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## Teaching *Kanthapura*: My Pedagogical Journey from Postcolonial to Post-Truth Paradigms

*Vibha Sharma*<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2287-0210>

vibhasharma.en@amu.ac.in; vibz\_s@yahoo.co.in

In this article, I share my experience in teaching the novel *Kanthapura* to undergraduate students at an Indian university over the past two decades. I discuss the evolving interpretations of the novel in the context of changing pedagogical culture and intellectual undercurrents, namely postcolonial and post-truth discourses. I reflect on the teaching strategies and techniques that I have used to engage students against the backdrop of culturally responsive pedagogy. The article comprises an empirical study of students' responses to the novel collected by me over the last ten years.

Keywords: *Kanthapura*, Pedagogical journey, Postcolonial, Post-truth, Teaching strategies

### 1. Introduction

I have been teaching English literature at an Indian University for twenty-one years now. Among various literature courses and texts assigned to me for teaching, I have greatly enjoyed teaching *Kanthapura* (1938), a novel by Raja Rao focused on the Gandhian movement during India's struggle for independence. Over the years of teaching *Kanthapura*, I have received a heartening response from the students, visible in their positive feedback about the novel over the years and their choice to select the novel in optional papers of the undergraduate program. Today when I look back at the different interpretations I used in my lectures, I can see the evolving patterns. This evolution emanates from the intellectual undercurrents that the world of scholarly fiction has offered over the last two decades and is also rooted in the evolving pedagogical culture in Indian classrooms. Hence, I aim to present an account of this evolution, tracing the interpretations of *Kanthapura* in

English literature classrooms in India over the past twenty years that figured in my journey as a teacher and researcher. I also aim evaluate the impact of teaching *Kanthapura* on the students by analyzing their responses, critical thinking abilities, and engagement with the text.

This article is significant for several reasons: Documenting the strategies that I have employed while teaching *Kanthapura* to engage and educate my students can contribute to the existing literature on pedagogical practices used in the teaching of such literary texts. Evaluating students' responses to the novel and my teaching approaches is set to demonstrate the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies and their influence on students' literary analysis, empathy, and cultural understanding.

An account of my teaching approaches to this novel in particular may prove beneficial for educators seeking to enrich their multidisciplinary teaching methods. *Kanthapura* is a novel that delves into the cultural and historical aspects of India, specifically the Indian independence movement. This article highlights how I contextualized the novel within the socio-political landscape of its era and its significance to modern Indian society, drawing connections between literature and history. I have integrated these interdisciplinary perspectives into my teaching, aiming to foster a comprehensive appreciation of the novel and its themes.

Reflecting on my experiences teaching *Kanthapura*, I explore the dynamics between me as the teacher and my students. Discussing the challenges encountered and the strategies used to overcome them can provide valuable insights into effective teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and fostering an engaging learning environment. Moreover, this article sheds light on how I made *Kanthapura* accessible and relatable to students from diverse backgrounds, fostering inclusivity and promoting cross-cultural understanding in the classroom. Namely, Indian classrooms are diverse, with students from different cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, exploring teaching approaches in such a context can provide insights into creating inclusive pedagogical practices in higher education.

Having progressively worked towards maintaining cultural awareness and respect, student-centeredness, inclusive language and communication, culturally inclusive curriculum and assessment, and social justice and equity in my pedagogical pursuits, I have aspired to implement culturally responsive pedagogy while teaching *Kanthapura* (Sharma, 2005, 2014). The present

discussion would not have been possible if I had not transformed my classroom into a culturally responsive one.

### ***1.1 What Is It Like When You Begin to Teach at an Indian University***

My journey as a lecturer in the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University began in 2001, and after two years, I was assigned to teach *Kanthapura*. In those initial years, as a new educator in India, my path was not determined by my preferences. The system allowed little room for choices in what one could teach. Therefore, when I was granted the privilege of teaching a novel, it was a serendipitous turn of events. *Kanthapura* was not just a story to me; it was the essence of India's struggle for independence from colonialism captured eloquently in words. Its central themes resonated with the rich cultural milieu that had, over the years, become a part of the pedagogical practices in my region, often bordering on tradition. By this I mean the ways in which storytelling and allusions to mythology and legends have become an innate aspect of literature classrooms. These practices, I soon realized, would become crucial to my teaching, and I felt compelled to share this perspective with my students, hoping to illuminate the nuances for them.

