Chapter - II

KANTHAPURA
PART ONE: FREEDOM STRUGGLE AS A MASS MOVEMENT

K. R. Srinivas Iyengar rightly notes that the period between the two World Wars and comprising them both was the Gandhian Age in India, our modern 'Heroic Age'. The creative writers of this phase are influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's role both in the field of spiritualism and the politics of freedom struggle. Virtually there is none who could escape from the spell of Mahatma Gandhi. As a result, the reflection of their love for Gandhi has become commonplace thing in their creative works candidly. Among the images of Gandhi, the one as a crusader of converting the Freedom Movement into the National Movement in the true sense of it is most popular in the creative writing. The most outstanding representatives of this genre are Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan who are considered as household names in Indian English Fiction. Rao's Kanthapura and Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma may be regarded as the representative novels the First Generation dealing with the theme of freedom struggle. Besides dealing with the theme of freedom struggle comprehensively, they are inclusive of those features of freedom struggle and Gandhism that have already been portrayed in the earlier novels as well. Thus Rao's Kanthapura and Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma are chosen as representative of the novels of freedom struggle during the Gandhian Age.

In the following Chapter Two Rao's Kanthapura is studied with the aim of tracing how the theme of freedom struggle is treated by Raja Rao. In chapter Three Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma is analyzed with the same objective. At the end of this part a brief note is given on the perspective of these two novels on the theme of freedom struggle.
Raja Rao is one among the ‘trio’ who has brought the Indian English Fiction to the main stream. The era of this ‘trio’ - Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan may be regarded as the ‘Renaissance’ in the history of Indian English because it is these three writers who have given a rebirth to Indian English Novel by adding originality, novelty, variety and grace, which were absent in the novels prior to the novels of the ‘trio’.

“Although Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s incomplete romance Rajmohan’s Wife (1864) is considered to be the first Indian English novel, it was only in the 1930s that this genre began to demonstrate the maturity and accomplishment of a major literary mode. This coming of age was heralded by the publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable (1935), R. K. Narayan’s Swamy and Friends (1935) and Rao’s Kanthapura (1938)”

Raja Rao has been rated the highest among the ‘trio’ by several critics. A.N. Dwivedi aptly notes that “Raja Rao happens to be one of the most talented and innovative Indian English novelists of our day”. E. M. Foster’s compliment that Kanthapura is the finest novel to come out of India in recent years is testimony to it. Makarand Paranjape too has expressed a similar view. It is worthwhile to note the observation of R. Parthasarathy:
Rao is one of the most innovative novelists now writing. Departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel, he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition.4

Raja Rao is a prolific writer. He published works which include Kanthapura, Companion, India-A Fable, The Serpent and the Rope, The Policeman the Rose, The Cat and Shakespeare, The Writers and the Word, Comrade Kirillov, The Chessmaster and His Moves, Bhim, the Patriot, Ranchoddoss and his Daughter, Sudha On Understanding, Words of Acceptance, The Silence of Mahatma Gandhi. There are several other works of Raja Rao, which are yet to be published.

In this section an attempt is made to study Kanthapura in detail with a view to identify the perspective of the novel towards the notion of Freedom Struggle in order to arrive at an understanding as to how the perspective undergoes a telling change in the next generation. For convenience, the study is divided in three parts. They are as follows:

1. Transformation of Freedom Movement into a Mass Movement.
2. Depiction of the atrocity of the British Rule.
Transformation of Freedom Movement into a Mass Movement

The plot of *Kanthapura* is woven around the theme of freedom movement, which is rightly endorsed by Avtar Singh:

Indian struggle for freedom is rightly chosen as a repeat performance of the great war of the *Mahabharata* and *Kanthapura* becomes a veritable Kurukshetra where the ‘battle royal’ between the force of good and evil is waged. It is a war between the forces of freedom and slavery, love and hatred, truth and untruth, and thus it is fought both in the inner world of the spirit and in the outer world between the British Raj and the nationalists.⁵

Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is one of the foremost narratives of Freedom Struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in an epic fashion. *Kanthapura* is a mirror held to the historic event of the transformation of the Freedom Movement into a full-fledged national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. To examine the perspective of *Kanthapura* on the Freedom, it is worth noting what Pramila Garg observe:

> It (*Kanthapura*) probes the depth to which the nationalistic uprising in the Gandhian age in 1930s
penetrated the Indian mind and society. Mahatma Gandhi aroused patriotic feelings of his countrymen, taking great care that such feelings were imbued with the traditional religious faith of India; he thus helped to rediscover the soul of India.  

