Raja Rao (born 1909), a major Indo-Anglian novelist, is widely acclaimed for his artistic exploitation of the rich resources of India's past in relation to the complex present. Instead of dilating upon the discovered truths of life and tradition, Raja Rao concentrates on the predicament of the individual in the changing society and offers the contemplative sensation of quest for reality. A scion of an ancient Brahmin family of Mysore, educated at the universities of Aligarh and Madras in India and at the University of Montpellier and the Sorbonne in France, Raja Rao, an extremely erudite person, is what Naik prefers to call the "heir to both the intellectual worlds of his birth and heritage, the East and West."  

A class by himself, Raja Rao is an innovator linguistically, stylistically and structurally. His experimental language adjusts miraculously to the nuances and rhythms of Indian life and thought. His novels defy categorization as he refuses to conform to "the very range, substance, and methodology of the traditional novel, though his output is meagre". He is steeped in Indian mythology as is evidenced in his works, though contemporary social reality does not escape his penetrating vision. His novels are conspicuous for their blend of the tradition of India and the assimilation of new ideas and ideologies. Raja Rao's infatuation for social concerns of the day, particularly in Kanthapura (1938), is a manifestation of the fact.

that Gandhi and Gandhian revolution was decidedly an inspiration for the novelist. His distinction lies in the fact that Raja Rao’s work does not degenerate into sentimental social comment or a strident message. His novels Kanthapura (1938), The Serpent and the Rope (1960), Cat and Shakespeare (1965) and Comrade Kirilov (1976) form a significant corpus of creative writing in English. Despite his indebtedness to the West, Raja Rao’s sensibility remains essentially Indian with the result that his major fiction achieves a "unique blend of techniques of modern Western fiction and age-old Hindu methods of literary expression". We would concentrate on the reading of Kanthapura as this novel alone is relevant to my study.

Kanthapura, a bold attempt at the assimilation of contemporary history into myth, treats the impact of Gandhi on the people. The novel introduces almost all the major events of the Indian struggle for freedom in which Gandhi was the leading voice. Civil Disobedience movement including the Dandi March, Satyagraha, Non-co-operation with the alien government, the non-payment of taxes, participation of Gandhi in the second Round Table Conference, Constructive Programme launched by Congress under the leadership of Gandhi, the crusade against untouchability and drinking, spinning Charkha and wearing Khaddar find vivid mention in the narrative. The novelist renders Gandhi’s influence on the people, particularly the rural masses, into fiction with skill and understanding. It is the story of an obscure village Kanthapura in Mysore state but the experience of the people there during the national movement of the thirties is common to

---

3 Naik, "Heir to Two Worlds", p.68.
all the Indians. Kanthapura is India in microcosm and the narrative is the story of rural India responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi for freedom.

Kanthapura is a tiny village situated in an interior part of Mysore state. It is a traditional village inhabited by the brahmins, the potters, the weavers and the pariahs. Moorthy, a University student from this village, comes back as a Gandhi man after having discontinued his studies and becomes the flag-bearer of the movement for liberation in Kanthapura. A sizeable number of the villagers including the womenfolk are drawn to the Gandhian ideology of non-violence. The village temple becomes the hub of nationalistic activities. Bhatta, the first Brahmin of Kanthapura, has nothing to do with Gandhi and offers tough resistance to Moorthy in his campaign against untouchability. He succeeds in getting Moorthy excommunicated from his Brahmin community but the young man continues working for the social uplift of the pariahs.

In spite of opposition from the conservative Brahmins, people join All-India Congress, a branch of which is set up in Kanthapura with Moorthy as the Chief, and begin to put the ideals of Satyagraha into practice. They start picketing the toddy-booths in the neighbouring Skaffington Coffee Estate. This invites police excesses. Then starts the "Don't-touch-the Government Campaign". This leads to arrests and harassment of the people by the agents of the Government. Moorthy urges his followers to remain peaceful in the name of the "Mahatma but Moorthy is arrested and innocent villagers are subjected to inhuman cruelty and police atrocities. Gandhi's Dandi March
provokes new vigour and the Satyagrahis of Kanthapura refuse to obey the British government officials despite beatings and humiliations. The infuriated officials decide to collect revenue under threats on a fixed date. At last their land-holdings are confiscated and auctioned. Men are arrested while women are molested. The village community is finally scattered into the neighbouring villages where they are well-received.