Unlike a schoolteacher in India, who has to attain a degree/diploma in pedagogical training, a university teacher in India does not have to go through a training program or a particular course in pedagogy. Aspirants for university teaching are exposed to the research process, writing articles and papers and engaging in debates and discussions, and sometimes they get to assist their supervisors in handling the pedagogical procedures. These make up the aspirants' preparation to be university teachers. The assumption is that if one knows a subject, one can teach it as well. Thus, as I delved deeper into the narrative of *Kanthapura*, I realized the monumental responsibility I bore. This was not merely about teaching fiction; it was about weaving a tapestry of culture, history, and literature that would resonate with my students. The weight of this task made me introspect on my teaching techniques, pushing me to explore innovative pedagogical strategies and immerse myself in theoretical interventions.

My account of this tale may appear to follow a straightforward trajectory, but in reality, my journey has been filled with twists, turns, and revelations. *Kanthapura* became more than a book; it was my compass, guiding me through the labyrinthine world of pedagogy and making every challenge an opportunity for growth.

## 2. *Kanthapura* as a Text with Multiple Orientations:

When I started teaching *Kanthapura*, the focus was primarily on the postcolonial aspects. The novel's exploration of colonial oppression, cultural identity, and resistance against British rule served as a catalyst for critical discussions on the consequences of colonization. Students were encouraged to analyze the characters' experiences, their struggles, and the larger socio-political implications within a postcolonial framework. To enable a deeper understanding of the novel's themes, I employed various interactive methods, such as role-playing, debates, and collaborative projects.

*Kanthapura* is a portrayal of India's struggle for independence. Its depiction of the Gandhian movement embodies psychological, philosophical, and literary resistance against the hegemony of British colonial rule in India. Psychological resistance is evident in the villagers' transformation of mindset, through which they embrace nonviolent protest despite facing adversity. Philosophically, Gandhi's ideals of truth and nonviolence serve as the foundation for the resistance, challenging the oppressive British rule. Through a unique narrative style, blending Indian folklore and mythology, the novel presents literary resistance by connecting the villagers' struggle to the broader historical and cultural context. Overall, *Kanthapura* highlights how the Gandhian movement brought about multidimensional forms of resistance that shaped the fight for independence.

The colonized world has contributed many stories of struggle and success to the world of literature. This literature is rich in its own right and creates a postcolonial paradigm carved out of non-Western literary traditions. In this process, texts like *Kanthapura* (1936), *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Midnight's Children* (1980), and several others have left indelible impressions on the intellectual and literary ecology of the world. *Kanthapura* is considered a work of world literature due to its significant contribution to the literary canon and its exploration of universal themes and human experiences (Barua, 2011). While it is primarily set in a small village in South India during the Indian independence movement, the novel transcends its specific cultural context and resonates with readers around the world. Namely, it delves into themes that are universally relevant – such as social injustice, the power of collective action, the impact of colonialism, and the search for identity and self-realization – which can be understood and appreciated by readers from various cultural and national backgrounds. Moreover, *Kanthapura* facilitates intercultural dialogue by providing insights into Indian culture,

traditions, and historical events. It introduces readers to the complexities of Indian society during a pivotal period of its history, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Raja Rao's narrative style, influenced by both Western modernist techniques and traditional Indian storytelling, creates a unique blend that appeals to readers across different literary traditions. The novel also incorporates elements of oral storytelling, folktales, and religious myths, making it accessible to a diverse readership. *Kanthapura* has been translated into multiple languages, allowing it to reach a wider audience beyond the English-speaking world and enabling readers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to engage with the novel and appreciate its artistic and thematic merits.

By embodying these characteristics, *Kanthapura* transcends its specific setting and becomes a work of world literature that contributes to the global literary conversation. It offers insights into the human condition, fosters intercultural dialogue, and enriches the understanding and appreciation of Indian literature and culture on a global scale. On a national level, *Kanthapura* holds a significant place in the development of Indian literature and is considered a seminal work in the stream of Indian English literature. Its innovative use of language and narrative techniques paved the way for subsequent generations of Indian authors writing in English and influenced the broader literary landscape of India.

Below, I will briefly address the novel's depiction of the psychological, philosophical, and literary aspects of the freedom movement led by Gandhi. I will also discuss how *Kanthapura* offers a piece of India's colonial history and presents a complex case of historicity in literature. It is a unique example of deviations in language, narrative technique, and orature.

