days, in 1938, during the heydays of high colonialism. But, at the same time Indian freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad, to name only the prominent few, was also at its peak and it was well understood that sooner or later India will win freedom. So, the novel is a valuable document as a recorded history of the Indian freedom struggle, albeit in a fictional form. The village of Kanthapura is the microcosm of India and the struggle of the residents of the village of Kanthapura allegorizes the freedom struggle of the people of India under the leadership of Gandhi.

*Kanthapura* is the story of a small village Kanthapura located in the foothills of steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas in the province of Kara in south India. The story is narrated by Achakka, an old lady from the same village. As usual with Indian villages, the village life is extremely traditional, farther from modern living, and typically divided on caste lines, dominated by caste Hindus. The domination of upper castes, especially the Brahmans, is visible even in the structure of the village. The central living space is occupied by Brahmin families while the margins are left for the *Sudras* and pariah community people, for instance, potters and weavers. But still, it is depicted that the villagers are united owing to long-standing customs and traditions, and in the village gatherings and festivities all castes and communities take part with equal enthusiasm. The village goddess is Kenchamma who is believed to protect the village from evils and ills.

The central character in the novel is a Brahmin boy named Moorthy. He is an educated young man with a progressive outlook. The village temple where all ceremonies and festivities are celebrated making it the centre of village life came into being due to Moorthy’s efforts. Once he discovered a half-buried ‘lingam’ in the backyard of the narrator’s house; he consecrated it, installed it with proper ceremonies and then a temple was built at the place, called Kanthapurishwari’s temple. Moorthy was also greatly interested in Hari-katha, the traditional form of storytelling, particularly excerpted from the ancient Hindu epics, Puranas, philosophical treatises and oral histories. A famous Hari-katha man called Jayaramachar was well-known for
his erudition, and funny and interesting narrative style. One day Moorthy invites him to the village to collect money for the expenses from all the families in the village. Jayaramachar narrated the Hari-katha, but he interspersed the story with instances from the life of Gandhi and his ideals. The story of Shiva-Parvati became the story of colonized India! He was arrested on the charges of sedition and political propaganda. It seems since Moorthy was influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, he deliberately arranged this Hari-katha to inspire the people of his village to be prepared for the freedom struggle. Soon Moorthy leaves the village for the city.

Now the hitherto sleepy village turns into a vibrant action spot. Moorthy has familiarized himself with the ideas and ideals of Gandhi and now follows him in letter and spirit. On a call from Mahatma Gandhi he discards foreign goods, particularly clothes, quits his university education and puts on home-spun khadi clothes. He brings pamphlets and related literature on Gandhian philosophy to his village; he also fights against casteism and untouchability in his village and mingles with the pariahs, drinks milk given by an untouchable woman to him. He explains to village women the theory of ‘drain of wealth.’ Bhatta, the moneylender of the village, alienates himself from all this since Gandhian philosophy went against his self-interest. He represents the Indian capitalist class. Moorthy’s ideas infuriated the village priest, who in turn tells all this to the Swami, a supporter of the foreign government. Ultimately, Moorthy is excommunicated from the village. Hearing this, Moorthy’s mother Narsamma is heartbroken and almost committed suicide by running away from home at night and falling unconscious by the river side.

Sensing the increasing support for Gandhi and increasing unrest among the villagers, the government appoints there a police constable named Bade Khan to monitor the activities of the people. An outsider in the village, Bade Khan looks for a house in Kanthapura but none is ready to offer him a shelter since he is an appointee of the government. Even the village headman, Patel Range Gowda, a government appointee, also refused him any kind of help. Khan is furious at this and turns an enemy of the villagers and he vows revenge. At this point he is supported by the coffee planter Mr. Skeffington, an Englishman, at his Estate. He is given a hut there.

Moorthy has started living with Rangamma, an educated widow in his village who is also well-versed in Gandhian philosophy and also takes part in the freedom struggle. There lives a Brahmin family at Skeffington Coffee Estate. The family head
is interested in creating awareness among the coolies of the estate on Gandhian freedom movement. So, he invites Moorthy to the Estate. But, Bade Khan takes offence to this and when Moorthy turns up there and insists on visiting the coolies, there ensues a scuffle and Bade Khan hits him. The pariah coolies stand with Moorthy and they hit Bade Khan and the maistri. Moorthy evaluates this situation and finds he has succeeded in creating an atmosphere of non-violent struggle espoused by Gandhi, but feels unhappy and sad at the turn of events because policeman Bade Khan has been beaten up.

Pariah Rachanna, who works at Skeffington Coffee Estate, has played a role in beating Bade Khan. He, along with his family members, is thrown out of the Estate. Moorthy does not give up and eventually he becomes a staunch ally of Gandhi putting up a tough fight against injustice, social inequality and foreign rule in India. Along Gandhian lines, Moorthy observed a three-day fast taking moral responsibility for the violence that took place at Skeffington Estate, and he comes out as a victorious, strong and spiritually elevated soul. Soon, a unit of Congress Working Committee is formed in the village and the most active Gandhi supporters like, Rachanna, Rangamma, Range Gowda and Seenu (son of the narrator Achakka) were elected as office bearers of the Committee. They take an oath to follow Gandhian philosophy and way of life, but there are problems too in their path. Moorthy is arrested for provoking the villagers to commit violence. Rangamma and Rachanna come forward to get bail for him, but he refuses. He is put behind bars - three months rigorous imprisonment. He is aware that this act of the government is a precautionary measure against further mobilization of the village people in support of the Gandhian movement under his leadership.

To his great satisfaction, the women of Kanthapura take charge of the freedom movement in the village in his absence. Rangamma takes active part in forming the Women’s Volunteer Corps in the village and instills nationalism among women citing the examples of the lives of great women heroic figures, like, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi and famous Rajput princesses who fought with their husbands. Later, when Moorthy is released from the prison, people throng his house, and he is as strong as he was before his prison days. Moorthy now organizes Dandi March. To root out the evils of drinking among the poor, Boranna’s toddy groove is picketed. The village Kanthapura turns into a battle ground and satyagrahis
are arrested. Police goes brutal with women too and people are deeply distressed witnessing brutality against women. At last, Kanthapura is deserted by its residents who moves to another place called Kashipur and Kanthapura is taken over by people arrived from Bombay.

**Raja Rao’s Perception of the Colonial Rule in India**

Raja Rao’s fiction is primarily concerned with colonialism and post-colonialism in India. He has been a prolific writer writing, like Chinua Achebe, in both the socio-political phases in India. Raja Rao was very much influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, therefore, his colonial era novels and short stories are focused on the Gandhian movement to free India from the colonial yoke. At the same time, Raja Rao, being a Brahmin, was highly interested in ancient Indian Hindu philosophy too. He presents a very interesting combination of ancient Indian philosophy with the thoughts of modernity, emancipation movements and individual deliverance.

Colonialism, from Raja Rao’s point of view, has been detrimental to the social, economic and political growth of India as a nation. He realizes, as is clear from his fictional works, that colonialism was responsible for most of the ills present in Indian society at the time of writing his novels. Apart from draining wealth from India to England, colonialism was damaging Indian men’s psyche too. Colonial cultural hegemony reduced the colonial subjects to mere nonentities. It eroded their self-esteem and they lost faith in themselves. Colonized subjects even lost their sense of place and no longer had faith in their potentials and capabilities and in their cultural values. There is an interesting observation made by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in this regard, that is, the colonized subjects were losing their sense of place and identity during colonial India. Thousands of ex-colonial subjects are settled now in their former colonizing countries, like, France and UK. Bhabha explores the dilemma of new diasporic community further as an aftermath of colonization and cultural inequalities. It is commonly observed, and noted in diaspora writing too, that these people suffer from identity crisis too much, as regard to their home culture since they find it difficult to leave ‘home’ and equally difficult not to be affected by the culture of their ‘new home’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 7; Bhabha xxii). This identity crisis was visible in India during the colonial era and has been more pronounced in
the postcolonial era. Colonialism presented a culture of superiority and forced the idea upon the colonial subjects. Since the colonial power was technologically superior, it was easier for them to rub this idea into the skins of their subjects.

Raja Rao does see a few positive aspects of the impact the presence of the British government had left in India, for instance, people’s awakening to girls’ education, introduction of India to the technical age and its effects on the world, etc. But, those were only the inevitable fringe benefits India got, and possibly in a fast changing world scenario India might have got those benefits even if the country wouldn’t have been colonized, as did Japan, China and a few other nations. Colonialism has proved to be a seriously damaging enterprise in India bleeding the country almost to death. In Kanthapura and in “The Cow of the Barricades” one can very clearly see how Raja Rao perceives India under colonial rule. For clarity of understanding, Raja Rao’s perception of India in colonial period has been summed up under a few heads, as follows:

A. Drain of Wealth

Raja Rao was a staunch follower of Gandhian thought and there is no doubt about it. His ideology is fairly evident the way he presents Gandhian ideals packed in the narratives of his writings. His famous novel Kanthapura and the short story “The Cow of the Barricades” are discussed here to analyze this point. Gandhi believes in Dadabhai Naoroji’s theory of the ‘Drain of Wealth’ and to counter this drain he launched his swadeshi movement.

