

Kanthapura

An Introduction

Kanthapura, one of the fascinating novels of Raja rao, was published in the year 1938. The critically acclaimed novel primarily serves as a critique of Indian caste system. Set in pre-independence India, the novel charts the impact of teachings of Mahatma Gandhi on the people of a small village in South India, named, Kanthapura.

Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel, is hugely impacted by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. As a result, he starts taking active part in the freedom movement; he criticizes the caste system openly and eschews british garments in favour of traditional indian clothing. This is not taken kindly by the village religious leaders and he was excommunicated. Moorthy, despite hindrances on his way, goes on to form a committee for independence in his village and becomes its leader. His actions warranted british government to take actions against him and he is imprisoned on charges of instigating violence. Meanwhile, a local woman leader Rangamma takes the command and unites village women for the independence struggle. When Moorthy is released from prison, he is greeted as a hero by the village, which is now united across caste lines. Moorthy and the rest of the town look towards the future and continue their fight for independence.

The story of Kanthapura is narrated by an old village woman, Achakka, in the fashion of meandering stream-of-consciousness rather than conventional linear narration. As for style, Rao's english is not a dry language of education and record keeping, it is adapted into vernacular style lending it a taste of familiarity and

relatability. Rao believed that indian writing in english must express “the tempo of indian life” which is a process of “rush and tumble and move on”.