The setting and events that take place in the novel portray the psychological aspects of resistance. Gandhian movements in the 1930s that formed the backbone of Indian resistance against the British serves as the novel's backdrop. Moorthy, the local Gandhian activist of Kanthapura village, mobilizes the people of his village to join the Gandhian freedom movement. He is supported by many and opposed by a few villagers. He invites Jayaramchar, a performer who narrates Gandhi's

story through Harikatha performance.<sup>1</sup> This performance, which aims to enlighten the villagers about British colonial rule, is disrupted by the police officers and Jayaramchar is arrested. This episode is the first direct encounter of the Kanthapura people with the hegemony of the British regime, and it motivates them to join the Gandhi movement led by Moorthy in their village. The Kanthapura Congress committee is formed, and an office is created from where free charkhas<sup>2</sup> are distributed to encourage people to weave to attain self-reliance. After this development, a series of episodes follow in the village, leading to sit-ins and protest marches by the villagers and the subsequent clampdown by the British government. Guided by the Gandhian mantra of peace and non-violence, these protests are peaceful. Many villagers are arrested in these protests. Women also participate in all these activities. In one of the protests, things turn too grim to return to normalcy. The village is burned down, crops are destroyed, farmlands are captured, and many protesters are brutally beaten and arrested by the government. The novel ends with uncertainty hovering over the people of Kanthapura, who have deserted their village and are waiting for a better turn of events. Moorthy gets released from jail in the city, and his letter reaches Ratna and Rangamma. The letter hints at Moorthy's transition from the Gandhian era and initiation into the Nehruvian one. The events described above show the psychological resistance through the transformation of the villager's mindset. Despite persecution, they embrace nonviolent protest.

Like most postcolonial texts, this novel has an ideological orientation. It is often cited as an example of Gandhian novels like Mulka Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* among several others. In this novel Gandhian ideology manifests in the method adopted by Moorthy to convince his village people to participate in the freedom movement led by Gandhi.

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<sup>1</sup> Harikatha is an indigenous performance tradition in which a singer narrates a tale through singing accompanied by simple music that he plays. Usually, Harikatha performances depict the stories of gods and goddesses borrowed from epics like the *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana*.

<sup>2</sup> A charkha (which means spinning wheel) is a single-spin handloom with a simple spinning wheel used for weaving cloth called *khadi*. Khadi went on to become the hallmark of India's freedom movement and swadeshi movement seeking self-reliance. The charkha was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi as a symbolic and strategic tool to fight back against the scarcity of cotton cloth and the enforcement on Indian markets of expensive mill-made cotton cloth manufactured in the factories of England. This imported and highly expensive cotton cloth was made from cheaply purchased cotton from Indian farmers, who were forced to sell their cotton to British manufacturers. This unethical trade led to the scarcity of cloth in India, where the masses were too poor to afford the expensive cotton cloth of the English mills. On his return to India to join the freedom movement, Gandhi toured the length and breadth of this big nation and witnessed the level of extreme poverty forcing people to live barely clad. The self-reliance in terms of clothes and food became a paramount mission to become independent for Gandhi. He invoked the principle of *swadeshi* (indigenous) clothes made with charkhas by all the people of the country.

Moorthy's method is very close to the method that Gandhi used to convince his fellow countrymen. Folklore and myths narrate the stories of the British atrocities wherein the colonial regime is likened to the mythological demons like Hiranyakashyapa, Kansa and others. Moorthy and Gandhi are presented as mythological heroes like Prahalad and Krishna.

Gandhian value system of truth, peace, and non-violence forms the core of the novel's philosophical framework. Gandhi undertook the Dandi March on foot to register a protest against the British government's policy of banning salt farming in the Kutch region of Gujarat. In the novel, Moorthy and his village folks set out on a march in the village in solidarity with Gandhi. In the novel, the villagers keenly follow Gandhi's footsteps and take out a protest march when Gandhi was on his Dandi March. Gandhi's Dandi March attracted a lot of media persons and successfully garnered the world's much-needed attention toward the plight of the colonized Indians. It is considered a watershed moment in India's freedom struggle because the poor freedom fighters could not afford their own a global media outlet. It was only through the spectacle of the March that they attained an audience on the world stage. Moreover, sustenance is the key to Gandhian protest ecology; one must persevere, be patient, and be ready to sacrifice. When one fails to be patient one must undergo self-penance. Gandhi had withdrawn the Non-cooperation Movement which started in 1920 because of the violent incident of Chauri Chaura<sup>3</sup>. This withdrawal of the

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<sup>3</sup> Mahatma Gandhi led the Non-Cooperation Movement, an important phase in the Indian freedom struggle against British colonization. This movement occurred between 1920 and 1922. It aimed to peacefully resist British rules by boycotting British institutions, products, and services.