The theory of ‘Drain of Wealth’ is ascribed to Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) as he discusses these ideas in Poverty and Un-British Rule in India. His work is focused on bringing the attention of the British government (He was a Liberal Party MP in the UK House of Commons in the British parliament between 1892 and 1895) towards the ill-effects of colonial rule in India, mainly on Indian economy as wealth from India was being drained into England through a smooth system of economic exploitation. Naoroji estimated the net national profit of India at that time when he was a Member of Parliament. This helped him calculate how much wealth was flowing annually from India to Britain. His work was purely concerned with economics in an attempt to prove that Britain was a burden on Indian economy, and that was one of the reasons behind the wide-spread poverty in India. As discussed by
Kozicki in his review of *Dadabhai Naoroji and The Drain Theory*, Naoroji gave six factors responsible for the flow of wealth from India:

1. First, India was governed by a foreign government.
2. Second, India did not attract foreign immigrants who might have brought their capital as well as labour for her economic growth.
3. Third, India was paying for Britain’s civil administration on Indian soil as well as for the occupational army in India.
4. Fourth, India was also paying for the building of the empire within India and out of her borders as well.
5. Fifth, India was open to free trade which resulted in offering high-paying jobs to foreign personnel, thus opening a way to exploit Indian economy.
6. Lastly, since the principal income earners were not Indians, they were prone to buy properties outside India or leave the country with their money. (729)

According to Naoroji’s estimate, there was roughly 200 to 300 million pounds loss of revenue to Britain for which there were no chances of return (Chandrasekaran 326). It was pure and simple vampirism of the colonial power and Britain’s actions were monstrous. Although, Naoroji believed that Britain brought some services to India, like railways, for which it deserved some tribute, he mentioned that money for such services was already being drained out of the country as, for instance, the money earned by railways did not belong to India and it was not being spent on any services in India. Such revenues did not bring any direct profit to the country (“Dadabhai Naoroji”). For such services, other countries were paying off foreign investment, whereas, despite the fact that railways were earning profits for Britain, Indians were paying for the services rendered.

There were other gateways too, for such type of drain of wealth. For example, British workers earned wages that were never equivalent to the work they did here. British government encouraged its subjects to take up lucrative jobs in India and the government allowed them to take a large part of their income back to home. There was an imbalance of trade as well, that is, Indian goods were undervalued and so purchased cheaply, while goods coming from Britain were sold at exorbitant prices. As Kozicki elaborates, East India Company was buying raw materials from India with the money drained from India to export to Britain and then the products produced in
Britain were imported to sell at higher prices, adding further dimension to exploitation opened up through free trade (728-729).

Gandhi urged the people to use only home-made goods so that the cottage industries that were dying because of industrialization in England could be revived, and the hungry and the poor of India could earn their livelihood in a respectable manner. He encouraged people to boycott not only foreign goods, like clothes coming from Britain manufactured in Manchester, but also to spin at home and to wear only made in India attires, called *khadi* clothes. To encourage people to spin, the Congress Working Committee distributed free spinning wheels to people and provided free cotton for the first month. The Committee would buy the threads spun by people and provide them yarns. This scheme is aptly explained to his village people by the protagonist Moorthy in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao:

…the Congress is giving away free spinning-wheels. Will you spin sister? You see, you have nothing to do in the afternoons after the vessels are washed and the water drawn, and if you spin just one hour a day, you can have a bodice-cloth of any colour or breadth you like, one bodice-cloth per month, and a sari every six months. And during the first month, the cotton is given free. (23)

To the question ‘And why should the Congress give it free?’ Moorthy is happy to answer:

Because millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy. And if you don’t need the cloth sister – well, you can say, “Give it away to the poor,” and we will give it to the poor. Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our Mother. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 24)

And there is a question raised by Nanjamma that why Brahmins should spin since there is no dearth of weavers in the village to work for them. Moorthy responds, “Yes, sister. But they buy foreign yarn, and foreign yarn is bought with our money, and all this money goes across the oceans. Our gold should be in our country. And our cotton should be in our country” (Rao, *Kanthapura* 24).

Gandhi not only boycotted foreign goods but also foreign education. As Gandhi saw it, colonial education was as detrimental to Indian culture as was drain of
wealth to economic growth. Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education” of 1835 set
the objectives of education in India in precise terms, “to form a class of interpreters
between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and
colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (qtd. in McLeod
141). Gandhi understood that people educated in this manner would be rather a threat
to Indian culture since they would criticize Hindu customs and traditions without
judging their merits or demerits. Moorthy got inspired by Gandhi’s call to boycott the
Western goods and Western Education. He sacrificed his university education and his
mother’s dream to see him in a great official capacity in Indian Civil Services, a
brilliant boy as he was.

B. Cultural Hegemony

Resistance to cultural hegemony in Kanthapura is a bit sensitive and debatable
issue because there are two layers of cultural hegemony in the novel. One, the
hegemony of the culture brought to the Indian soil by the colonizers and posited as
much superior to Indian culture. The rulers proved it to be superior to Indian culture
to justify their presence in India and to continue exploitation of the masses. This
hegemony is subject to resistance by one and all, except a selected few who are hand-
in-glove with the foreign rulers. To resist the cultural hegemony of the foreign rulers
and to make it a mass movement, the author has taken the help of faith as the common
masses in India believed in the mythical glory of ancient Indian culture, in the
greatness of their heroes, in the stories of good men who fought against evils and
came out victorious, in the narrative of seamless and uninterrupted continuity of the
heroic past of India up to the present times where some relics, some memories of the
heroic deeds of the mythical figures were believed to be still present in every village.
Raja Rao resorts to Indian mythology and history, so that the masses could identify
themselves with the mythical heroes and feel themselves as their direct descendants
and thus feel proud in fighting for the sake of a great culture of which they have been
a significant part.

Second, there is hegemony of the culture of the Brahmans against the culture
of non-Brahmins. Non-Brahmins here include not only the Muslims whose culture is
different from the Hindus and Hindus keep themselves away from it calling Muslims
as mlechas (untouchables,) but also untouchables within the fold of Hinduism. This
observation of hegemonic setup in the indigenous society may be a little objectionable
to some scholars and they may argue that there does not exist such a distinction in Indian culture. But to prove this point, it would be worthwhile to refer to a few textual evidences of such a distinction in *Kanthapura*, albeit very subtle distinctions. The untouchables in this novel are seen to be culturally different from the rest of the caste Hindus characterized in the novel, although they are said to be within the fold of Hinduism.

There are only a few characteristics that define them as Hindus. They worship the Hindu Goddess Kenchamma, worshipped by other villagers including the Brahmins. They speak the same language as other caste Hindus do in the village, albeit they are miles away from Sanskrit, the language of Hindu scriptures. But there are numerous characteristics that belie the points of similarity of cultures, especially the characteristics of material aspect of culture. They wish to enter Hindu temples but they are not permitted. Their food habits are said to be contrary to mainstream Hindu culture. Their marriages are devoid of the usual Hindu rituals. For instance, Bade Khan, the policeman just took one of the pariah women as his wife, without bothering to follow any rituals, and she had no objection. They commonly drink liquor which is almost not allowed in mainstream Hindu culture. This cultural imbalance was later exploited by the foreign force to smoothly run their colonies.

Mainstream Hinduism is strongly proved to be much superior to the cultural practices followed by these people. And, as is the case with the cultural hegemony of the rulers, caste Hindus, who had been ruling the lives of these people before the foreign rulers intervened, prove the mainstream Hindu culture to be much superior to the culture of the untouchables in order to justify their dominance over them, to go on enjoying the fruits of their labour. The point is, the untouchables strongly feel the hegemony of the mainstream Hindu culture in their lives since it is this hegemony that prepares the grounds for their oppression, and they wish from the depths of their hearts that this hegemony should also come to an end. The culture of the foreign rulers is exactly like the mainstream Hindu culture, based on capitalist exploitation, hierarchy and social distinctions, so the untouchables have no hope for any support from them.

But Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals of a casteless, egalitarian and just society have given them some hope that their centuries old oppression may come to an end soon, and Gandhians proclaim equality from their platforms. The untouchables have no
voice as such, but their enthusiasm to take very active part in the Gandhian movement is indicative of their strong faith in Mahatma. Some conscientious Hindus inspired by Mahatma Gandhi like, Moorthy, Range Gowda, advocate Shankar and advocate Ranganna are also with them. Seeing such a positive attitude towards them, pariahs like Rachanna and their women are prepared to do whatever the Congress orders them do. The untouchables in the novel suffer the greatest loss of lives as they are the softest targets for the police brutality. And ultimately, when their men die, pariah women burn their own houses and the houses of others too, and Kanthapura is no more their village.

C. Death of Indian Economy

The theory of ‘Drain of Wealth’ is closely related to the death, or rather destruction, of Indian economy by the colonial rule in the country. Indian economy in the pre-colonial days has been primarily agricultural economy. Most of India was comprised of villages where people were engaged in self-sustaining mutually cooperative economic activities, like, farming, spinning, weaving, oil extraction, gardening, making clay pots, iron work, gold work, carpentry, and so on. Colonialism brought about the destruction of these cottage industries as England was an industrialized country and the capitalist economy needed raw materials for production and markets for the finished products. India was converted into a source of raw materials and a market for their finished goods. There were no buyers for the home-grown products and people were forced to abandon their ancestral professions because it could not provide enough to sustain. Kanthapura does not discuss this mechanism of destruction of village life directly, but there are indirect hints that Gandhi wished to revive cottage industries because he wanted the villages to be the centers of life in India as they ever had been.

D. Destruction of Traditional Cultural Values

Colonialism has been detrimental to not only Indian economy but also to Indian cultural values, and this is obvious in Kanthapura. Indian cultural values like, simple commune life, honesty, reverence for elders, compassion, truth, asceticism, spiritualism, and fraternity are the cherished values. Villages in India were ideal settings for life and all these values were easily traceable in day-to-day lives of people. People in the cities also followed good cultural values in life. Mahatma Gandhi didn’t invent anything new in Indian life; he just made a serious attempt to
revive the cultural values that have been part and parcel of the lives of Indian populace. Advocate Sankar in *Kanthapura* does not accept any cases founded on lies and deceit. He himself lives an extremely simple life and encourages others also to do the same:

‘Your son Sankar, he is a saint,’ and when he walked the main bazaar, they used to say, ‘Look there, there goes the Ascetic advocate.’ People sometimes looked at his khadi coat and his rough yarn turban and laughed at this ‘walking advocate,’ and others said, ‘No, no, he follows the principles of the Mahatma,’ – And what, pray, are the principles of the Mahatma?’ – ‘Why, don’t you know Sankar does not take a single false case, and before he takes a client he says to him, “Swear before me you are not the criminal!”’ (Rao, *Kanthapura* 138-139)

Sankar follows Gandhian principles to the extent of fanaticism:

And he says he was a fanatic, too, in his dress, you know, sister. When he went to a marriage party he used to say, ‘Everyone must be in khadi or I will not go,’ and they said, ‘Oh, one must have a nice Dharmawar sari for the bride; she cannot look like a street sweeper,’ and he would say, ‘Well, have your Dharmawar saris and send your money to Italian yarn-makers and German colour manufacturers and let our pariahs and peasants starve.’ (Rao, *Kanthapura* 142)

But after colonialism has taken over, people like advocate Sankar are not many. People have taken to dishonesty, deceit, greed and exploitation. Bhatta is a good example of a colonial mindset. He owns half of the lands in Kanthapura and wants more. He exploits the poor pariahs to extract cheap labour from them; he gives money to people on a high interest rate and he has no scruples about poor people’s lives. Bhatta is a symbol of deterioration of Indian cultural values under the impact of colonialism since he has no compassion, no truthfulness, no honesty and he has extreme greed in his character.