*Kanthapura* depicts the Gandhian national movement comprehensively and vividly. At the beginning, the narrative aims at providing the miserable conditions of India under the imperialistic rule. In order to highlight the rude and merciless attitude of the British rulers the narrative traces the rulers prior to the invasion of the British.

It is needless to repeat that India has been ruled by several invaders ever since the invasion of the Aryans. India was subjected to the devastations and lootings of the foreign invaders from Arab, Afganistan and Europe etc. Prior to the invasion of the East India Company of Britain, many Hindu and Muslim Kings has ruled India. But the people of India were taken care of. Besides the rulers, the country was endowed with the birth of several saintly persons and the physical and spiritual welfare of the subjects were safeguarded by those human and divine rulers.

Such sanctity of India as depicted was torn into pieces by the British government in India. The people of India have been deprived of their
rights of all kinds by the white government. India appears to be insecure for the first time in her 3000 years history. The author depicts the wickedness of the British:

Asoka, who loved his enemies and killed no animal;
Chandragupta, who had the nine jewels of Wisdom at his court; and Dharmaraya and Vikramaditya and Akbar, and many a noble king. And you gave her, too, sages radiating wisdom to the eight cardinal points of the earth, Krishna and Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. But, O Brahma! you who sent us the Prince propagators of the Holy Law and Sages that smote the darkness of Ignorance, you have forgotten us so long that men have come from across the seas and the oceans 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.7

As a matter of fact, the Gandhian movement is the last phase of the freedom struggle, which has been preceded by several other phases of revolt against the British Rule like the Sepoy Movement, Religious
Movement, Home Rule Movement, Indian National Congress etc. But none of the above was able to get rid of the foreign rule. The author makes use of this situation and incorporates the religious flavour with the theme of freedom struggle. Thus a prayer is sent to Lord Brahma, the God of creation, to rescue the motherland through a divine incarnation:

O Brahma! deign to send us one of your gods so that he may incarnate on Earth and bring back light and plenty to your enslaved daughter...’- ‘O Sage’ pronounced Brahma, ‘is it greater for you to ask or for me to say “Yea”? Siva himself will forthwith go and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery. Pray seat yourself, and the messengers of Heaven shall fly to Kailas and Siva be informed of it.

Subsequently the narrative dwells upon the biographical information of Mahatma Gandhi. Further it goes to the extent of comparing Gandhiji with Lord Krishna, which gives the impression that Gandhi has come to this world as an incarnation of Hindu deities:

You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had
killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. And as he grew up, and after he was duly shaven for the hair ceremony, he began to go out into the villages and assemble people and talk to them, and his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule.9

Though the freedom struggle has begun from the day of Sipoy Movement, it has got to wait for Gandhi to take the reins to convert it into a mass movement. The significance of Gandhi in this context is observed by Avatar Singh: “Mahatma’s word is accepted as the word of God and the spiritual ideal of dedication to truth and *Ahimsa* is adopted as a means to achieving the political end of freedom”.10

Understandably, the above is laid as the basis for the theme of Freedom Struggle, which is the nucleus of the novel. The glimpse of the perspective of the novel is also discernable at this juncture. The author
exhibits his sense of patriotism and of reverence towards Mahatma Gandhi.

The author now sets out to tell the story of how Gandhism manages to reach the nook and corner of the Motherland. There are two innovative devices towards the realization this goal. Firstly, small village from South India has been chosen to represent the uprising national movement across the country, in its miniature. It means that Kanthapura is India in its compressed from during the whirlwind of Gandhian movement in India. In order to justify this assumption, C. D. Narasimhaiha observation is worthwhile to recall: "...For Kanthapura is India in microcosm: what happened there is what happened in many place during India’s fight for freedom".\textsuperscript{11}

