

## **The Role of Gandhian Philosophy in the Fiction of Raja Rao**

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### **Abstract:**

Raja Rao's fiction, particularly *Kanthapura*, stands as a literary embodiment of **Gandhian philosophy**, capturing the transformative impact of Mahatma Gandhi's ideals on Indian society during the freedom struggle. Set in a traditional South Indian village, the novel portrays how Gandhi's principles of **non-violence, truth, and social equality** permeate even the most remote corners of India. Through the character of Moorthy, a young Brahmin who becomes a local symbol of Gandhian values, Rao illustrates the spiritual and political awakening of the masses. The narrative, rich in mythological allusions and indigenous storytelling, reflects the convergence of **Indian tradition and nationalist fervor**, making *Kanthapura* a microcosm of the larger independence movement. This exploration highlights how Gandhian thought reshaped social hierarchies, challenged caste discrimination, and inspired grassroots activism, ultimately redefining the moral and cultural landscape of Indian fiction.

This research paper explores the influence of Gandhian philosophy on the works of Raja Rao, one of India's prominent literary figures. It delves into how Rao's novels embody the principles of Gandhi's thought, focusing on themes such as non-violence, truth, self-reliance, and the spiritual quest. Through selected texts, this paper examines the interplay between Gandhi's ideals and Rao's narrative style, character development, and thematic concerns.

### **Introduction:**

Raja Rao, a celebrated Indian novelist and a key figure in Indian English literature, is renowned for his nuanced portrayal of the complexities of Indian life and the philosophical underpinnings that shape the national consciousness. His works often reflect the socio-political and cultural milieu of India, deeply influenced by the Mahatma Gandhi's philosophies. This paper aims to unpack the intertextual relationship between Gandhian thought and Rao's literary output, emphasizing how the former serves as a foundation for the latter's exploration of identity, spirituality, and social justice. Raja Rao, a pioneering figure in Indian English literature, is renowned for his ability to blend traditional Indian storytelling with modern political consciousness. His seminal novel *Kanthapura* (1938) stands as a literary tribute to **Mahatma**

**Gandhi's philosophy**, capturing its profound impact on rural India during the freedom struggle. Rao's fiction is not merely a narrative of political events—it is a spiritual and cultural chronicle that reflects how Gandhian ideals permeated the lives of ordinary villagers and reshaped their worldview.

Set in a small South Indian village, *Kanthapura* portrays the awakening of a caste-bound, superstitious community through the influence of Gandhi's teachings. Though Gandhi never appears directly in the novel, his presence is felt through the character of Moorthy, a young Brahmin who becomes the village's moral and political guide. Moorthy's embrace of **non-violence, truth, and social equality** mirrors Gandhi's principles and initiates a grassroots revolution. His efforts to unite castes, promote khadi, and resist colonial rule reflect the transformative power of Gandhian thought.

The novel's narrative style—told by an elderly village woman—infuses myth, folklore, and religious symbolism, aligning Gandhi with divine figures like Rama and Shiva. This mythic framing elevates Gandhi's philosophy to a spiritual force, making it accessible and resonant for the villagers. Rao's use of indigenous idioms and oral tradition reinforces the authenticity of the setting and the emotional depth of the characters' journey.

Beyond *Kanthapura*, Rao's broader literary vision is shaped by **Gandhian ethics**, emphasizing inner transformation, communal harmony, and resistance through moral strength. His fiction explores the intersection of politics and spirituality, suggesting that true liberation requires both external freedom and internal awakening. Rao's portrayal of Gandhi is not idealized but deeply human, acknowledging the challenges and contradictions of applying philosophical ideals in a complex social landscape.

In essence, Raja Rao's fiction serves as a cultural bridge between **Gandhian ideology and Indian literary expression**, offering a nuanced exploration of how political philosophy can inspire personal and collective change. His work remains a cornerstone of Indian literature, illuminating the enduring relevance of Gandhi's message in shaping national identity and moral consciousness.

### **Gandhian Philosophy in Raja Rao's Fiction**

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao crafts characters who serve as vessels for **Gandhian philosophy**, with Moorthy standing as the most vivid embodiment. A young Brahmin, Moorthy undergoes a

profound transformation after embracing Gandhi's ideals of **truth, non-violence, and social equality**. His journey from religious orthodoxy to political activism mirrors the awakening of rural India during the independence movement. Moorthy's rejection of caste discrimination and his outreach to the Pariah quarter challenge entrenched social norms, reflecting Gandhi's call for unity and upliftment of the marginalized.

Moorthy's moral dilemmas—such as facing excommunication and the death of his mother—underscore the personal cost of adhering to Gandhian values. His commitment to spinning khadi, fasting, and leading peaceful protests against British rule illustrates his internalization of **Satyagraha** and **self-sacrifice**. Though Gandhi never appears directly in the novel, his presence is felt through Moorthy's actions and the villagers' reverence for him as "the Gandhi of Kanthapura".

Other characters, like Rangamma and Ratna, also reflect Gandhian ideals by participating in civil disobedience and promoting women's empowerment. Through these portrayals, Rao not only dramatizes the impact of Gandhi's teachings but also highlights the transformative power of ethical resistance in reshaping individual lives and collective consciousness.

- **Themes of Non-violence:** Rao's narratives often explore the theme of non-violence as a mode of resistance. For instance, in "The Serpent and the Rope," the protagonist's journey is marked by the struggle against moral and spiritual dilemmas, aligning with Gandhi's advocacy for resolving conflicts through peaceful means rather than aggression.
- **Spiritual Quest and Self-Discovery:** Rao's works are infused with a deep sense of spirituality that resonates with Gandhian thought. The exploration of the self, the connection to one's cultural roots, and the emphasis on personal growth as a form of social change are prevalent in novels like "The Serpent and the Rope." The protagonist's journey reflects a struggle for self-understanding that mirrors Gandhi's own philosophical explorations.
- **Social Justice and Community Upliftment:** The impact of community and collective action in Rao's narratives illustrates Gandhi's belief in the importance of social responsibility. In "Kanthapura," the villagers' collective resistance against oppression highlights the power of community solidarity, a central tenet of Gandhian philosophy.

**Conclusion:**

Raja Rao's fiction serves as a prism through which Gandhian philosophy can be examined and appreciated. His characters, themes, and narrative structures testify to the integration of Gandhi's ideals into the fabric of his storytelling. By fostering an understanding of spirituality, non-violence, and social justice, Rao not only reinforces the relevance of Gandhi's teachings in the context of India's post-colonial identity but also offers a thoughtful reflection on the human condition. Raja Rao's fiction, deeply rooted in Indian ethos, serves as a powerful vehicle for **Gandhian philosophy**, blending political ideology with spiritual introspection. In *Kanthapura*, Gandhi's influence is omnipresent—though he never appears directly, his ideals guide the characters' actions and shape the village's collective consciousness. Moorthy's journey from orthodoxy to activism mirrors the internal struggle of a nation grappling with colonial oppression and social reform. Rao's use of myth, oral tradition, and symbolic imagery reinforces the timeless relevance of Gandhi's teachings. The novel transcends mere political commentary, offering a vision of **ethical resistance and communal transformation**. Through this lens, Rao not only pays tribute to Gandhi but also redefines the role of fiction as a tool for social change. His work remains a testament to the enduring power of literature to reflect, challenge, and inspire.

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