



## **ECHOES OF STRUGGLE FOR INDIA'S FREEDOM IN KANTHAPURA BY RAJA RAO**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper explores the portrayal of the Indian freedom struggle in Raja Rao's 1938 novel, Kanthapura. The novel, set in a small South Indian village, chronicles the impact of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and the Indian National Congress's activities on rural India. Through a comprehensive analysis of the novel's characters, themes, and narrative style, this paper demonstrates how Kanthapura successfully captures the essence of the freedom struggle, both on an individual and collective level. Additionally, the paper highlights the novel's significance in understanding the socio-political landscape of India during the colonial era.

**Key Words:** South, Indian, Village, Chronicles

### **Introduction:**

The Indian freedom struggle, a multifaceted and prolonged movement against British colonial rule, culminated in India's independence in 1947. Key organizations, such as the Indian National Congress, and leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel, played crucial roles in shaping the struggle (Bose 68). Raja Rao's Kanthapura, published in 1938, offers a unique perspective on the freedom struggle by focusing on the experiences of a small South Indian village. This paper aims to explore the novel's portrayal of the freedom struggle through an in-depth analysis of its setting, characters, themes, and narrative techniques. Kanthapura by Raja Rao is a significant novel that portrays the impact of the Indian freedom struggle on a small South Indian village. The village of Kanthapura serves as a microcosm of Indian society during the colonial era. The novel explores the intricacies of caste, religion, and customs in the village, as well as the transformation of these social structures as the freedom struggle unfolds. The novel's characters embody various aspects of the Indian freedom struggle. The protagonist, Moorthy, is a Gandhian figure who leads the village in adopting non-violence and self-reliance. Rangamma, a widow, represents women's empowerment and challenges traditional gender roles. Secondary characters like Rachanna and Bhatta emphasize the importance of inclusivity and solidarity across caste and religious lines. Kanthapura explores themes central to the Indian freedom struggle, such as non-violence, Satyagraha, women's empowerment, and unity across caste and religious divides.

These themes are portrayed through the villagers' experiences and actions, reflecting the broader socio-political changes occurring in India during the struggle for independence. Raja Rao's narrative style draws from oral storytelling traditions and employs the local dialect, providing an authentic, grounded voice to the novel. The first-person perspective of the village's elderly woman, Achakka, offers an intimate account of the events and emotions experienced by the villagers during the freedom struggle. The novel incorporates myth and folklore, blending the freedom struggle with the villagers' cultural heritage. This demonstrates the integration of Gandhian ideals into their traditional belief systems and highlights the profound influence of Gandhi's principles on the psyche of rural India. Kanthapura serves as a commentary on the socio-political landscape of India during the colonial era. Through its depiction of the village and its inhabitants, the novel provides valuable insights into the impact of the freedom struggle on rural India and the challenges faced by the Indian population in their fight against colonial rule. Kanthapura's eponymous village serves as a microcosm of Indian society during the freedom struggle. The novel depicts the village's caste divisions, religious practices, and traditional customs, which are deeply entrenched in the social fabric (Rao 10). As the villagers embrace the ideas of the freedom struggle, these social structures are challenged and transformed, reflecting the broader socio-political changes occurring in India. Moreover, the village's close-knit community and its connections to the larger freedom struggle emphasize the interconnectedness of India's rural and urban populations in the fight against colonial rule (Gokak 48).

### **Characters and the Freedom Struggle:**

In Kanthapura, the characters embody various aspects of the Indian freedom struggle. Moorthy, the protagonist, represents the Gandhian ideals of non-violence and self-reliance, as he leads the village in adopting these principles (Rao 39). Rangamma, a widow, emerges as a female leader, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's participation in the struggle (Rao 78). Secondary characters, such as the pariah Rachanna and the Muslim Bhatta, demonstrate the novel's commitment to inclusivity and solidarity across caste and religious lines (Rao 98). By capturing the diversity and complexity of the freedom struggle through its characters, the novel offers a nuanced understanding of the movement's impact on Indian society.