In *Kanthapura* (1938), Raja Rao has made a conscious use of myth as a part of his narrative technique to delineate the impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the unlettered villagers in an obscure village. By virtue of his legend-oriented genius, Raja Rao's treatment of the Freedom Struggle is "neither anachronistic nor over-indulgent but satisfying aesthetic instinct and demand of relevance". The immediate concern of the novelist is Gandhian struggle for freedom, but he has mythologised contemporary reality and *Kanthapura* as a 'finished product' offers an effective literary transcript of the Gandhian myth, wherein he attunes the local colour of his tale to the myriad transformations in the prism of historical consciousness. Raja Rao has displayed his individual talent in harmonising Puranic myths, localised myths or the "Sthala Purana " (the legendary history of a place or village) and the popular rites and rituals to transform a local legend into a fine artistic creation. As a legendary history of a small village caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle of the 1930's, *Kanthapura* is firmly rooted in the soil. Raja Rao himself states in the foreword to the novel:

> There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthala-purana, or legendary history, of its

---

own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village — Rama might have rested under the pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of village I have tried to tell.

Kanthapura is not simply a political novel just as Gandhian Struggle was not exclusively a political movement. Gandhi spiritualised politics and Kanthapura portrays the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership through the inter-mingling of myths and facts, legends and history. Though the Mahatma is not directly presented as one of the characters in the novel, the entire action is sustained by the spirit of Gandhi.

Kanthapura is "a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth — the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhi literature". The whirlwind of the Gandhian revolution shakes the village to its very roots. The village and the changing village scene are described so evocatively that Kanthapura and its inhabitants come to life perfectly.

And if there is neither a temple nor a tomb to testify the truth (since the whole village has been destroyed by the forces of colonialism), the presence of a British-founded colony, the geographical region with the Himavathy, the Tippur Hill and the Bebbur Mound testify the truth of the Freedom Struggle in the

---


6 Iyengar, Indian Writing, p.396.
There is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura, for the men from Bombay have built houses on the Bebbur Mound, houses like the city, for coolies, and they own this land or that..." (p.258).

Raja Rao has exploited a characteristically Indian technique of narration — the digressional method of story-telling which presupposes the sharing of common mythology between the narrator and the audience. Such a narrative technique allows ample scope for a free-play of myths and legends meandering into episodes which follow in breathless succession, the justification of which is offered by the novelist in his Forward to Kanthapura:

"Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was, and still is, the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story" (p.6).

Kanthapura is, therefore, a Gandhi Purana and the central character, Moorthy, is a 'Gandhiman'. A mere vision has changed the course of his life, and since then he has found the mission of his being. Now Moorthy has been impressed by Gandhi forms an interesting part of the novel. When Moorthy is still a university student, he sees a vision of the Mahatma, "mighty and God-beaming". Stealing between the volunteers, Moorthy gets on to the platform. The very skin of the Mahatma seems to send out a mellowed force and love. As the Mahatma speaks on, Moorthy feels that there is

---7---

Puranas in Sanskrit literature offer mythical history in their unique blend of history, literature, philosophy and religion, an encyclopaedic presentation of the totality of human existence. Stories, fables and legends abound in them.
in it something of the silent communication of the ancient books. He hears: "There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of All" (p. 53).

When Moorthy, like Hanuman to Rama, surrenders himself to Gandhi's commands, the Mahatma explains that he gives no commands "save to seek Truth". At Mahatma's suggestion, he at once decides to boycott foreign cloth and the University education he is seeking so as to work among the dumb millions of the villages. The Mahatma pats him on the back "and through that touch was revealed to him, as the day is revealed to the night, the sheathless being of his soul" (p. 54).

Moorthy abandons his scholastic pursuits, and becomes a 'Gandhiman'. This is a concrete illustration of mythicising Gandhian impact on the people. It is now a fact of history that in those days of national resurgence hundred and thousands of young men throughout the country abandoned their studies and courted arrest in response to the call of Gandhi. But there is something fascinating about the manner Moorthy does so. Moorthy's transformation fits eminently into the Puranic structural pattern of the novel, and at the same time, brings out Gandhi's greatness who produced hundreds and thousands of Gandhis throughout the country. There is no wonder that the people of Kanthapura regard him as the Mahatma himself. Ranga Gouda, the village Patel, acknowledges Moorthy as "our Gandhi" and explains to others: "He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another in Heaven,
and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy — will be our Mahatma" (p.109).

