

**Kenchamma as the metaphor in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*:  
A Synthesis of Gender and Race in India**

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Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* (1938) is the first major Indian novel in English. It is a fictional but realistic account of how the great majority of people in India lived their lives under British rule and how they responded to the ideas and ideals of Indian nationalism. The book has been considered by many to be the first classic modern Indian writing in English and is thought of as one of the best, if not the best, Gandhian novels in English.

*Kanthapura* - The Village:

'*Kanthapura*' portrays the participation of a small village of South India in the national struggle called for by Mahatma Gandhi. Imbued with nationalism, the villagers sacrifice all their material possessions in a triumph of the spirit, showing how in the Gandhian movement people shed their narrow prejudices and united in the common cause of the non-violent civil resistance to the British Raj.

This village is a microcosm of the traditional Indian society with its entrenched caste hierarchy. In *Kanthapura* there are Brahmin quarters, Sudra quarters and Pariah quarters. Despite stratification into castes, however, the villagers are mutually bound in various economic and social functions which maintain social harmony. The enduring quality of the Indian village is represented as ensuring an internal tenacity that resists external crises, its relationship to past contributing a sense of unity and continuity between the present and past generations. *Kanthapura* may appear isolated and removed from civilization, but it is compensated by an ever-enriching cycle of ceremonies, rituals, and festivals.

Rao depicts the regular involvement of the villagers in Sankara-Jayanthi, Kartik Purnima, Ganesh-Jayanthi, Dasara, and the Satyanarayana Puja with the intention of conveying a

sense of the natural unity and cohesion of village society. Old Ramakrishnayya reads out the Sankara-Vijaya day after day and the villagers discuss Vedanta with him every afternoon. Religion, imparted through discourses and pujas (prayers), keeps alive in the natives a sense of the presence of God. Participation in a festival brings about the solidarity among them. The local deity Kenchamma protects the villagers "through famine and disease, death and despair". If the rains fail, you fall at her feet. Equally sacred is the river Himavathy which flows near Kanthapura.

Rao does not marginalize the role of women in the freedom movement and highlights their individual contributions. Rangamma and Ratna form women's volunteer groups, despite opposition from the orthodox. Moorthy and his volunteers closely monitor the Mahatma's Dandi march and enact their own satyagraha in Kanthapura. They picket toddy shops, and are joined by more volunteers from the city, and by the coolies from the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Their march is opposed by the police who beat them up mercilessly. The police tell them to be loyal to the British Government, but the people say they know only the Government of the Mahatma. Moorthy and several others are arrested. As a result of the police atrocities the entire village is desolate and, in the end, "there remains neither man nor mosquito in *Kanthapura*".

*Kanthapura* has been described as the most satisfying of all modern Indian novels. Recognized as a major landmark in Indian fiction, it is the story of how the Gandhian struggle for Independence came to one small village in south India. has been described as the most satisfying of all modern Indian novels. Recognized as a major landmark in Indian fiction, it is the story of how the Gandhian struggle for Independence came to one small village in south India.

Kenchamma is portrayed as the goddess who represents Mother India. Worshipping goddess has various connotations in traditional discourse. Once you attribute the position of deity to a woman you can subject her to any type of injustice. Her suffering is glorified in the name of religion. Worshipping also gives dignity to the person who offers that worship. He can find easy escape from all actions of integrity and contemporary values like honesty, truth, equality and progress in society. Rituals are the best escape. Therefore Raja Rao's Goddess Kenchamma creates this kind of metaphor which has continued from times immemorial in India.

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