Secondly, unlike his predecessors and successors, Rao inducts not the character of Mahatma Gandhi directly but the alter ego of Mahatma Gandhi in the character of Moorthy who is the protagonist of the novel. "Though it is a tale of Gandhi’s charismatic effect on the village, the Mahatma himself does not appear in the novel. His spokesman is his disciple, Moorthy, who follows his master to the extent of fasting and preaching against caste in favour of a universal brotherhood. Even Moorthy is more like a walking slogan than, real character".\textsuperscript{12} Moorthy is
an embodiment of all the qualities of Mahatma Gandhi has had Moorthy is hailed as Mahatma Gandhi by the people of Kanthapura which is a dramatization of the influence of Gandhi all over the nation. Avatar Singh notes in this connection: “But the village Gandhi Moorthy, knows that the key to the Indian rural mind is religion, and hence translates the new Gandhian message into a traditional narrative of God based on ancient legend, the Harikatha”.13

According the information available from the history of Freedom Movement, the initial response to Mahatma’s fashion of national movement was characterized by the mixture of acceptance and rejection. Gandhiji’s plea for involving the untouchables and Sudras into the national movement witnessed a strong sense of contempt from the sections of the caste Hindus. The novel has incorporated this aspect very skilfully:

So Moorthy goes from house to house, and from younger brother to elder brother, and from elder brother to the grandfather himself, and – what do you think? – he even goes to the Potters’ quarter and the Weavers’ quarter and the Sudra quarter, and I closed my ears when I heard he went to the Pariah quarter. We said to ourselves, he is one of these Gandhi-men,
then they pray like us and they live like us.  

Then the narrative unravels how the national movement is able to overcome obstacles and gain momentum. The first of Gandhian doctrine, which has been vividly portrayed in the novel is Khadi Movement. Rangamma's house is the ex-officio center for the programmes of Moorthy. It is described as: "something of a Congress House". All the paraphernalia of the movement like books, pamphlets and spinning-wheel are stored in this house. The novel depicts the propaganda of the Khadi movement by the followers of Gandhi in a spectacular manner:

They went to the Sudra quarters and the Potters' quarters and the Weavers' quarters and they cried, 'Free spinning-wheel in the name of the Mahatma!' And it was Moorthy who came to the Brahmin Street. 'Sister', says he to Nose-scratching Nanjamma, 'sister, 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'.

'May I ask one thing, Moorthy? How much has one to pay?'

'Nothing, sister. I tell you the Congress gives it free'.

'And why should the Congress give it free?'

'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 scared, says the Mahatma.16

The evil of using foreign cloth has been communicated to the illiterate mass and awareness is created as how the native wealth has been looted by the British government through the use of foreign cloth. The villagers are educated on the need to manufacture / spin their cloth in order to defeat the exploitation of the foreign rulers:

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.17

Then the people come forward one after the other and take an active participation in Khadi Movement by spinning the cloth:

Post Office Suryanarayana is already a Gandhist. He asks for two charkas. Then he goes, Moorthy, to Pandit Venkateshia and Snuff Sastri and Rangamma’s widowed sister Seethamma, and her daughter Ratna, and Cardamom-field Ramachandra, and they all say, ‘Oh yes, my son. Oh yes!’ And so he leaves the Brahmin quarter and goes to the Pariah quarters, and the Pariahs are so happy to see a Brahmin among them that they say, ‘Yes, yes, learned one’; and Left-handed Madanna’s son Chenna, and Beadle Timmayya’s son Bhima, and old Mota and one-eyed Linga and Jack-tree Tippa, all of them follow him home, and to each one of them he gives a spinning-wheel and a seer of cotton-hemp, and they go back with their spinning-wheels upon their shoulders, their mouths touching the ears with delight. Not a pie for this!...They would
spin and spin and spin, and if that Brahmin boy was to be believed they would have clothes to wear, blankets and shirts and lion-cloths. They said it was all of the Mahatma!\textsuperscript{18}

Next the novel depicts the Gandhian doctrine of transforming the fragmented society in the name of caste into a homogeneous one. Gandhi's service to the untouchables under the banner Harijan Seva Sangh was rejected by some Brahmins. Gandhiji's won sister left the ashram in protesting against the practice of inter-dining among the touchables and untouchables. Such objection to the upliftment of untouchables have been duly represented:

'Is that why, Rangamma,' interrupts Bhatta angrily, 'Is that why the Mahatma has adopted a pariah girl as a daughter? He is a Vaisya and he may do what he likes. That does not pollute me. But, Rama-Rama, really if we have to hang the sacred thread over the shoulders of every pariah... it's impossible, impossible...\textsuperscript{19}

But Gandhian follower Moorthy does not lose heart because of the bitter criticism from his caste people. He shows a great sense of
perseverance and persistence in his mission of promoting the welfare of the untouchables. He continues to supply cotton to them, encourages them to spin more and teach them to learn. The movement, which was subjected to gain momentum gradually, emerged as a mass movement with the passage of time. Dr. G.N. Agnihotri observes impressively: "As a careful artist, Raja Rao does not make the mistake of introducing Gandhi, directly as a character into novel. However he exploits for the purpose of his novel the Indian people's traditional faith in the charismatic leadership that Gandhi offered them".20

The author has employed the mode of fancy to depict how Moorthy is drawn into the active participation of the national movement. Gandhi is not a character in the novel but appears in the imagination of Moorthy and others:

But Moorthy would have none of this. For, as everybody knew, one day he had seen a vision, a vision of the Mahatma, mighty and God-beaming, and stealing between the Volunteers Moorthy had got on to the platform, and he stood by the Mahatma, and the very skin of the Mahatma seemed to send out a mellowed force and love, and he stood by one of the
fanners and whispered, 'Brother, the nest is me'. And the fanner fanned on and the Mahatma spoke on, and Moorthy looked from the audience to the Mahatma and from the Mahatma to the audience, and he said to himself, 'There is in it something of the silent communion of the ancient books', and he turned again to the fanner and said, 'Brother, only when you are tired? And the fanner said, 'Take it, brother,' and Moorthy stood by the Mahatma and the fan went once this side and once that, and beneath the fan came a voice deep and stirring that went out to the hearts of those men and women and came streaming back through the thrumming air, and went through the fan and the hair and the nails of Moorthy into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered, and then there came flooding up in rings and ripples, 'Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!' - Jai Mahatma!', and as it brake against Moorthy, the fan went faster and faster over the head of the Mahatma, and perspiration flowed down the forehead of Moorthy...He stood up, and he was there, by the
legs of the chair, the sandal and the foot of the Mahatma, and he said to himself, 'That is my place?
And suddenly there was a clapping of hands and shoutings of ‘Vande Mataram, Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!’
and he put forth his hands and cried ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai.’

In Moorthy’s vision, Gandhi appears to inspire Moorthy through his compassion and sows the seed of the campaign in remote villages. It works as driving force behind to undertake his expeditions in Kanthapura village. It is vividly portrayed as follows:

And as there was fever and confusion about the Mahatma,...Mahatma lifted him up and’, before them all, he said, ‘What can I do for you, my son?’ and Mahatma said, ‘You wear foreign clothes, my son? - ‘It will go, Mahatmaji. - ‘You perhaps go to foreign Universities’ - ‘It will go, Moorthy said, “I am ignorant, how can I see Truth?” and the people around him were trying to hush him and to take him away, but the Mahatma said, ‘You wear foreign clothes, my son’. ‘It will go, Mahatmaji. - ‘You perhaps go foreign
Universities’ – ‘It will go, Mahatmaji’ – ‘You can help your country by going and working among the dumb millions of the villages’ – ‘So be it, Mahatmaji’, and the Mahatma patted 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; and Moorthy drew away, and as it were with shut eyes groped his way through the crowd to the bank of the river. 22

Subsequently a local unit of the Congress is established in Kanthapura and members are admitted to this unit by collecting four annas or two thousand yards of spun yarn. In addition to participating in the national movements the members are taught to imbibe the moral principles of Gandhian ideology in their life style. This is aptly represented as follows:

Sister, from today onwards I want your help. There is a huge Panchayat of all India called Congress, and that Congress belongs to the Mahatma, and the Mahatma says every village in this country must have a Panchayat like that, and everybody who will become a
member of that Panchayat will spin and practise 
ahimsa and speak the truth.\textsuperscript{23}

Moorthy manages to inspire the people of Kanthapura. He is able to make twenty-three persons enroll for Kanthapura unit of the Congress. He collects five rupees and twelve annas from them towards the membership fee and sends that amount to the Provincial Congress Committee. Thus the function of the local unit of the Congress commences its function.