The initial reaction of the people to Gandhian thought, however, is marked by apathy. When Moorthy, the local Gandhi, embarks on his mission for the removal of untouchability, the comments of the Brahmin widow are revealing:

"We said to ourselves he is one of those Gandhimen, who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family.... They say, too one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a brahmin might marry a pariah and a pariah a brahmin. Well, Well, let them say it, how does it affect us? We shall be dead before the world is polluted (p.13).

Moorthy who has gone through life like "a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic", understands that the master-key to the rustic mind is religion. The simple village women do not understand clearly the why and the wherefore of the National movement; but once they are convinced that Gandhi is following the tradition of the Hindu avatars, they are all up for the Mahatma. This is how Moorthy awakens the slumbering village of Kanthapura to life, stirring thereby the consciousness of the people and enlisting their active participation in the non-violent movement of non-cooperation, launched by Mahatma Gandhi.

Just as Gandhi exploited the deeply religious and spiritual resources of the people to build up a national movement for independence, Moorthy, likewise, starts arranging the celebrations of Shankara Jayanthi, Harikathas, Rama Festival, Krishana Festival and the Ganesh Festival. These celebrations enable him to build a strong base for his political mission. Sivarjya, Khaddar, Gandhi and the spinning of Charkha become the subjects of discussion among the people. These religious
congregations become the nucleus of social regeneration in Kanthapura. This, without introducing Gandhi himself as a character, Raj Rao has presented the growing nationalism in the people as a consequence of Gandhi's emergence on the political scene of India in the twenties. This is the dramatisation of what Jawaharlal Nehru calls a "New Voice" a "New Factor", or "a little cloud on the political horizon which grew and spread till it covered the Indian sky". It will be quite pertinent to read along with it the inscription from the Gita on the title page of the novel: "Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come".

The misery and ignorance of the poor people of India was there and He did come. Gandhi's identification with suffering multitudes was complete, and this was the key to his immense popularity with the masses. The grateful countrymen gave him an honorific prefix 'Mahatma' and he became a legendary figure in his own times. He was deified and worshipped. Nehru sums up the people's attitude to Gandhi when he remarks: "Where he (Gandhi) sat became a temple, where he walked the ground became hallowed". Raja Rao is keenly aware of this growing halo of semi-divinity around Gandhi's figure and fictionalizes it in a legend about the birth of the Mahatma narrated by Jayaramchar, the Harikatha-man (the village bard).

The sage Valmiki approaches Brahma, the self-created one in Heaven to break him the sinister news that redmen from across the seas have enslaved his chief daughter Bharatha, the land of

8 Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, p.11.
9 Ibid., p.29.
10 A Harikatha is the exposition of a myth, or an episode from the great epics, or the life of a well-known saint. It is often an interpretation with music and sermons, stressing the relevance of the myth to contemporary times.
wisdom and well-being. They come to trample on our wisdom and to spit on virtue itself. They have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women die milkless and our men die ignorant" (p.21). Valmiki urges Brahma to send some god who should bring back light and plenty to his enslaved daughter. The god of the gods decides that "Shiva himself will forthwith go and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery (p.22). Thus, according to the Harikatha, Gandhi is the incarnation of Lord Shiva, and he begins to lip the language of wisdom while he is in cradle. As he grows up, he gathers a large following, and goes from village to village to "slay the serpent of the foreign rule". This Harikatha (or Gandhikatha) has crammed in its outline Gandhian struggle for freedom from the English yoke with its thrust on non-violence, truth, spinning, swadeshi, Hindu-Muslim unity and spiritual aspects.

This legend offers the key to solve the conceptual pattern of the novel. In the manner of this Harikatha, the narrator of Kanthapura has given a Gandhikatha to her listeners in the form of a novel. Several legends glorifying Gandhi and his moral strength were made current in the country by his countrymen. The novelist has exploited all these legends not only to establish Mahatma Gandhi's greatness, but also to highlight the futility of such magniloquence. The blank at the close of the Harikatha, as Narasimhaiah suggests, "probably indicates the author's own reservation and detachment in respect of the incredible stories that had been woven round the name of the Mahatma".11 Raja Rao

seems to have thoroughly read and assimilated in his mental make-up Gandhi's writings, particularly his *Autobiography* and *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule* and the echoes of their purple patches can be had in the Harikatha, rendered, of course, in the village bard's own idiom and style. He had mixed legend and history arbitrarily with a daring disregard for chronology.