**E. Policy of Maintaining Status Quo**

Raja Rao, in his colonial fictions, perceives colonialism as a system that maintains the status quo in the Indian society. The world around is changing fast, social realities are changing fast, people’s preferences, needs and requirements are changing fast, but the colonial masters in India are impervious to all these changes.
They would never neglect the needs of a social change back home, but since maintaining status quo in India suits their interests very well, they would support the rotten political and social fabric of India. Things have changed in Russia drastically, things have changed in England and everything is changing at a rapid pace in America, but India is maintained politically and socially as it had been over the ages. Princely states are pampered because they are in collusion with the British; social hierarchies are untouched because it fits very well with the system of exploitation the British government needs in India and no political institutions worth the name are introduced in India by the British. Not much attention has been paid to public education since they need illiterate people, and whatever efforts have been made they are oriented towards producing a colonially educated class that serves a link between the government and the toiling illiterate masses. Raja Rao highlights this point very subtly in *Kanthapura*. He contrasts the changed life in Russia and the life poor people have in India through a news item in a paper Rangamma subscribes to. And this is the reason Mahatma Gandhi has urged the people of India to boycott even foreign education because it produces a class of people who serve the interest of the British.

**Socio-Political Resistance to Cultural Hegemony in *Kanthapura***

The sleepy village of Kanthapura is awakened into a resistance movement by the efforts of Moorthy, a university student inspired by Gandhi. There are two forms of resistance in the village to the cultural hegemony of the rulers. On the one side are the people like, Waterfall Venkamma and Bhatta who cling to old customs and traditions, like, child marriage, no to widow remarriage, no education for girls, men’s dominance in women’s lives, no equality between caste Hindus and untouchables, and the like. The culture of the rulers has brought some changes in the existing social life patterns and traditional practices like, child marriage, no education for girls, etc. have started giving way to modernity and progress. So, these people resist the hegemonising influence of the new culture in their own ways, exaggerating the greatness of the culture in the name of Puritanism and projecting themselves as the guardians of their culture protecting it from pollution. Bhatta relates the story of city-educated girls that they are polluted because they are of marriageable age but
unmarried and mix with young boys. And in this connection he tells that one Hindu girl married a Muslim boy, totally unacceptable to anyone:

Do you know, in the city they already have grown-up girls, fit enough to be mothers of two or three children, going to the Universities? And they talk to this boy and that boy; and what they do amongst themselves, heaven only knows. And one, too, I heard, went and married a Mohomedan. Really, aunt, that is horrible!’

‘That is horrible,’ repeats Satamma. ‘After all, my son, it is the Kaliyuga-floods, and as the sastras say, there will be the confusion of castes and the pollution of progeny. We can’t help it, perhaps…’ (Rao, Kanthapura 39)

On the other end are the people, like most of the people in Moorthy’s Gandhi brigade, who are opposed to such puritanical forms of Indian culture because they find it stagnant and ridden with evils and suppressive tendencies. They feel that the time demands a change in the culture, and that a vibrant culture should be more inclusive and more tolerant of differing views. They realize that puritanical tendencies in a culture give way to oppression and exploitation. They visualize that the mainstream Hindu culture suffers from these suppressive notions in it and, rather, the culture has developed a few dehumanizing tendencies in it. They resent that the culture that is claimed to be great propagates inequality between men, suppresses women, encourages child marriage, forbids widow remarriage, forbids girls’ education and encourages beliefs in superstitions. They say no to all these and go for a radical change.

They respect the progressive aspects of the rulers’ culture and adopt them. But they also realize that foreign rule in India is founded upon economic exploitation and that poverty in India is because of the foreign rule. The British were hypocrites because they were double faced – they followed the principles of equality and social justice in their own country and there were well-founded social and political institutions in place in their own countries to safeguard the interests of the majority of people, but the same people had entirely different standards for the people of India. Whatever system was established in India by the British that was established to serve their ultimate economic interests. They hardly cared for the well-being of people, and generally gave free hands to the landlords to exploit the common masses so that they received a regular inflow of revenue for themselves. The culture of the rulers was
based on capitalism, class conflicts and hierarchy among people. These people who were opposed to the stagnant Indian culture rejected the foreign rule too. They believed that economic exploitation of people was inhuman, whether that exploitation was carried out through Brahmin and untouchable conflict or through establishing a capitalist colonial machinery. They strongly believed that this should also change and to see that change come into effect, the foreign rule must come to end.

Thus, their resistance has both social as well as political aspects to it. They become part of a Movement that put up a stiff resistance to the political domination of India, but they also put up an equally strong resistance to the prevalent social evils in the then Indian society. Just this one point was enough to win them the support of the Indian masses. C.D. Narasimhaiah also notes the same point in this regard:

*Kanthapura* is no political novel any more than is Gandhi’s Movement a mere political movement. It pictures vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi’s leadership; its religious character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals precisely in the way Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics, the capacity for sacrifice of a people in response to the call of one like Gandhi – not the spectacular sacrifice of the few chosen ones who later became India’s rulers, but the officially unchronicled, little, nameless, unremembered acts of courage and sacrifice of peasants and farmer hands, students and lawyers, women and old men… (qtd. in Komalesha 81)

The greatness of Indian culture is that, as visualized by Raja Rao, the Indian masses are conscientious and if they realize the importance of a cause, they go for it. There has been a tradition of compassion, tolerance, coexistence and mutual cooperation among Indian people, and therefore it would not be difficult to mobilize them along same lines. Moorthy, Rangamma, Ranganna and Sankar all are Brahmins, but when it comes to the ideas of compassion, tolerance and human equality they are the first ones to jump headlong into the struggle to bring greater changes in the society. Raja Rao is a visionary in this respect.

The role of the major characters in *Kanthapura* in awakening (or discouraging) the people of their sleepy village to rise up in resistance to the foreign rule and the cultural hegemony of the foreigners can be summed up as follows:

**Rangamma:** She is a Brahmin lady. She is an educated widow. She subscribes to a few newspapers and she is well-versed in ancient Indian scriptures too. She is
well aware of the latest developments in the world. Her resistance may owe to her 
widowhood, but her education and her awareness on current affairs is also a great 
factor for her support to Gandhian thought. She is influenced by the Russian 
revolution as well. But the time is not ripe for her to accept equality for all. Moorthy 
is instrumental in her accepting Gandhian satyagrah.

Moorthy: He is a Brahmin boy going for university education. To him 
Gandhi’s views are spiritual in nature and his own experience in being in close 
contact with Gandhian has been a spiritual experience. Gandhi’s thoughts have 
touched his heart and mind and he starts believing in equality among human beings. 
Towards the end of the novel Moorthy seems to be influenced by a more pragmatic 
Jawaharlal Nehru, though. Moorthy organizes Congress Working Committee 
meetings in Kanthapura. He is the one who distributes spinning-wheels to the village 
people, urges them to spin, and explains the theory of ‘drain of wealth’ to them in 
their own idiom. He organizes the resistance movement, inducts pariahs in the party 
activities, goes to jail several times and instructs people to follow the ideals of 
Gandhi, especially non-violence.

Bhatta: A typical landlord, Bhatta is all for the foreign rule since the system 
has given him economic prosperity. Equality for all may bring his downfall in two 
ways: (i) He will lose cheap labour that is available to him because of landless pariahs 
and untouchables. He is an Indian version of Skeffington Coffee Estate as regards to 
the exploitation of the poor and (ii) equality for all means he has to share his lands 
with the landless. Bhatta may be taken to represent the capitalist class in pre- 
independence India who were left free by the British to exploit the poor masses, and 
to whom their economic interests were more important than nationalism or resistance 
to foreign rule. Hindu religion, as interpreted traditionally in support of caste divisions 
and social distinctions, suits his interests very well as it maintains status quo in 
society keeping the pariahs, untouchables and other lowers caste people to the lowest 
rung in society as landless labourers.

Patel Range Gowda: He is a representative of the Government, but his 
traditional right in the village is diminishing because of Government’s intrusion in his 
authority, so he takes sides with the Gandhians. He may represent some of the 
princely states in India which were against British rule because they lost their 
traditional authority over people, so, they wanted a change in the political atmosphere
of the country hoping that after independence they can once again regain power. His return to Kanthapura after the socio-political upheaval there to retrieve his buried jewels is a symbolic return of the princely states in the hope of retrieving their buried authority and past glory and rule over people. Surprisingly, the Congress Party acknowledges his authority and he is given a minor leadership role.

**Ratna:** She is a young widow and surely it is her widowhood that prompts her to fight against the social injustice perpetrated upon women in the name of widowhood. Gandhian thought has given her hope for better days, if not for herself, for the next generation to come. Raja Rao is all for widow remarriage. His short stories ‘Javni’ and ‘Akkayya’ raise the issue of the pathetic condition of widows in India. Ratna is an active member of the resistance movement and in absence of Rangamma she takes care of the women’s wing of volunteers. Ratna has a soft corner for Moorthy. After the political upheaval in Kanthapura, Ratna leaves for Bombay.

**Sankar:** Sankar is an advocate and a staunch supporter of the Gandhian movement. He is a widower and follows Gandhian ideals in his daily life too. He represents the intellectual class in India who were inspired by Gandhi for a social change. He puts on only khadi, encourages other also to do the same and he never takes a false case.