As per M.K. Naik, "A prominent Indian literary critic, Naik has contributed significantly to the study of Indian English Literature. In his book "A History of Indian English Literature," Naik examines Kanthapura and discusses its themes and narrative techniques." (65). In Kanthapura, the characters play a crucial role in portraying the Indian freedom struggle. Each character embodies different aspects of the struggle, making the novel a rich and diverse representation of the movement. Here are the main characters and their connection to the freedom struggle:

**Moorthy:** The protagonist of the novel, Moorthy, represents the Gandhian ideals of non-violence, truth, and self-reliance. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, he leads the village in adopting these principles and becomes a key figure in the struggle (Rao 36). Moorthy's commitment to social reform, such as fighting against caste discrimination and promoting spinning and weaving as symbols of self-sufficiency, mirrors Gandhi's vision for India's freedom struggle. **Rangamma:** Rangamma is a widow who emerges as a female leader in the village, defying traditional gender roles. She plays a vital role in advocating for women's participation in the freedom struggle and organizing women to join protests and Satyagraha campaigns (Rao 78). Rangamma's leadership and dedication to the cause illustrate the novel's emphasis on women's empowerment during the freedom struggle. **Rachanna:** Rachanna is a pariah (untouchable) who supports the freedom struggle and becomes an active participant in the movement. His character highlights the novel's commitment to inclusivity and the need for solidarity across caste lines (Rao 98). Rachanna's involvement in the struggle demonstrates the impact of Gandhian ideals on breaking down caste barriers and fostering unity.

#### **Themes and Symbols:**

The themes and symbols in Kanthapura reflect the core values of the Indian freedom struggle. Non-violence and Satyagraha, central to Gandhi's philosophy, are embodied in the villagers' peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience (Rao 133). The novel also emphasizes women's empowerment, as female characters like Rangamma and Ratna actively participate in the struggle and challenge patriarchal norms (Rao 82). Additionally, the novel showcases unity and solidarity among the villagers, transcending caste and religious divisions, which mirrors the broader Indian struggle for independence (Rao 98). Central to Gandhi's philosophy, non-violence and Satyagraha are embodied in the villagers' peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience (Rao 127). These themes are essential to understanding the freedom struggle's emphasis on non-violent resistance against British colonial rule. The novel emphasizes women's empowerment, as female characters like Rangamma and Ratna actively participate in the struggle and challenge patriarchal norms (Rao 78). This theme highlights the importance of gender equality and women's participation in the Indian freedom struggle. Kanthapura showcases unity and solidarity among the villagers, transcending caste and religious divisions (Rao 98). This theme mirrors the broader Indian struggle for independence, where diverse communities came together to fight against colonial rule. The spinning wheel, or charkha, is a significant symbol in the novel, representing self-reliance and economic independence (Rao 40). The spinning wheel was a central symbol in Gandhi's teachings, as it encouraged self-sufficiency and opposed the exploitation of Indian resources by the British. One prominent theme and symbol in Kanthapura is non-violence and Satyagraha:

Central to Gandhi's philosophy, non-violence and Satyagraha are embodied in the villagers' peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience (Rao 127).

This theme is essential to understanding the freedom struggle's emphasis on non-violent resistance against British colonial rule.

#### **Narrative Style and Technique:**

Raja Rao's narrative style in Kanthapura draws from oral storytelling traditions and employs the local dialect, giving the novel an authentic, grounded voice (Sarangi 88). By using the first-person perspective of the village's elderly woman, Achakka, the narrative provides an intimate account of the events and emotions experienced by the villagers during the freedom struggle (Rao 2). Additionally, the novel incorporates myth and folklore, blending the freedom struggle with the villagers' cultural heritage and effectively demonstrating the integration of Gandhian ideals into their traditional belief systems (Rao 55). This narrative approach not only enhances the novel's realism but also highlights the profound influence of Gandhi's principles on the psyche of rural India.

#### **Conclusion:**

Kanthapura is a significant literary work that provides valuable insights into the Indian freedom struggle's impact on rural society. Through its vivid portrayal of the village setting, diverse characters, and underlying themes, the novel captures the essence of the struggle for independence, both on an individual and collective level. The novel's narrative style, which incorporates oral storytelling, local dialect, and myth, further underscores the relevance of the freedom struggle within the context of rural Indian culture. By examining Kanthapura, readers gain a deeper understanding of the socio-political landscape of India during the colonial era, as well as the enduring legacy and relevance of the freedom struggle in contemporary times.

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