Since the story of *Kanthapura* is narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener, it has been quite convenient for the novelist to mingle facts and myths. A villager born and brought up in Indian tradition understands easily a problem if it is explained through a fable, legend or an episode of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*. The stories of the *Ramayana* are repeated ad infinitum in Indian villages. It is but natural that the obsessive images are scattered over the pages of the novel to deal with political awareness. *Rama-Ravana* myth is the central myth that forms the integral and central design of the novel. The battle between Rama and Ravana was a battle between the good and the evil. The relentless rule of Ravana had brought misery, humiliation and wretchedness in its train. Rama was sent to quell this evil. The characteristically concrete imagination of the unlettered old woman pictures a similar situation under the British regime. The advent of Gandhi on the political horizon of India is compared with the emergence of Rama. Gandhi's humiliation in South Africa at the hands of the whiteman is compared with the humiliation of Rama whose spouse had been kidnapped by Ravana. Freedom is, like *Sita*, sullied and dishonoured, and Mahatma Gandhi is a fighter, like Rama, for his dignity, of course with the weapons of Truth, Non-Violence and Self-control.
The non-violent Non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1919 is thus viewed as the fight between the good and the evil. For the old lady in Kanthapura, Swaraj is Sita, Mahatma is Rama and Jawaharlal is brother Bharata. Gandhi's visit to England as an invitee to attend the Round Table Conference in 1931 is like Rama, going to Lanka to bring back Sita:

He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be all happy. And Rama will come back from exile and Sita will be with him, for Ravani will be slain and Sita freed, and will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air and brother Bharata will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya, there will be rain of flowers (p.257).

Even the ideal of Swaraj is presented as a proper modern myth with the flavour of the old. Siva is the three-eyed and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self purification, Hindu-Muslim Unity and Khaddar.

After Moorthy has infused nationalism into the minds of the uneducated villagers through the familiar but effective means of Bhajans, he persuades the entire village to spin, and scrupulously follow the directions of the Congress. A branch of All India Congress Committee is organised at Kanthapura, but Moorthy explains: "One cannot become a member of the Congress if one will not promise to practise Ahimsa, and to speak Truth and to spin at least two thousand yards of yarn per year" (p.103). Later, Moorthy's arrest, following his intense nationalistic activities, causes a great commotion among the villagers who love and respect Moorthy as their local Gandhi Mahatma. His arrest makes the people more politically conscious, besides adding much to the moral stature of Moorthy. People are restive and even prone to violence.
but Moorthy says:

Brothers, in the name of the Mahatma let there be peace and love and order. As long as there is God in Heaven and purity in our hearts evil cannot touch us. We hide nothing. We hurt none. And if these gentlemen want to arrest us, let them. Give yourself up to them. That is the true spirit of the Satyagrahi (p.103).

True to the spirit of Gandhi, Moorthy refuses to have the help of an advocate during his trial since he "shall speak that which Truth promoteth, and Truth needeth no defence" (p.125). When saint Naryan tries to persuade Moorthy to have a counsel engaged, Moorthy touches his feet in reverence but declines to deviate from his idealism: "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" (p.126).

Raja Rao evocatively suggests how Gandhi had prepared people including the women to undergo sufferings in the cause of freedom. There is strong freedom-consciousness among the people of Kanthapura and they are eager to keep the national flag flying. Every one readily steps into the position of responsibility when the occasion demands it. Such is the impact of the Mahatma on the masses. Moorthy has prepared a strong base for his activities. Moorthy's arrest is followed by punitive measures and Ranga Gouda is dismissed from the Patelship. During the period of Moorthy's incarceration, the mantle of leadership falls on a woman Rangamma, who efficiently organises a Savika Sangha (Volunteers Corps). At first the thought of defying the police is terrifying to them, but Rangamma tells them,"We shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is with you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and
as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma” (p.154). The new nationalistic fervour has not only blended completely with deep-rooted religious faith, but has also revitalized the spiritual springs within. When the village women are arrested and marched to the police station, they feel as if they “had walked the holy fire at the Harvest Festival” (p.18). After they are beaten by the police, they feel as though they have done the pilgrimage to the holy city of Kashi, where the gods are supposed to watch over the sleeping pilgrims.

They decide to accord a befitting welcome to Moorthy when he comes from jail. Seeking inspiration from the instance of Kamala, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant among their contemporaries, they think of organising a foreign cloth boycott and picketing cigarette shops and toddy shops. After his release from jail, Moorthy exhorts the people to gird up for a final fight. Gandhi’s Salt Satyagraha of 1930-31 is eagerly expected. Even the women of Kanthapura actively prepare themselves for future march of Dandi, or any other place that may be decided by Moorthy.