When Gandhiji is imprisoned they volunteer themselves for the arrest. Indeed, Moorthy is caught by the police of the British government and is sentenced to three months rigorous imprisonment. Gradually the support of the people for Gandhiji becomes total. They show their loyalty to the national movement in various ways. One such instance is reflected in their observation of ‘fasting’ on the days the nationalists made scarifies:

And he also made the whole family fast-fast on this day because it is the anniversary of the day the Mahatma was imprisoned, fast on that day for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and on another day in memory of the day of Tilak’s death, and some day he would have made everyone fast for every cough and
sneeze of the Mahatma. 'Fasting is good for the mind', he would say, and even on the days he fasted he was in full spirits and went to court and spun his three hundred yards of yarn every morning instead of his prayers, and he said the gods would be happy when the hungry stomachs had food.24

The novel depicts the support of the people of Kanthapura for Gandhiji's salt Satyagraha. The transformation of Freedom Movement into a national movement is portrayed vividly in this instance. The information of Gandhiji's pilgrimage from his ashram to Dandi from the first day to the end is communicated to the people of Kanthapura and the emotion of the people for the success of Gandhiji's mission is picturesquely narrated in the novel. The following is a narrated in the novel. The following is testimony to it:

Do you know, brothers and sisters, the Mahatma has left Sabarmati on a long pilgrimage, the last pilgrimage of his life, he says with but eighty-two of his followers, who all wear Khadi and do not drink, and never tell a lie and they go with Mahatma to the Dandi beach to manufacture salt. Day by day we shall
await the news of the Mahatma, and from day to day we shall pray for the success of his pilgrimage, and we shall pray and fast and pour strength into ourselves, so that when the real fight begins we shall follow in the wake of the master.25

Kanthapura’s chief interest is in the depiction how Gandhiji turned the Freedom Movement into a mass movement and in the glorification of Gandhian doctrine. Therefore, the novel dwells upon not only the programmes and strategies of freeing India from the clutches of the British rule, but also upon the programmes to make India as Swaraja a reality, where in all sections of society are integrated irrespective of caste and creed.

Depiction of the Atrocity of the British Rule

To begin with, it is worthwhile to note: “However, in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura the British administrators of justice has been shown to be unjust in their ways.”26 As stated earlier, the British rule has been regarded as the worst evil of all India has witnessed. The British have meted out atrocity on the people of Indian in various manners ceaselessly and protests and revolts against them have also been made by our patriots. This has been represented symbolically in two episodes in the novel.
Firstly, the episode of 'Skeffington Coffee Estate' reflects the crude behaviour of the British rule. This estate is located adjacent to Kanthapura. It is a vast estate surrounded by hills, valley, mountains, ghats and rivers. The master of the estate is an Englishman, people from the surroundings work there as coolies.

The coolies are provided a place where they erect their huts. The poor laboures fall prey to the fury of the master frequently and are thrashed. It is represented: "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;"27 The irony lies in the natives being commanded by the masters.

Moorthy visits the labourers and begins to fight for their cause. Simultaneously, he also helps them to become literate. Moorthy's sympathy for the workers is not tolerated by the British officials in the estate. As a result, Moorthy is manhandled which is the height of the invaders' atrocity. The worst part of it is that a fellow Indian is appointed as policeman through whom Moorthy is tortured. The verbal abuse of the police of the women and others points out the evil of imperialism as:

The Police Inspector then turns towards Bade Khan,

who is now seen clearly in the lantern light, and
shouts, 'Bind this man!' and when they are beginning to pull out ropes from their belts, there is noise in the street below, and there comes Range Gowda, Mada and a lantern with him, and when he seems the policeman, he says something to Mada, and Mada goes away... there is Pariah Rachanna and Madanna and Lingayya and Lingayya’s woman, and they all gather at Rangamma’s door and cry out, ‘Hele Hele! What are you doing with our master?’ and the policeman shouts, ‘He, shut up, you sons of my woman! – He, he, do you think we are going to be silent because of your beards and batons...’ – ‘If you are not silent, you will get a marriage greeting today!’ – and Rachanna says, ‘Ah, I’ve seen your elders, You son of my concubine.28