**Rachanna:** He is a pariah coolie who has come to Skeffington Coffee Estate along with other coolies. He comes under Moorthy’s influence and Gandhism. Naturally, the ideas of equality of men, social justice and a casteless society attracted him to Gandhism very much. He is already a have-not, so he has nothing to lose but his fetters in the freedom struggle.

**Bade Khan:** He is a typical representative of the brutal police force, used by the British, to safeguard their interests in India. He is the policeman posted to monitor political activities in Kanthapura. He is a loyal supporter of the British government. People of Kanthapura hate him for both the reasons, being a Muslim (there are occasions when he is referred to as a “bearded monkey,” as if having a beard is a sin; beard is a symbol of Islam among Hindus, though Sikhs also wear a beard.) and being a cruel representative of the government. Interestingly, he can easily mix up with pariahs and untouchables, because as he moves into Skeffington Coffee Estates, he takes a lonely woman from among the pariah coolies as his wife.
Kanthapura is primarily a story of people’s organized resistance garnered by Gandhi to political domination of India by the British. But since Gandhi realized that such an organized resistance to an all-powerful enemy like Great Britain was not possible without a mass movement, he converted his small step into a huge socio-political resistance to European cultural dominance and hegemony in general. The reasons for this are simple to grasp. The Indian elite class, that is, the erstwhile rulers, petty kings and princely states, were in full support of the foreign rule in lieu of their interests being safeguarded by the British, so it was futile to expect any support from them in the freedom struggle. There existed no middle class in those days; therefore, the class which remained to seek help from was the toiling moiling masses who were deeply attached to whatever cultural forms they had in their lives, without realizing whether it may be good or bad for them. It was easy to move them along their cultural values, traditions and customs, mobilizing them to revive the so-called glorious ancient Indian culture, resulting in a strong opposition to an onslaught on their cultural forms cherished by them.

But again, there existed divisions in India based on caste, religion and region. It was easy for the British to weaken such a movement in a country already divided along so many narratives, where Brahmans would not allow the pariahs and other Sudra castes into their homes and temples, where Hindus (including the pariahs and other untouchables) would not readily mix with Muslims as they viewed them as intruders in India. Influential Brahmans (represented by the all-powerful but invisible Swami) were appeased by the government, so they would not go against its policies. There is a very interesting incident in the novel around this feeling. Advocate Sankar and advocate Ranganna organize a public awareness meeting on behalf of Moorthy and they speak to people about government atrocities, charkha, ahimsa and Hindu-Moslem unity. Their speeches are disrupted by someone shouting,

‘And what about the untouchables?’ and Sankar says, ‘Of course, we are for them – why, has not the Mahatma adopted an untouchable?’ and somebody cries out again, ‘Ah, our religion is going to be desecrated by you youngsters!’ and Sankar says, ‘Brother, if you have anything to say, please come up to the platform,’ and the man says, ‘And you will allow me to speak?’ and Sankar says, ‘We have no enemies.’ (Rao, Kanthapura 126)
Now, it is very enticing to see how the appearance of the man coming to the platform is described:

…and the man is seen coming from the other end of the maidan, a lean, tall man in durbar turban and filigree shawl, and he wears gold-cased rudrakshi beads at his neck and the man goes up the platform and says:

‘Brothers, you have all heard the injurious attacks against the Government and the Police and many other things. I am a toothless old man and I have seen many a change pass before me, and may I say this: All this is very good, but if the white men shall leave us tomorrow it will not be Ram-rajya we shall have, but the rule of the ten-headed Ravana...’ (Rao, Kanthapura 126)

He goes on counting the acts of charity of the British government:

‘What did we have, pray, before the British came – disorder, corruption, and egoism, disorder, corruption and egoism I say’ – he continued, though there were many shouts and booings against him – ‘and the British came and they came to protect us, our bones and our dharma...’ (Rao, Kanthapura 126)

The most perplexing comment he makes is that he visualizes Lord Krishna incarnated as the British Government and comes to India to protect the eternal Hindu dharma from pollution. He is not even ashamed at the fact that the British colonizers have come from across the seas and such people are called mlechas in the same Hindu scriptures. He says:

I say dharma and I mean it. For hath not the Lord said in the Gita, ‘Whenever there is ignorance and corruption I come, for I,’ says Krishna, ‘am the defender of dharma,’ and the British came to protect our dharma. And the great Queen Victoria said it when she put the crown of our sacred country on her head and became our Beloved Sovereign. And when she died – may she have a serene journey through the other worlds! – and when she died – you are too young to know, but ask of your grandfathers how many a camphor was lit before the temple gods, and how many a sacrificial fire was created, and how many a voice did rise up to the heavens in incantation…Tell me did she not protect it better than any Mohomedan prince had ever done? (Rao, Kanthapura 126-127)

He uses a common strategy on such occasions, that is, frightening people with a dark future ahead if they overthrew the British Government: “When the British rule
disappears there will be neither Brahmin nor pariah, vaisya nor sudra – nay, neither Mohomedan nor Christian, and our eternal dharma will be squashed like a louse in a child’s hair” (Rao, Kanthapura 127).

People gathered there, the Gandhi supporters, take him to task since they know he was a Swami’s man, the same Swami who has been instrumental in excommunicating Moorthy in his village:

But before he has stopped somebody says, ‘So you are a Swami’s man?’ and the old man says, ‘And of course I am, and I have the honour to be.’ – ‘And the Swami has just received twelve hundred acres of wet land from the government. Do you know that?’ says a youngster. – ‘Of course, and pray what else should he do if he is offered a Rajadakshina, a royal gift?’ – and the youngster says, ‘So the Swami is a Government man?’ – and the old man says, ‘The Swami is neither for the Government nor against it, but he is for all who respect the ancient ways of our race, and not for all this Gandhi and Gindhi who cannot pronounce even a gayatri, and who say there is neither caste nor creed and we are all equal to one another, while the Swami…’ – And somebody cries out, ‘Do you know the Swami has been received by the Governor?’ – and Sankar rises up and says, ‘No interruption, please!’ – and the old man answers, ‘And of course, but why not? And do not the dharma sastras say the King is the protector of faith? And I cry out “Long live George the Fifth, Emperor!” ’ and he hobbled down the platform. (Rao, Kanthapura 127-128)

Under the given circumstances Gandhi had to invent an altogether different social narrative for the India masses, a narrative that was capable of answering the feelings of and taking along the larger segments of the Indian population with him. The narrative of equality and social justice to the suppressed masses of India is significantly striking in the novel. Isn’t it strangely enticing that every time there arises an occasion to enthuse the people around Moorthy in the name of Mahatma Gandhi, it is Rachanna, the pariah, who takes the lead in shouting ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai’? Following excerpt is a worthy instance:

And then men rush from this street and that street, and the police Inspector seeing this hesitates before coming down, and Rachanna barks out again, ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!’ And the police inspector shouts, ‘Arrest that swine!’
and when they come to arrest him, everybody gets round him and says, ‘No, we’ll not give him up.’ (Rao, *Kanthapura* 120)

This is not just a stray incident in the novel; this happens at least ten times in the whole text. This narrative preaches equality for all, social justice for all and love for one and all and is based on non-violence and truth. Such narratives had existed in India but they had failed to take along very large segments of the Indian masses. For instances, Gautam the Buddha and Mahavir (the propounder of Jainism) had preached the same philosophy of life, but Buddhism lost the struggle on the soil of its birth and Jainism became so puritanical that for the masses it was not possible to follow its tenets whose daily lives involved at least minimum violence. But Gandhi was successful in bringing the ideas of non-violence, social justice and equality for all to the common masses again and thus cementing the gaps between communities. He could not depend upon the ideas enshrined in Vedic Hinduism as the system was founded on casteist social divisions, too much ridden with hierarchy and inequality; nor could he take any support from the glorified history of India since however gloried they may be, Indian histories are always stories of violence glorified.

European colonialism was largely founded upon a culture of violence, large-scale slavery, hierarchy and distinctions among people. Thus, the idea of social justice and equality was highly attractive to the already suffering masses of India, suffering all kinds of atrocities for millennia. To conclude, resistance to cultural hegemony, the thread that runs through *Kanthapura* along the lines of freedom struggle, is in fact a resistance to social inequalities, social injustices and the hierarchized organization of Indian society. The struggle of the masses was not only a struggle to free India from the foreign rule, but also a struggle to free themselves of centuries of bondage within their country itself. Raja Rao articulates this reality very well in *Kanthapura*. Raja Rao believes in equality and social justice for all. Moorthy says:

“And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, when I was in prison that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur Mound, and gas-lights and coolie cars, there will always be pariahs and poverty. Ratna, things must change.” (Rao, *Kanthapura* 257)
“The Cow of the Barricades”: The Story

_The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories_ is a collection of short stories by Raja Rao. There are seven stories in this book: ‘Javni,’ ‘Akkayya,’ ‘A Client,’ ‘The Cow of the Barricades,’ ‘Narsiga,’ ‘The True Story of Kanakapala’ and ‘India – A Fable.’ ‘Akkayya’ is the story of a widow. Child marriages were rampant in India at the time this story was written and for some or the other reasons there were many child widows in Indian society, traditionally not allowed to remarry. ‘Akkayya’ is a pathetic story of one such widow who suffers without knowing what pleasures of human life are. ‘Javni’ also tells the story of a widow, from the low caste community. The sufferings that can spring from such a horrible life – a life of poverty and helplessness, combined with widowhood, are well articulated in this story. ‘Narsiga’ is the story of Gandhi’s widespread influence among Indian masses, in every village, even among children. Narsiga is a simple rustic shepherd boy whose “father had died of cholera, his mother of famine, and one sultry afternoon, a thin tall woman, angry and effusive, turned up and calling herself his aunt carted him away into a distant village” (Rao, _Collected Stories_ 5). But the readers are touched by his exuberance despite his sufferings and his enthusiasm for life. He is very moved by Gandhian ideals. Raja Rao paints here the story of India’s struggle for freedom and the role of Gandhi in it. Beloved master at the local Ashram here is a metaphor for Mahatma Gandhi. The simple boy Narsiga is so bewitched by the personality of Gandhi that to him he is God. The description given by him is as follows:

Auntie said, there was a big, big man called Gandhiji… ‘An old man- a bewitching man, a saint, you know! He had come from village to village and I have beheld him too,’… ‘He looks beautiful as the morning sun, and he wears only a little loincloth like a pariah. And they say he is for us pariahs, like the Master is for us pariahs. They say he works for the pariahs as the Master works for us. They say he loves the pariahs, as the Master loves us. He is a great man. They say he is an incarnation of God, that is why everybody touches his feet, even brahmins, my son. You will touch his feet too, some day,’ auntie had assured him. ‘When you touch his feet you feel as though the body has sunk to the earth, and you are nothing but a mere ant before an elephant. (Rao, _Collected Stories_ 11)
Narsiga is portrayed living in the imaginary world of childhood fears and phobias, demons and fairies, gods and goddesses and he is in impressionable age. As he lost his mother in early childhood, he finds it difficult to imagine his motherland as his mother. Perhaps, Raja Rao is making an attempt here to portray the feelings of his countrymen to imagine a new reality in their lives with which they had lost touch, like Narsiga’s mother. The boy sings ‘Vande Mataram’ and knows that the song is a hymn in praise of the motherland. Still it is difficult for him to identify himself with the idea. Exactly same was the condition of the multitudes of Indians who had never experienced anything like ‘motherland’ before. Narsiga is a typical representative of rural India and his pathetic condition in life is the miseries of millions and millions of Indians who were metaphorically orphaned like him and when there appeared a great personality like Gandhi on the Indian horizon who could connect with them coming down to their level, he became their God. Raja Rao has expressed this realism in Indian people’s lives very touchingly and in a realistic manner, using only a few symbols.

“The Cow of the Barricades” is the story of a myth-like cow that helps Gandhian freedom fighters, satyagrahis, to initiate a non-violent movement against the foreign rule in India. This story is taken up for analysis in this chapter as the story represents Raja Rao’s thoughts on Indian freedom struggle related to socio-political resistance of the Indian masses against cultural hegemony of the West. The story portrays people’s faith in their traditions and in Mahatma Gandhi, though Mahatma Gandhi is not overtly present in the story, neither is he referred to directly. Gandhi is present in the story covertly, in the form of a holy man called ‘Master.’ The Master represents Gandhi’s ideology and his call for non-violent struggle against the foreign rule in India. Another significant character in the story is the cow called ‘Gauri’ who comes to nibble at the hair of the Master every Tuesday. And the cow has also nibbled at the hair of the Mahatma: “There was only one other person whose hair she had nibbled. She had nibbled at the hair of the Mahatma. For the Mahatma loved all creatures, the speechful and the mute” (Rao, Collected Stories 86).
Socio-Political Resistance to Cultural Hegemony in “The Cow of the Barricades”

“The Cow of the Barricades” is a simple but meaningful story. There are only two main characters in the story – The Master who lives at a shrine on Suryanarayana Street, and Gauri, the cow. Gauri comes to visit ‘The Master’ every Tuesday at his shrine. This cow is a strange creature as she comes to visit only the Master who gives her food and then she disappears. She leaves the street without halting anywhere and without paying any attention to people who gather at the shrine to have a look at her. It is only the Master who may have the knowledge of her whereabouts afterwards. As usual, people associate her with divine power, equate her to goddess Lakshmi, and start gathering at the shrine every Tuesday in anticipation of her arrival and to get blessed by her appearance and even to fulfill their various wishes. For instance, students would come wishing for good marks, widows for purity in their lives, the issueless to be blessed with children and young girls seeking handsome husbands. Tuesday becomes a ceremonial day at Suryanarayana street as there gathers a huge procession of men and women at the Master’s shrine.

The backdrop of the story is the time when Indian freedom struggle was at its peak and Mahatma Gandhi had become a household symbol as the messiah of freedom, non-violence and peace. The residents of the city in this story also join the freedom struggle. The Master advises them not to buy foreign goods- especially clothes, to refuse to pay taxes and to stop serving the government of the Englishmen. In preparation of preventing any attacks by the troops, the workmen build barricades around the city. But the Master is against this strategy. He says: “No barricades in the name of the Mahatma, for much blood will be spilt” (Rao, Collected Stories 87). Also, later in this story he echoes Gandhian ideology: “No, there shall be no battle, brothers” (Rao, Collected Stories 88). The city is about to be assaulted by the British troops and at that moment Gauri, the cow appears from somewhere and climbs up the barricades. In fact, people do not heed the advice of the Master for non-violence much and they are ready there with pickaxes, scythes, spades, crowbars, swords, stolen rifles and all kinds of weaponry they could lay their hands upon to have a show-down with the military on the other side of the barricades. Although people are ready to fight, yet they remain confused. When they see Gauri approaching the barricades they
expect that she will save the situation and with high expectations they start cheering her up with ‘Vande Mataram.’ Even the police force present at the scene is confused and puzzled to the appearance of the cow:

But when they saw the cow and its looks and the tear, clear as a drop of the Ganges, they shouted out, ‘Victory to the Mahatma! Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai’ and joined up with the crowd. But their Chief, the Red- man, saw this and fired a shot. It went through Gauri’s head, and she fell, a vehicle of God among lowly men. (Rao, *Collected Stories* 90)

Raja Rao conveys the success of the magic of the Mahatma to change the hearts of people, as he believed, through non-violence and love. The policemen who has come there to assault people are so moved seeing the holy cow that they shout, *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* (Rao, *Collected Stories* 90). The event represents a symbolic change of heart of the Indian people in the service of the foreign government at the call of the Mahatma. The crowd gathered there is jubilant and in sheer frenzy people start chanting *Vande Mataram* (Rao, *Collected Stories* 90). The army chief gets into a rage at this and fires a shot, killing Gauri on the spot. Peace is restored after this incident. There grows a legend around the cow and she is worshipped as a Goddess. A statue is erected in her memory, and the Master declares that, “Gauri is waiting in the Middle Heavens to be born. She will be reborn when India sorrows again before she is free” (Rao, *Collected Stories* 91).

“The Cow of the Barricades” is a story set in the India of 1930s when the national scene was predominantly affected by Gandhian struggle for Indian independence advocating non-violence and peace. Indian nation was taking shape and Indians had started looking towards their country as a sacred space, and nationalistic feelings were solidified, sometimes taking support from mythological thinking, for example, looking at one’s country as mother-land, which in India became Bharat Mata (Mother India). In general too, cows are considered as sacred animals among Hindus, “mother cow” (*gau mata*) as they are called and worshipped as life-sustaining creatures, Gauri, the cow taking a bullet and saving numerous lives was to naturally strengthen people’s faith in the animal as well as in their mother land. The cow not only becomes a martyr laying her life for the cause of her people, but she also acquires the force of a tangible power capable of freeing her people as peace restores
to the city after her martyrdom. By association too, the cow is used as a metaphor for Mother India whereas the follower of non-violence, the Master, is a metaphor for Mahatma Gandhi.

Though Raja Rao may not have full faith in the success of Mahatma Gandhi’s politics, as in Kanthapura towards the end Moorthy leans more towards Jawaharlal Nehru and in “The Cow of the Barricades” too, he expresses similar concerns voiced through the master, as follows: “The Mahatma may be all wrong about politics, but he is right about the fullness of love in all creatures- the speechful and the mute” (Rao, Collected Stories 91). And yet there is no better writer than Raja Rao to convey the philosophy of Gandhi through his realistic fictional works. Raja Rao has devoted his fiction to extensively bring out the success stories based on Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals, like for instance, the devotion and work of satyagrahis like, Moorthy, Rangamma, Range Gowda, Rachanna, and Seenu, are lauded in many ways. The mindset of people like, Waterfall Venkamma and Bhatta start changing and many people who are seeped in orthodoxy before, for example, Ranganna (the narrator in Kanthapura), Achakka and Satamma - do not believe in it now and gradually social evils like, caste system and untouchability are leaving ground and giving way to equality and social justice.

Raja Rao’s Perception of Socio-Political Resistance to Cultural Hegemony in Kanthapura and “The Cow of the Barricades”

Raja Rao’s perception of the colonized Indian masses is that of a people united in faith. He strongly believes that Indian masses can easily be moved by religious sentiments. Religious and mythical sentiments are so interwoven with the lives of one and all (especially Hindus) that the people tend to forget their other differences in view of a threat on their cultural values. It is obvious that Indian masses are divided on caste and class lines, and yet a mythic-religious symbol is capable of bringing all under one banner. The symbol of cow is a strong symbol giving the Indian struggle for freedom a mythical shape and colour. For the common masses it is easy to associate themselves with a fight launched for the destruction and uprooting of a foreign rule that has acquired the proportions of a demoniac figure, like Ravana, torturing the gods and the devout, and the masses seeing themselves as the army of
Rama. The struggle for India’s independence, as depicted in the fictions of Rao, is not a political struggle, rather it is more like a religious struggle- a dharma yuddha in which people are fighting against evil for the protection of and to reinstate virtue. It is interesting to note here how the similar ideology, that is, whenever there is ignorance, predominance of evil and destruction of dharma (that is, righteous behaviour) on the Indian soil, God incarnates Himself on Indian soil to protect the virtuous and to destroy the evil can be employed by people belonging to different camps.

**Mythic Past Overshadowing the Present**

Raja Rao inherits a Brahmin culture and all his fictional works too inherit the same. He easily invokes various Hindu scriptures and ‘brahminical’ texts (texts on Hindu practices and ideologies) to unify people. Raja Rao believes in ancient Indian traditions but without ritualism in there. To him rituals are symbolic representations of some other reality, a kind signs. For instance, the ritualistic holy thread is a symbolic instrument of the reminder of one’s sacred oaths. Since man is prone to forget the resolutions he may have made, the holy thread around his neck functions as a continual reminder of his resolutions. A case in point is Moorthy’s resolution to remain bound to the oath he takes before his mother: “…when Narsamma said, ‘You are a grown-up boy, Moorthy, and if you don’t marry now, you will take to evil ways,’ Moorthy, deferential as ever, said, ‘No, mother. I swear upon my holy thread I shall keep pure and noble and will bring no evil to my ancestors’” (Rao, *Kanthapura* 50). In his writings, the struggle for the independence of India takes the form of a struggle to free Hinduism from ill influences of other cultures around it. Thus, it follows that it is not that the holy thread is confined for the use of only Brahmins; anyone, irrespective of caste and creed who wishes to be reminded of his or her resolution can put on a thread around his neck. And isn’t it interesting to note that in Coleridge’s poem “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” the sailors hang the dead albatross around the neck of the guilty mariner as a constant reminder of his sin?

Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is Raja Rao incarnate. Moorthy’s adversaries, like, Bhatta, Venkamma and other Brahmins, take him wrong, thinking he is against ‘brahminism’ or typical mainstream Hinduism. He is, like Mahatma Gandhi, rather a social reformer who wishes to make Hinduisms still stronger by purging it of the
prevalent evils. What they celebrate to unify the village people are the typical Hindu festivals. For example:

Then came Postmaster Suryanarayana and said, ‘Brother, why not start a Sankara-Jayanthi? I have the texts. We shall read the Sankara-Vijaya every day and somebody will offer a dinner for each day of the month.’ ‘Let the first be mine,’ said Bhatta. ‘The Second mine,’ said Agent Nanjundia. ‘The third must be mine,’ insisted Pandit Venkateshia. ‘And the fourth and the fifth are mine,’ said Rangamma. ‘And if there is no one coming forward for the other days, let it always be mine,’ she said. (Rao, Kanthapura 10)

There is nothing wrong in it, but the examples they take to support their struggle for independence are all from Hindu mythic past in which all those against whom the battles for the protection of dharma are fought are evil villains bent upon destroying the age old Hindu civilization, for example, Ravana, Hirnakashyapu and the like. There are stories from the Ramayana, from the Puranas, from Mahabharata and from other epics and scriptures. The behaviour of those villains is interesting to note. They eat flesh; they drink alcohol; they do not follow the usual Hindu rituals; they do not believe in the mainstream idea of God, and so on. If one looks at these traits closely, those are the very characteristics of the untouchables and the pariahs. Untouchables and pariahs are shunned for they indulge in such nefarious activities. Thus, one of the significant messages from Kanthapura is that the struggle launched for the freedom of India was also a struggle to free Hinduism from the so-called bad influences.

A comparative look at Kanthapura and “The Cow of the Barricades” reveals the same phenomenon. In Kanthapura, an agent of the Swami, a Government’s man, argues that British rule established in India is good for Hindu dharma since the Sovereign Queen of England has protected “Our dharma” better than anyone else has done during all the eras of non-Hindu rule in India. And he gives example of Mohommmedan princes who always failed to protect Hinduism. Therefore, to him British rule in India was like reincarnation of Lord Krishna to protect virtue and destroy evil. On the other hand, the similar ideology was used by the followers of Gandhi who saw in him an incarnation of God and the struggle for independence as a holy war. A lawyer called Ranganna tells the crowd a story that he was called by the
Swami, the self-styled protector of the Hindu dharma, and instructed by him to dissociate his people from the pariah business. The Swami says:

For some time there has been too much of this pariah business. We are brahmins and not pariahs. When the pariahs will have worn out their karma, and will have risen in the waters of purification, nobody will prevent them from becoming brahmins, even sages, in their next lives. But this Gandhi, who is no doubt a fine person, is meddling with dharma sastras, the writ laws of the ancient sages, and I am not for it. (Rao, Kanthapura 129)

To which the advocate responds:

“Swamiji,” I said, “how can you accept the help of a foreign Government? Do not the dharma sastras themselves call the foreigners mlechas, untouchables?” and the Swami said, “Governments are sent by the Divine Will and we may not question it,” and he added, “And I may say the Government has promised to help us morally and materially,…” (Rao, Kanthapura 130)

Raja Rao has succeeded in conveying the clever strategy used by all the nationalists at that time to use the traditions and customs of India to mobilize the masses, adapting the stories and myths of the past to modern times. The cow in “The Cow of the Barricades” symbolizes the ongoing synthesis between carrying on with traditions since the masses believed in them, and adapting them to modern times as is the need of the time. Raja Rao has been realistic in the portrayal of this fact. In his portrayal of the socio-political resistance to cultural hegemony in “The Cow of the Barricade” too he is realistic. The Master and Gauri, the Cow, became the symbols of Indian culture, the Master standing for non-violence and the cow representing the life-sustaining elements in Indian culture. The Government that comes with its army to assault the city represents the culture of violence and annexation. As a token of resistance to such a culture, the Master forbids his followers to resort to violence and blood-spilling. And, to the utter satisfaction of the people, Master’s strategy of non-violence carries the day, and strengthens people’s faith in it. The incident proves the superiority of the strategy adopted by the Master, the tactics of non-violence that spring from the fountain source of Indian culture, thus effectively resisting the cultural hegemony of the intruders.

But there are a few disturbing questions too, as regards to the killing of the sacred cow, which Raja Rao leaves unanswered, or may be the time was not ripe to
answer them. Some of such questions are as follows: If the cow (of the barricades) is the symbol of Mother India, the land of brahminism and the mythical India of the Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and ancient Indian philosophy, then a new India without brahminical myths and mythological imagery should emerge after the killing of the cow by the British. But did it happen? Who appropriated that new India and why? Have the stark social and religious division between the higher caste and lower caste Hindus disappear with the arrival of nationalist movement in Indian rural setup during the British colonial period? Unfortunately, the caste system and its multifaceted impacts on the marginalized people of the society are still largely prevalent in modern India. Kamalakar, a teacher at a college in Maharashtra (India) has an interesting observation in this regard. Commenting on Moorthy’s politics, he says in his blog:

His politics aims at assimilating the lower castes into the nationalist movement. This may also operate as a move towards containment. For example, the discourse of nationalism meets the discourse of religion at different levels in the novel. While Bhatta, Swami and their followers (who have often material motives such as Venkamma) resist Gandhism in the name of religion, in *Kanthapura*, the nationalists increasingly employ the religious discourse and customs and symbols for nationalist purposes. Religious resources are mobilized for the politicisation of the people. But the customs, rituals and symbols that become tools of nationalist mobilization are primarily Brahminic: arthi, puja, conches, bells, Vedanta, bhajan, etc. They do not include the cultural practices of the lower castes though their participation is prominent. (Kamalakar)

It can be added here that Raja Rao leaves a hint in his novels about the probable appropriation of the nationalist discourse, in this way completing the appropriation of the nation as well. The rituals, customs and symbols used as tools of mass mobilization in *Kanthapura* became the tools of mass mobilization in India as an emerging nation, and those symbols serve the purpose of only a few.

**Gandhian Movement and the Idea of Nationalism**

Gandhian movement was a nationalistic movement, which needed to take along one and all irrespective of caste, creed, region, language, gender, and other
affinities creating hindrances in bringing the people of India together to fight the strong demon of colonialism. People did come together, but the issues of caste, creed, religion, gender, language and region rose their ugly heads together, and the people who came to fight colonialism in the hope that their centuries of oppression would come to end if they followed Gandhian ideals felt betrayed as India reverted back to the same mythological paradigm that had kept them out of the mainstream. The situation is the same as witnessed in Achebe’s A Man of the People. In Achebe’s novel people of Nigeria fights against the colonial rule in the hope that they will have better day, but no, they are betrayed by the elites who replace the British and take the exact position that is of their colonial masters.

It would also be pertinent to ask at this juncture what Raja Rao’s perception of India has been before colonialism as represented in his fictions. Did India exist before the British arrival in India? What was India before colonialism? What was India before Gandhi’s intervention? What is India during the British raj? Brahminism and colonialism: do they go hand in glove? What is nationalism to Gandhi? Is nationalism invented by Gandhi a threat to brahminism as well as colonialism?

India in Raja Rao’s fiction is not the India that people imagine it to be in the pre-colonial days. Though there appears to be a seamless continuity of the past into the present in his works, still he reveals there was a rupture at some point in time and India of the past was lost to the present Indians. Indians had plunged into an abyss of caste, creed and regionalism a long before the colonial intrusion in this subcontinent. The system developed afterwards was such that those who were reaping the fruits of legendary Indian affluence were only a few while the common populace was a miserable ‘wretched of the earth,’ as says Fanon. During the freedom struggle movement the same narrative was being woven by some vested interests in which the untouchables would remain untouchables. A new nation was being invented in which, again, the untouchables and the downtrodden had no place and position other than being subservient to caste Hindus. Even Muslims had no place in it – they were projected as outside intruders, marauders and plunderers of Mother India. There are four prominent Muslim characters in Kanthapura, and all four of them are painted in black. Bade Khan is a policeman working for the British and beating up the Gandhi brigade black and blue; Moti Khan is another policeman thrashing the Gandhians as they picket Boranna’s toddy grove; Rahman Khan is the third Muslim who is a
dishonest guy trying to cheat someone, and there is a fourth Muslim, an Afghan man who tried to kill Gandhi.

Raja Rao’s fictions depict India in many ways – through people’s love for each other, compassion towards all creatures and spirituality in the lives of characters of his novels. But there is yet another India that has enslaved a large part of its population and in India of the future that India wishes to continue the same narrative. Gandhi is against that and Raja Rao is also against that thought pattern. But, it is distressing to note that in Raja Rao a strain of support for brahminical tradition with all the symbols, rituals and customs are resurrected. But this may be just a depiction of the reality, not an expression of his endorsement of the view. Mulk Raj Anand, in comparison, does not endorse brahminism when he writes on Gandhi’s influence on the psyche of the India masses. His *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are just realistic portrayal of the lives of the miserable people. Even Gandhi was aware of the dangers of the freedom struggle being usurped by the mainstream Hindu nationalists, as writes Thomas Bonnici, “He knew the dangerous path he was treading, especially with a nation composed of Hindus and Muslims, each group vying for power and dominance.” (3). Brahminism was obviously hand-in-glove with the British raj as brahminism had no problem with their economic or social policies of the colonial force, but brahminism has problems with Gandhi’s pro-pariah policies. Although Raja Rao denounces the anti-pariah stand of the Swami, he speaks to be for a revival of Hinduism, even brahminism in India as is clear from his use of brahminical symbols and metaphors in *Kanthapura* and “The Cow of the Barricades” and other stories.