The novelist takes care to suggest that peasants are not the only people to respond to Gandhi’s call with fervour and enthusiasm. The working classes vie with the peasants to follow the Mahatma. This is done to suggest how Gandhi, like a magnet, drew people to him from all sections of society. The spell of Moorthy, the local Gandhi, has extended to the nearby Skeffington Coffee Estate. The Estate authorities use force to intimidate the coolies but they put up bold defiance as they argue, “What is a policeman before a Gandhism there?” (p.84). When Moorthy is not allowed by the police to address the coolies, there occurs disastrous clash between the police and the coolies. Moorthy
reminds us of the Mahatma when he undertakes a self-purificatory fast for three days against the eruption of violence. The analogy is too obvious to be missed. Gandhi had gone on a similar fast in 1933 against the violent incident of Chauri Chaura. Moorthy's utterances on the occasion are couched in Gandhi's idiom and remind us of the words used by Gandhi. Moorthy confesses that there is something wrong with him and "that were he full of radiance of ahimsa such things should never have happened" (p. 90). Moorthy has caught Gandhian accent when he insists on shunning violence completely. "The great enemy is in us, Rangamma", said Moorthy, slowly, "hatred is in us. If only we could not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm affection towards our fellow men, we would be stronger, and not only would the enemy yield, but he would be converted" (p. 96).

Moorthy keeps the people of Kanthapura informed about "the pilgrim path of Mahatma from day to day; for day after day the Congress Committee sent him information" (p. 171). When Gandhi is to manufacture salt and defy law, people of Kanthapura eagerly expect the event. They display their active co-operation with the Mahatma by taking a dip in the river and raising slogans in honour of Gandhi when Gandhi is to make salt. Mahatma's arrest electrifies the people who are greatly agitated but Moorthy speaks the language of the Mahatma when he urges them to remain absolutely non-violent:

Remember each one of you is responsible for the harm done by another, and the first time violence is done against the Police or those that are not with us, we shall stop the Movement and wait for six months more in penance and in prayer that our sins may be purified. Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the Police and the Revenue officials, but
against the demoniac corruption that has entered their hearts, and purer we are the greater will be our victory, for the victory we seek is the victory of the heart. Send out love where there is hatred, and a smile against brute force (p.180).

Gandhi's impact, we are told, is not confined to Kanthapura alone. The whole country has accepted Gandhi as a leader with a definite programme before him. When the Civil disobedience movement is launched, the whole country is involved in it. The spirit of Satyagraha is everywhere in action:

It is the same from Kailas to Kanyakumari and from Karachi to Kachar, and shops are closed and bonfires lit, and Khadi is the only thing that is sold, while processions and songs and flag salutations go through the streets, picketing and prabhat pheries, and the police will beat and soldiers open fire, and the millions and millions of our brothers and sisters be thrown into prison (p.228).

Active Non-cooperation movement, No-tax campaign and picketing of toddy shops swiftly succeed the imprisonment of the national leaders. The Satyagraha movement is in full swing; the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate also join the movement. Moorthy, the spiritual guide, friend and philosopher of the people of Kanthapura, leads the villagers ably in launching, and carrying on the movement. There follow the police excesses — brutal, intolerable and mostly shameful. Women are raped, beaten and locked up.

A worse fate, however, is yet to befall Kanthapura. Congress volunteers come to Kanthapura in order to lead a peaceful procession of the people including the coolies of the Coffee Estate. The convenient cloak for this procession is Satyanarayana Puja, but these people are offering Satyagraha against the decision of the Government to auction the lands as a result of non-payment of the taxes by the farmers. The police open fire, callously and
indiscriminately. The whole of Kanthapura is reduced to mere shambles. The staggered survivors are still scattered, most of them settle down at Kashipura where they are well received. Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 causes the suspension of the movement and the release of the Satyagrahis, but Kanthpura is no longer there in its familiar form. "All said in a knot, there's neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura" (p.258).

This is certainly the case of losing a battle, but war continues as the Satyagrahis are neither vanquished nor lost, although there are moments of backsliding and cowardice. Faced with total ruin, the village women feel for a moment —— "Had we were, daughters, mad to follow Moorthy" (p.230). But this moment passes, and the final reaction of the village folk is: "You will say we have lost that. Kanchamma forgive us, but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night, when lights come floating down" (p.256). To gain this, Kanthapura is indeed well lost.