If the elder master of the coffee estate has treated the coolies with physical and verbal abuses, something worse is to come from the heir of this master. After the demise of the old sahib, his nephew inherits the estate. He is called ‘new sahib’. His act of atrocity on the coolies is expressed ironically:
He is not a bad man, the new Sahib. He does not beat like his old uncle, nor does he refuse to advance money;... Sometimes when the weeds are being pulled or the vermin killed, he wanders into the plantation with his cane and pipe and puppy, and when he sees this wench of seventeen or that chit of nineteen, he goes to her, smiles at her, and pats on her back and pats her on her breasts.29

The Skeffington Coffee Estate belongs to the British owners they impose their power on poor coolies of the Estate. The Sahib has never shows pity on the coolies. The outcome is:

But when the girl says 'Nay', and begins to cry at his approach, he whistles, and the maistri is there, and he asks the maistri, 'To whom does this wench belong?' and the maistri says, 'She's Sampanna's granddaughter', or 'She's Kittayya's young wife,' or 'She's to be married to Dasayya the One-eyed'; and that night Sampanna or Kittayya or Dasayya is informed of it, and if he doesn't send her, a week's salary is cut, and if he doesn't send her then, still more
money is cut, and if he still doesn't send her, he'll get a whipping.\textsuperscript{30}

The above scene speaks about the manifold oppressions of the colonial rule in India. It has divested the life of the natives in many ways. The women folks are seduced amidst their own people. When the women do not yield to the desire of the white master, her whole family is put to torture and humiliation. There is a serious damage to the native culture and morality of natives through sexual violence caused by the colonial rules. The white man's 'divide and rule' formula is manifested in using the policeman from our country to exploit the people. For example Bade Khan has been appointed in this place not only to safeguard the white masters but also to barter the women to them.

Secondly, the treat meted out on the natives, when they protest against tapping 'toddy' from the coconut trees exemplifies the atrocity of the colonial rule. Mahatma Gandhiji's message of 'no wine' spreads over the country like a wild fire. The people of the country express their full support to Gandhiji in this regard. Protests against the imperialists attempts to tap toddy are undertaken in all parts of the country in various ways. In Kanthapur the people take out procession to the coconut groves raising slogans against the British. Non-cooperation with the British in
this regard has been described in the novel picturesquely: "We were a hundred and thirty-nine in all, and we marched out to Boranna’s toddy grove".31

This non-cooperation movement is given a realistic name such as: ‘Don’t - touch - the Government campaign”. All the people of Kanthapura participate in this campaign. They march to the grove of Boranna. On reaching the grove, Pariah Rachanna shows his protest against the British:

But the men were before us and the children huddled between us, and the police surrounded our men and tried to push them back, and suddenly Pariah Rachanna slipped out and ran and we all turned to see where he was going when he jumped across the lantana fence... and he fell and he rose, and as he rushed to climb a toddy tree the police made towards him, but he was already halfway up the tree when the lathis banged against his legs. And the cartmen, who had gathered round us, began to shout, and we cried out ‘Vande Mataram!’ and somebody began to clap hands and push forward and we all clapped hands too
and began to sing, and the police began to push us this way and that, when Pariah Rachanna was torn down from the toddy tree, our hearts began to beat so fast that we cried out ‘Hoye-Hoye!’ and pushed forward with the men. 32

The above serves two purposes. Firstly, it explains how the freedom struggle under Gandhiji’s leadership has been converted to a mass movement by providing scope for people irrespective of caste age, gender to participate in the movement. Pariah Rachanna, who belongs to the caste untouchables, is portrayed as the first man to react against the British rule and as being supported by all higher caste people including Brahmins. Woman and children too are portrayed to be very active in Don’t-touch-the-Government campaign. Thus Freedom movement has become peoples’ movement in its true spirit.

Secondly, it exposes the cruelty of the British rule on the native people. The basic rights are denied to the natives. When the people resort to a non-violent method to disturb the colonizers who loot our resources, they are manhandled and imprisoned. The undemocratic attitude of the foreign rule has been explicitly rendered through the above description. Thus, "Kanthapura, is the story of how a small, sleepy, south Indian village
is caught in the whirlpool of the Indian freedom struggle and comes to be completely destroyed”. And succeeds in the depiction of the transformation of Freedom Struggle into a National Movement and the imperialistic attitude towards the natives.