Bhatta, the Brahmin landlord and a moneylender who owns more than half of Kanthapura’s lands now resents the increasing influence of Gandhian philosophy, as it threatens his livelihood. He presents his arguments in opposition to Gandhian thinking wrapped up in the mythical greatness of Indian culture and tries to win the brahmin community to his cause taking shelter of caste and clan ‘superiority’, and the fear of a casteless society. He rents and raves:

What is this Gandhi business? Nothing but weaving coarse hand-made cloth, not fit for a mop, and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans, and mixing with the pariahs. Pariahs now come to the temple door and tomorrow they would like to be in the heart of it. They will one day put themselves in the place of the brahmins and begin to teach the Vedas. I heard only the other day that in the
Mysore Sanskrit College some pariahs sought admission. Why? Our Beadle Timmayya will come one of these days to ask my daughter in marriage! Why shouldn’t he?” (Rao, Kanthapura 38)

To Bhatta’s rent and raving about caste pollution and pariahs taking over bs, Rangamma responds as follows: “I don’t think we need fear that, Bhattare? The pariahs could always come as far as the temple door, couldn’t they? And across the Mysore border, in Belur, they can even enter the temple once a year…” (Rao, Kanthapura 38).

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Mahatma Gandhi is called Rashtrapita (in English to be translated as the ‘Father of the nation’). ‘Father of the Nation’ is a title given to a man considered to be the driving force behind the foundation of a nation. It was the great Indian freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose who used the term for Mahatma Gandhi, in a radio address from Singapore in 1944 (Raj). Later, it was recognized by the Indian government. When Gandhi was assassinated, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in a radio address to the nation, had announced that the Father of the Nation “is no more”.

It is important to briefly look at the historical background of this hugely popular title of Mahatma Gandhi as he is stilled proudly recognized in India as the ‘Father of the Nation’. Dr. Savsita Singh provides the following information on this issue in his blog on Mahatma Gandhi:

Much before the Constitution of Free India conferred the title of the Father of the Nation upon the Mahatma, it was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose who first addressed him as such in his condolence message to the Mahatma on the demise of Kasturba.

Ba and Bapu had been interned at Aga Khan Palace, Pune in the wake of the Quit India Movement. It was while serving the prison term Kasturba passed away on 22 February, 1944.

Concerned about Gandhiji, Netaji sent the following message to the Mahatma on Azad Hind Radio, Rangoon on 4th June, 1944:

“…Nobody would be more happy than ourselves if by any chance our countrymen at home should succeed in liberating themselves through their own efforts or by any chance, the British Government accepts your “Quit India” resolution and gives effect to it. We are, however, proceeding on the assumption that neither of the above is possible and that a
struggle is inevitable. Father of our Nation in this holy war for India's liberation, we ask for your blessings and good wishes."

The above message also proves beyond any doubt Netaji's 'reverence and warm feelings towards Gandhiji whom he had addressed as The Father of the Nation'.

There have been many queries as to how could Gandhi be called ‘the Father’ of an ancient civilization like ours. No one is questioning the antiquity of this ancient land.

But India or ‘Bharat’, as we known today that has emerged out of an old civilization is a recent phenomenon. This multicultural multi-ethnic country became a Nation-State owing allegiance to one Constitution, one flag and one Government only on 15 August, 1947.

So it seemed to a vast millions of Indians, and who saw a Father figure in him and whose 'Bapu' he was. (Singh)

The relevant question to ask at this juncture is: what is the meaning of ‘nation’ here? If Gandhi was the father of the nation, does not it follow that the ‘nation’ as perceived today and which was begot by Gandhi did not exist prior to Gandhi? If it did, how could he beget it? What is at stake here is the mythical continuity of the ‘nation,’ the theory of comingling of the past and the present or the present seen existing as it was in the past and thus reshaping itself as a nation in its present form.

The new India which should have emerged abolishing caste, creed, religion, region, gender discriminations, and of course, poverty – the worst curse – was usurped by a few vested interests. Has there been a revival of the age-old mythical symbols against which Raja Rao warns us in his works? What is the role of Bade Khan the policeman in Kanthapura? Is he only a representative of the Raj? Does he represent Muslims of India? Why does a bad character who beats up the followers of Gandhi happen to be Muslim? Bade Khan is presented in a typically hateful form, so terrible that women of the village are ready to pounce upon him and uproot his beard from his face:

…Moorthy cries out, ‘No beatings, sisters. No beatings in the name of the Mahatma.’ But the women are fierce and they will tear the beard from Bade Khan’s face. Gangadhar and Vasudev go up to the pillars of the gate and cry, ‘Calm! Calm!’ Bade Khan, spitting and licking, says he will have every one of
them arrested, and as the maistri whips the coolies up the Estate path, Vasudev leads Moorthy away down to Kanthapura and spends the night there. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 85)

The question is: Does Bade Khan represent Muslim support to the British rule, because after the First War of Independence the British were angry with the Muslims and started sidelining them. But then Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) became instrumental in bringing the Muslims close to the British and took the Muslim community on the road to modernization, English education, and thus the British made peace with Muslims (Rahman). Therefore, is it assumed that Muslims supported the Raj? What is raja Rao’s perception in this regard? Another incident with yet another Muslim policeman, Moti Khan, can also be discussed here in this context:

…and the Police inspector says, ‘Moti Khan, you’d better try,’ and as he is trying to go up the other policemen fall on us again, and we rush to this side and that, while somebody pulls down Moti Khan and the man on the top spits down on him, and a wave of laughter whirls up the toddy grove. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 186)

The scene here is that Moorthy and his women brigades are picketing Boranna’s toddy grove and the police trying to push coolies to drink. These questions related to Raja Rao’s stance towards Muslim characters in his fiction and the role of Muslims in the freedom struggle of India in general are difficult to answer because in Raja Rao’s works there are only very few Muslim characters. And a research study cannot be based on speculations.

Raja Rao’s fiction, particularly his colonial novel *Kanthapura* and the short story “The Cow of the Barricades” can be interpreted to have three prominent strains: i) Full support for Gandhian philosophy of life, ii) Revival of ancient Indian traditions, especially, Hinduism, to counter European cultural hegemony, but with accommodating the modern realities of India in which there is no scope for class and caste distinctions, and iii) Advocating Russian-style socialism based on the ideals of equality, fraternity and social justice. *Comrade Kirillov* presents a god example in support of this ideal; *The Serpent and the Rope* is a befitting example for revival of ancient India and *Kanthapura*, “The Cow of the Barricades” and *The Cat and Shakespeare* are good examples of his ideas concerned with Gandhian philosophy of life. In this sense, most of his works may be termed as postcolonial literature since
they visualize a post-independent Indian scenario. Sociopolitical resistance to cultural hegemony, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, is narrated in *Kanthapura* and “The Cow of the Barricades”, but Indian socio-political life is at the heart of all of his works.

The Hegemony of Religion and Culture of the Elite Upper Class in the Native Society

Raja Rao paints a very bleak picture of the life of common labourers in India. There is an instance when *maistri*, the man who brings coolies to work at coffee estate of Hunter Sahib, repeats the working conditions put before them by the Sahib: “The Sahib says that if you work well you will get sweets and if you work badly you will get beaten – that is the law of the place.’ And they all rose up like one rock and fell on the ground saying, ‘You are a dispenser of good, O Maharaja, we are the lickers of your feet…” (Rao, *Kanthapura* 67). Raja Rao paints this picture to make a case for India’s freedom struggle from the foreign rule that was responsible for such a pathetic condition of people. Cultural hegemony destroys people’s self-respect and hunger completes the downfall. But, the coolies were not coolies only during the British era; they had been outcastes even much before that. So, when people’s resistance to cultural hegemony in Raja Rao’s fiction is studied, the following questions should also be discussed: Whose cultural hegemony is being referred to? Is it the cultural hegemony of the colonizers or the cultural hegemony within Indian social sphere like, brahminism vs non-brahminism? It is not that the collies, who were ready to lick the feet of the Colonial master, were doing this for the first time during the British Raj. These poor people have been made to lick the feet of their masters for centuries and centuries, much before the arrival of the White man in the Indian subcontinent. The White man could do this because that is what he has seen in India. Centuries of oppression had left people tongue-tied, in fact, they were not even aware that they could speak too. The mainstream Hindu nationalists were fighting only a single battle – against their foreign masters, but the people who were not part of the mainstream Hindu culture were fighting double battles – against the colonial masters who indirectly oppressed them and against the Indian masters who directly oppressed them. These battle lines are clearly drawn in *Kanthapura*, though in “The Cow of the Barricades” they are not so obvious.
Of course, the novel *Kanthapura* tells the story of a secret collusion between brahminism and colonial forces as is revealed by the tall lean old man who speaks at the platform raised by advocates Sankar and Ranganna in order to educate people on colonial hegemony in India, and by Ranganna himself who relates his visit to the Swami. The concept of nationalism to Brahmins is entirely different from Gandhi’s nationalism. India is not a nation to the Brahmins; it is just a piece of land where different kinds of people live and the Brahmins are superior to all of them. So, any place where they lose their superior status is not for them, and any ruler who recognizes their superior status is their ruler, irrespective of the fact where the ruler has come from. Gandhi’s nationalism encompasses the entire length and breadth of India and all the people who live here irrespective of their caste, creed or region. India is for Indians, to Gandhi. To Brahmins, anti-untouchable movement of Gandhi is more dangerous than cultural hegemony of the British.