This fearlessness or Abbaya is the greatest contribution of Gandhi as the people of Kanthapura, though crest-fallen, are no longer spineless but enlightened individuals ready for action. Nehru has summed up the impact of Gandhi on Indians in memorable words: "He was like a powerful current of fresh air... a beam of light that pierces the darkness... like a whirlwind that upsets many things, but most of all the working of people's minds". 12 Kanthapura, verily, is the artist's enactment of Nehru's portraiture of this impact of Gandhi on the Indian scene, moulded in the crucible of art.

12 Jawahar Lal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, p.23.
Raja Rao's exploration of Gandhian Age is further authenticated by its shift of emphasis on economic issues and socialistic stance of the Congress. Towards the end, Moorthy explodes the myth of Gandhian charisma, and gives a new direction to the struggle for freedom. Jawaharlal Nehru is hailed as the rising star of the Congress. Moorthy writes to Ratna that things must change under the guidance of Jawahar Lal "Bharata to the Mahatma": "You know Jawahar Lal is like a Bharata to the Mahatma, and he, too, is for non-violence and he, too, is a Satyagrahi, but he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an 'equal distributionist,' and I am with him and his men" (pp. 256-57).

Thus Kanthapura is not simply a Gandhi Purana but an historically authentic saga of the Indian Nationalism invested with the solemn dignity and religiosity of a piece of ancient mythology. Besides Moorthy, Sankara is another character that bears close resemblance to Gandhi. Sankara, like Gandhi, is an advocate who accepts only true cases. He speaks the truth and defends his truth. He has no truck with liars and manipulators. The result of his piety and upright character is that he "looked like a veritable Dharmaraja" (p. 144).

Moorthy's zeal for the emancipation of the untouchables offers a very enduring aspect of Gandhian movement. The pillars of orthodoxy give a tough time to Moorthy who invites the wrath of Bhatta and his patron, Swami, the so-called custodian of Sanatan Dharma. Bhatta is haunted by Pariah business: "Pariah 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 place of the brahmans and begin to teach the Vedas" (pp. 42-43).
Swami is so much annoyed with Moorthy that he excommunicates him, but Moorthy goes about his work undaunted. In fact, the Swami receives governmental patronage to crush this crusade for social reform. Bhatta also sides with the Government to curb the nationalists. The novelist has tried to establish that religion has been often exploited by the vested interests to perpetuate their hegemony. The fight with the orthodoxy outside is bitter enough; but it is with the enemy within — the orthodoxy entrenched firmly in their hearts owing to centuries of tradition, that the Gandhians have to fight a far more terrible battle. The threshold of a Pariah house is for Moorthy a Rubicon to be crossed. After he has crossed it, "The roof seems to shake, and all the gods and all the names of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread" (p.105).

Kanthapura represents not an isolated village in Mysore but the whole country. The characters are convincingly drawn from all the castes of an ordinary Indian village. When the village Panchayat is formed, Moorthy, Ranga Gouda, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu become its members. If Moorthy is the local Mahatma, Ranga Gouda is his right hand man — his 'Sardar Patel'. and if Moorthy as 'Gandhi man' is reverentially looked upon as Srirama, Seenu is his Anjanaya, or the monkey-god in the Ramayana. The author's intention is clearly to show that the non-violent National Movement, led by Congress under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi, has spread even to the most obscure village like Knathapura, blowing it off in the process. It is also significant that women predominate in the action of
the novel, barring Worthy as an exception. It is historically corroborated, for, in the nineteen thirties for the first time in the course of the National Movement, women came out in large numbers to participate in the Satyagraha movement.

The presence of Gandhi is always felt in the novel, although he is not represented as a character. 'Gandhi Mahatma Ki Jai' and 'Vande Mataram' are the vital war-cries of the non-violent soldiers of the Congress movement. The Gandhian image is convincingly integrated into the main action, conferring on it the status of a myth. Raja Rao has exploited Puranic narrative technique as the artistic design or structure of the novel while mythological representation of contemporary history and Gandhian Struggle forms the texture of the total pattern in Kanthapura.

Raja Rao treats Gandhi as an all-pervasive reality and Kanthapura, the literary transcript of the Gandhian myth, becomes a Gandhi purana. Gandhi is not presented as a character in the novel but his presence permeates the entire action of the tale and Gandhi can well be taken as the invisible hero of the piece. Gandhi as a divine figure merges with the myths and local legends and the resultant image of the pious person is aesthetically satisfying. The novel enhances our awareness of Gandhian struggle for freedom to such an extent that no other novel can easily equal it in the conception and execution of the Gandhi figure.