**Treatment of Freedom Struggle in Kanthapura**

*Kanthapura* is one of the earliest novels that well upon Freedom Struggle as a major theme. It is Raja Rao’s masterpiece and the reasons are historical and artistic. As far as the first is concerned, this is the first successful novel dealing with the theme of freedom struggle.

The novel is not interested in the theme of struggle, which has a history of more than 150 years. Indeed, it is interested only in the last phase of the Freedom Struggle, which was carried out under the eminent leadership of Gandhiji. Therefore, the narrative dwells upon those few selected aspects of the Freedom Struggle, which heighten the image of Mahatma Gandhi.

The movements that are strewn in the plot of the novel are: Khadi Movement, Salt Satyagraha and Non-cooperation etc.

These movements are incorporated in the narrative not in the historical mode, nor in the romantic mode but in a spiritualistic mode. Rao perceives the struggle for freedom as a holy war fought between virtue
and vice, good and evil. The struggle is viewed as similar to the war between Rama and Ravana and the war between Pandavas and Kavravas. And the whole struggle launched Mahatma Gandhi against the British is viewed as a holy war founded on non-violence.

There are several evidences for considering the treatment of struggle as a holy or spiritual battle in Kanthapura. The first and foremost is the employment of ‘Harikatha’ as a mode of narration. Makarand Paranjape’s observation in this regard is worthwhile to note:

Kanthapura also shares certain narrative techniques with the Puranas. The story is told rapidly, all in one breath, by a village grandmother and the style reflects the oral heritage also evident in the Harikatha.34

Harikatha is a traditional narrate familiar in Indian societies. Obviously the stories of gods and divinities are narrated through songs. To have selected ‘Harikatha’ to narrative Gandhian movement naturally confirms to the fact that Kanthapura’s treatment of Freedom Struggle is not historical but spiritual. It is further supported by the non-sequential progression of the narrative. Had the novel been historical, it would have presented the events of the Freedom Struggle in the successive order. But the events are depicted in a disorderly way.
Secondly the scenes of invocation of God to send an incarnation to rescue Mother India from the foreign rule are resonant with nature of spiritualism. The novel depicts Gandhiji’s birth as an instance of incarnation of Krishna to protect Mother India:

And lo! When the sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality, there was born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world has never beheld. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the Kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom. You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four had begun to fight against demons and killed the Serpent Kali.35

The spiritualistic perspective in dealing with the theme of freedom struggle in Kanthapura can be traced in the deployment of certain myths and symbols too. The old grandmother nostalgically remembers while sitting by the fire-side in a remote village to one of the new arrivals the happy and carefree days of the inhabitants of Kanthapura before free movement under the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and local Moorthy engulfed in totally Kanthapura is a Sthala-purana and attempts to
combine "folklore and politics in its texture and tends to be symbolic at places". Moorthy is representing the myth of self-effacing Jesus Christ for he undergoes all the trials and tribulations of life and takes upon himself the offences of people. His fasting for three days is an example of his self-suffering. The myth of Gandhi is also constituted in the portrayal Moorthy. The mythical qualities in Moorhty are described by A.N. Dwivedi as "As for Moorthy, he represents the forces of Good struggling against the forces of evil".

If Moorthy stands for the myth of Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi, Bhatta, the Pariah priest, Bade Khan, the policeman, the police inspector, Venkamma all stand for the evil and the myth of Ravana has been incorporated in the story. They prevent Moorthy from his campaign for Swaraj. In a way they behave like Ravana in keeping India, which is viewed as Sita in confinement.

