

New Regimes and Old Structures: An Analysis of Ideological Shifts and Strategies of Change in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is the inspirational story of a South Indian village in which the Gandhian movement of non-violent resistance against the British Raj unites a motley crowd deeply divided by caste barriers. Although the independence movement eventually becomes a tragic reality in this tiny, secluded village, the novel celebrates the spirit of this closely knit community which sheds narrow yet deeply entrenched prejudices and unites for non-violent fighting on behalf of the *Mother* and *Mahatma*.

In the novel we see the gradual evolution of a community steeped in tradition. It is a village where one's caste and gender and dubiously interpreted *Dharma Sastras* decided one's entire trajectory of life. Yet one young man, assisted by a young widow and an older widow, changes it all. A new egalitarian ideology seeps into the community through charismatic and essentially idealistic Moorthappa, who tactfully rallies the caste conscious community under the patriotic slogan *vande mathram!*, transforming the village's insulated identity into a national identity of great significance.

Furthermore the narrative establishes Kanthapura as a microcosm of traditional India, evoking the ethos of India's traditional folk-epics, the *puranas*, religious fervor, ethics, traditions and ceremonies, beliefs and superstition. Therefore, it could be assumed that the ideological shifts in Kanthapura reflect the ideological and structural shifts in British India. Partha Chatterjee's observations in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) support the assumption made above:

"One structural contradiction in pre-British state formations was between centralizing, militaristic regimes and numerous local lordships. The British inserted themselves into these formations, not as outsiders with new procedural principles and purposes (as yet), but, contingently, as part of the political system of the subcontinent..."

Just as Moorthy affects a significant paradigmatic shift in his village by approaching its community through existing structures and hierarchies, the British implemented the rule of the British crown and disseminated authority through existing structures and hierarchies of socio-political power. They also naturalized and fully legitimized the rule of the invader in the minds of people by inserting themselves to the existing popular narratives and religious beliefs of the masses. While the narrative hints at the savvy exploitation of traditional methods within the macrocosm of British India, the history of the rule of the British Raj provides ample evidence to support this view.

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