It is Bhatta who has been instrumental in the excommunication of Moorthy, because he has made a case against Moorthy to the influential Swami sitting in Mysore and working for the colonizers:

The Swami is worried over this pariah movement and he wants to crush it in its seed, before its cactus-roots have spread far and wide. You are a Bhatta and your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village, and you should speak to your people and organize a brahmin party. Otherwise brahminism is as good as kitchen ashes. The Mahatma is a good man and a simple man. But he is making too much of these carcass-eating pariahs. Today it will be the pariahs, tomorrow it will be the Mohomedans, and the day after the Europeans …. We must stop this. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 40)

Bhatta communicates the news of possible excommunication of Moorthy to his mother Narsamma if he continues with his pariah business. Bhatta also tells her how Moorthy himself reacted to this situation:

And Moorthy says, “Let the Swami do what he likes. I will go and do more and more pariah work. I will go and eat with them if necessary. Why not? Are they not men like us. And the Swami, who is he? A self-chosen fool. He may be learned in the Vedas and all that. But he has no heart. He has no thinking power”. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 59)
Gandhi’s views and brahminism do not go together. Moorthy’s mother Narsamma pronounces a curse upon Gandhi when she hears of her son’s excommunication by the all-powerful Swami because Moorthy associates himself with pariahs under the influence of Gandhi. She says, “Oh, this Gandhi! Would he were destroyed!” (Rao, Kanthapura 61).

To Raja Rao, the struggle of the common masses of India to oppose colonial hegemony was a collective struggle of the people of India, and in the process they reinvented a new reality for themselves and their lives. But the struggle of some sections of India opposing the cultural hegemony of the elite upper classes of India was not and could never become a collective and strong struggle or mass movement, and that’s the reason it didn’t achieve much success. The influence of socialism on the views of Raja Rao is quite discernible in his writings. He speaks of Russia in the following manner:

… the country beyond Kabul and Bukhara and Lahore, the country of the hammer and sickle and electricity… and there in that country there were women who worked like men, night and day, and when they felt tired, they went and spent their holiday in a palace …and mind you, she said that there all men are equal – everyone equal to every other – and there were neither the rich nor the poor…. (Rao, Kanthapura 42-43).

But India is not ready for such a revolution in the society:

Pariah Ramakka, who heard of it one day, said, ‘So in that country pariahs and brahmins are the same, and there are no people to give paddy to be husked and no people to do it – strange country, Mother.’ But Rangamma simple said, ‘My paper says nothing about that,’ and continued measuring the unhusked rice…’ (Rao, Kanthapura 43; emphasis added)

Even Moorthy, the protagonist and the greatest champion of the downtrodden is not fully prepared for a sudden change. Although he drinks the milk offered to him by pariah Rachanna’s wife Lingamma, yet he is not mentally at peace with himself. As he goes back to Rangamma’s house, he seeks her permission whether to enter the house or not and she advises him to use the back yard entrance, wash himself and put on fresh clothes. Rangamma says:

‘Maybe you’d better change your holy thread,’ but Moorthy says, ‘Now that I must go there every day, I cannot change my holy thread every day, can I?’
and Rangamma says only, ‘I shall at least give you a little Ganges water, and you can take a spoonful of it each time you’ve touched them, can’t you?’ So Moorthy says, ‘As you will,’ and taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him, and lest anyone should ask about his new adventure, he goes to the riverside after dinner to sit and think and pray. After all a brahmin is a brahmin, sister! (Rao, Kanthapura 104-105)

Moorthy does not change his holy thread, but the reason he offers for his decision is surprising: “Now that I must go there every day, I cannot change my holy thread every day, can I?” He does not say that since he believes in equality between men and men, the holy thread which is a symbol of his identity as a Brahmin and thus a symbol of his superior status, he is neither going to change nor going to replace it when the thread wears out. Also, he neither says that he is ready to put away the thread since it identifies him as superior and different from the rest of men. He goes on following the other Hindu, or rather, brahminical rituals, some of which do not advocate equality among all humans. All the Congress meetings take off with bhajans (Hindu religious songs), and other religious chanting, despite his knowledge that the majority of his followers are pariah people who could not be part of those activities. Raja Rao seems to endorse the patronizing attitude of the mainstream Hindu nationalists emphasizing in the process that the mainstream Hindu culture is the right and the best culture for India.

People’s resistance to the cultural hegemony of the colonial rulers is brought out by Raja Rao in a fine narrative style. He tells the story in a traditional storytelling manner as he himself says in the “Foreword” to the novel:

This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.

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 grand-mother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village. (Kanthapura vi)

The narrative is not just another tale told by the grandmother; rather it is the narrative of Gandhi’s adventures. How Gandhi organized an army of helpless people to fight a mighty empire. The narrative is also the narrative of Gandhi inspiring people to
follow the ultimate truth in their lives, and of course they did. The narrative is also the narrative of the victory of truth over falsehood.

Moorthy, the protagonist, becomes a seeker of truth in life. Because, to him the struggle for India’s freedom was not a mere political struggle; it was also a struggle to realize the ultimate truth, the truth of mankind. After Moorthy is arrested and put behind bars, he refuses to avail a bail because he is seeking truth, nothing else. A conversation between Sadhu Narayana and Moorthy is worth mentioning here:

…And there is in you the hunger of God, and may He protect you always. But Ranganna comes and tells me, ‘I cannot change his heart. You are a religious man, go and speak to him,’ and I came to see you. I have neither hair nor home, and I have come to tell you, this is not just. Defend one must against evil; if not, where is renouncement, continence, austerity, and the control of breath?’ To which Moorthy says, ‘You are a holy man, Sadhuji, and I touch your feet in reverence. But if Truth needs a defence, God Himself would need one, for as the Mahatma says, Truth is God, and I want no soul to come between me and truth.’ (Rao, Kanthapura 124)

In this process Moorthy also learns to be all-inclusive, to give place to one and all in the affairs of the Congress Working Committee. As he suggests names of people for the Committee, he point to the pariahs:

And Moorthy then turns towards the pariahs and says, ‘One among you!’ and then there is such a silence that a moving ant could be heard, and then Moorthy says, ‘Come, Rachanna, you have suffered much, and you shall be a member,’ and Rachanna says, ‘As you will, learned master!’” (Rao, Kanthapura 108).

Kanthapura is the story of Mahatma Gandhi’s efforts to unify India into one nation. Raja Rao has added a new dimension to it – the dimension of narrativity. As Kanthapura is a narrative of the preparation of the common masses to fight a decisive battle in a non-violent manner, “The Cow of the Barricades” narrates the success of this strategy on a larger scale, as was never witnessed by anyone during the history of mankind. As discussed in the foregoing pages in this chapter, history of mankind is the story of violence glorified. Gandhi meditated upon something better as he was influenced by the ideas of love in all the world religions, and he came up with the theory of a non-violent resistance to colonial force. He believed in the change of heart
Chapter 3  Raja Rao’s Fiction: The Colonial Period

of people; in such a thought there is no concept of an enemy; people are just misguided by their ego and other misplaced factors as is stressed in ancient India philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Raja Rao was greatly influenced by the views of Mahatma Gandhi since he himself was a good scholar of Advaita Vedanta. His ideas in this regard are very subtly expressed in his postcolonial novel, The Serpent and the Rope.

To conclude, this present chapter has analyzed Raja Rao’s perception of colonialism in India as well as his depiction of the socio-political resistance of the Indian masses to cultural hegemony of the foreign rulers in Kanthapura and “The Cow of the Barricades.” The analysis of the novel and the short story reveals that Raja Rao has been a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi since in both these colonial fictions. He depicts Mahatma Gandhi in various representation, Moorthy in Kanthapura and the Master in “The Cow of the Barricades.” Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals, especially non-violence, truth, swadeshi, equality, social justice and universal brotherhood have been portrayed in the lives of his protagonists and people are shown to follow them as essential principles in their lives. Raja Rao perceives colonial rule in India as highly detrimental to her social, economic and political growth. Colonial rule is associated with mass poverty in India owing to drain of India’s wealth to England, death of Indian cottage industries, export of raw material from India and import of finished goods at exorbitant prices. Colonial rule is also responsible for cultural hegemony of the rulers leading to low self-image of the colonized, destruction of traditional cultural values and maintaining status quo in Indian society. Also, another layer of culture hegemony among different sections people in the pre-colonial Indian society that had been oppressing the lower caste Hindus, was present long before the British colonial power came to this land, and it is analyzed at length in this chapter.

Another aspect of Raja Rao’s representation of Indian resistance to cultural hegemony in Kanthapura and “The Cow of the Barricades” is that he has showed the Indian masses in a single unified colour standing in one file against the empire. There may be differences of colour, caste, creed and regions among the masses, but on the call of Mahatma Gandhi, they put away all their differences and joined hands in the struggle. The greatest victory of the people was that they regained their consciousness, their self-respect and they learned to be strong without any weapons.
with them. It also shows the victory of faith – Indian people were victorious because they had faith in the powers of Mahatma Gandhi and his principles; they had unquestioned faith in the powers of non-violence, compassion, love, Truth and simplicity in life.

Though there are some disturbing questions too as regards to nation and its new narration by different camps of nationalists in India at the time. Raja Rao appears to support the mainstream Hindu nationalism in his works since he employs the typical Hindu symbols in his fictional works. For example, cow is a sacred animal for the Hindus and Raja Rao uses the symbol as a metaphor for Mother India. He uses some more signs and symbols coming from the same narrative, for instance, the Master in “The Cow of the Barricade” living in his Ashram far from the madding crowd is a well-known symbol of Hindu ascetic life style. All other rituals, signs, scriptures and epics are also picked up from Hindu mythology in Kanthapura. All this is done by Moorthy despite the fact that a large number of his followers were untouchables and pariahs who were either not allowed to practice these rituals or they were not at all aware of the fact they could also practice these rituals.

There is a mass movement gathering up in Kanthapura in the form of socio-political resistance to the foreign rule. Mahatma Gandhi encouraged people to oppose the foreign rule in a non-violent matter, resorting to giving up the use of foreign goods and reviving Indian cottage industries. In Kanthapura the experiment on these lines is partly successful as there is some violence from people as they are not used to fight non-violently. In “The Cow of the Barricades” a similar experiment is depicted to be successful as after the violent shooting of the cow, peace is restored in the city and the police personnel came to assault the city also shout slogans in support of Mahatma Gandhi. But, towards the end in Kanthapura Raja Rao shows some disillusionment with Gandhian politics and leans towards Jawaharlal Nehru as a more pragmatic politician capable of winning freedom for India.
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