The myth of Lord Shiva is also employed in Kanthapura. It reinforces the idea of Swaraj in the novel. This myth is narrated by the popular Harikatha-man Jayaramchara. To illustrate this it is worthwhile to note what Jayaramachara informs us: "Parvati in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what". The mixture of myth with freedom struggle is further observed in the novel as:
‘Siva is the three-eyed’, he says, ‘and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar’. And then he talks of Damayanthi and Sakuntala and Yasodha and everywhere there is something about our country and something about Swaraj. Never had we heard Harikatha like this.39

The myth of Krishna is also included in the texture of Kanthapura. The narrator informs us as soon as Gandhi is born the four wide walls began to shine like the kingdom of the Sun and hardly was he in the cradle then he began to lisp the language of wisdom. And then the image of Lord Krishna appears before the narrator’s tale:

You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country.40

In the above instance Kali refers to the enemies of the country who are the British rulers that had enslaved India. The Britishers are the serpent Kali who lets out deadly poison to kill the very spirit of Mother India. This imagery has been incorporated the episode of Moorthy’s childhood. When Moorthy was child, he had ones quietly slept into deep
meditation under the serpent Piple tree on the bank of river Hemavathy in the presence of mother, who was then washing clothes there. In his meditation he remembered the child Prahlada who had said that Hari was everywhere. Later on when he took to fasting in the sanctum of village temple he saw the vision of his mother and his speech with her appears thus: “Mother, now you can throw me down the mountains’, and she asked, ‘why, my son?’ and...I have seen Hari...” The vision of Siva, Lord Krishna and Mahatma are reoccurring in the novel because Rao considers that they are destroyer of evil and protectors of good. This transforms Kanthapura from a dry political novel to a spiritual one.

In the text of the novel there are direct references to the Rama, Ravana myth. It is very relevant in our given political situation:

They say the Mahatma will go to the Red-man’s country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air, and brother Bharatha will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the master on his head.
And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers.42

The above instance makes it very clear that Gandhi is like Rama in his heroic struggle against Ravana-like British, and that Nehru is like Rama’s younger brother Bharatha, the devoted sincere follower, and that Swaraj like mother Sita. Swaraj can be achieved after Ravana is slain, and Ravana an unambiguous symbol of evil and tyranny and oppression the rejoicing Ayodhya denotes the whole of India gone into raptures over the attainment of hard-won freedom.

In addition the mythical and symbolic design of Kanthapura has been deployed for a passing reference to the local goddess Kenchamma who certain to come to the resume of the residence of Kanthapura whenever they are in difficulties. Immediately after mentioning the local of Kanthapura, the author moves fast to introduce the river Hemavathy and goddess Kenchamma. It is believed that the river Hemavathy originates from the Tippur Hill, which is sacred resort of Kenchamma. The goddess of river placed through the night with Goddess of hill. Kenchamma is the mother of Hemavathy. The goddess of Kenchamma is always invoked as protector of the people of Kanthapura at the time of difficulties. She is naturally kind and bounteous and never betrayed the
villagers in woe or weal. To illustrate the significance of the myth of Kenchamma in Kanthapura the following is quoted from the novel:

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous,
Mother of earth, blood of life,
Harvest-queen, rain-crowned,
Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous.43

It seems that Kenchamma is the giver of bred, rain and life to the people of Kanthapura. She has killed a horrible demon in a long-drawn battle because of which it is believed that the Tippur Hill is all red.

There is reference to the myth of Hemavathy in the narrative. The river Hemavathy is observed by R.S. Singh as “a symbol of the continuous flow of life.”44 The river protects the village and provides drinking water to people and their cattle. *Kanthapura* begins with a description of this river “And once they are on the other side of the Tippur Hill the noise suddenly dies into the night and the soft hiss of the Hemavathy rises into the air”.45 And ends Range Gouda’s visit to his village and drinking “three handful of Hemavathy water”.46 Thus the myth of Kenchamma
and Hemavathy which suggests that the perspective of the novel is given by spiritualism.

This spiritualistic mould is present from the beginning to the end in the novel. The principles of Gandhi-non-violence, non-attachment, fasting, penance and others - are emanated from Hindu spiritualism only. Gandhiji has endorsed it. By incorporating these principles throughout the novel, the novel adheres not only to Gandhiji’s political doctrine but also to the doctrine of Hindu spiritualism also. The novel's spiritualistic mould is noted by Dr. T. Prabhakar who says that: “Kanthapura is an account of the renaissance of Indian spiritual life under impact of the independence movement. Its message is essentially spiritual and cultural”. Therefore, it may be conceded that the treatment of Freedom Struggle in Kanthapura is spiritualistic.
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