The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched as a response to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in 1919; hundreds of Indians were killed when the British troops fired on a peaceful crowd in Amritsar. Mahatma Gandhi believed non-violent civil disobedience could help India achieve independence. He asked Indians to boycott British-made goods, educational institutions, courts, and government services. The movement also urged Indians to use swadeshi (indigenous) items during peaceful demonstrations and disobey orders. The movement enjoyed nationwide support from various religious, regional, and social backgrounds across India. It produced leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Rajendra Prasad, who actively participated in the independence movement. British rule in India was disrupted through the Non-Cooperation Movement, which led to economic hardships facing the colonial administration. Indians began to steer their affairs by creating parallel institutions and encouraging self-help.

The Chauri Chaura Incident (1922):

At Chauri Chaura, a small town in Uttar Pradesh, a group of protestors was met by the police force. The situation became violent and led to an attack on a police station where several officers lost their lives. Gandhi felt deeply wounded by this event because it contradicted his non-violence principle, which he had heavily insisted on throughout the campaign. The Non-Cooperation Movement came to an end as Gandhi decided that it was time to withdraw its support following the Chauri Chaura incident. According to him, non-violence constituted a core value in the struggle and what happened at Chauri Chaura constituted a violation of the foundation of the movement. Gandhi took the

Movement was an act of self-penance by Gandhi. Concerning this, the novel presents a mix of successful and not-so-successful protests. Moorthy undergoes a self-penance to purify and strengthen himself as a Gandhian when Jayaramchar is arrested, and the gathering of the people turns violent against the policemen. Rangamma leads the women's march peacefully and convinces the husband of a woman who does not want his wife to participate in the protests. Overall, all the villagers' commitment to register their protest sustains the fight against the colonial regime.

The novel is written purportedly to shape a resistance on the English literary canvas. Rao discusses this in the Foreword to *Kanthapura* which is a vital documentation of the theory and practice that go into writing a postcolonial text like *Kanthapura* and *Things Fall Apart*. Both novels are comparable because of the pioneering role played by these novels in carving out an identity of Indian and African Englishers through the deviant use and nativization of the English language. In addition, both novels are foundational texts that document the making of the national identity and sensibility in the postcolonial journeys of India and Nigeria, respectively. Rao defines this role in the foreword:

One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own; the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up, like Sanskrit or Persian was before, but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. (1936, xxxi)

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blame for the incident as he believed that maintaining such movements would risk the lives of innocent people as well as negate principles of non-violence. For the Indian nationalist movement, pulling out from the Non-Cooperation Movement was only a brief decline. However, this also strengthened the commitment to non-violence as a principle guiding action. It paved the way for future movements like the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement which in turn helped in achieving Indian independence in 1947.



Through their conscious efforts, the first generation of authors in postcolonial countries like India and Nigeria laid down the foundation of the variety of English of their country. Along with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, R. K. Narayanan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao belongs to this league of frontrunners who facilitated this nativization of the English language in their respective literary spaces. In this process, an important technique has been the infusion of the tone and tenor of the dialect and culture. Rao shares this method and process when he further says,

The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression ... We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The Mahabharatha has 214778 verses and the Ramayana 48000. Puranas there are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous “ats” and “ons” to bother us – we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story. (1936, xxxi-xxxii)

The orality of Indian story-telling has been infused in the narrative technique of the novel. Rao infuses the tempo of Indian life into the English language of the novel. This is a manifestation of orality because the novel is “told” (xxxii, 1936). Specifically, it is “told” by an old woman called Achakka, a resident of Kanthapura village. The story by Achakka is a narration of Kanthapura’s fight against the British. Recognizing the importance of orality and alternative narratives, I incorporated oral histories and storytelling into the pedagogical framework when teaching *Kanthapura*. By inviting guest speakers from local communities, I encouraged students to connect with the living histories of resistance and resilience. The fusion of traditional storytelling techniques with the novel’s narrative structure allowed students to grasp the complexity of truth-telling and the power of oral traditions. This experiential learning approach ignited their imagination and empathy, deepening their connection with the characters and the historical context.

Achakka narrates the novel and addresses her listeners throughout the novel exactly in the manner in which an oral storyteller acknowledges and addresses the listeners. This is how the novel opens: “Our village – I don’t think you have ever heard about it – Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara” (Rao, 1936, p. 1). Since the story is being told, the conversational tone and

register are evident in this sentence. The deviations in language can be explicated through a close reading of the novel.

*Example 1. Deviation in Subject + Verb + Object Structure of English:*

High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a center of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. (Rao, 1936, p.1)

This sentence breaks the order Subject + Verb + Object because “High on the Ghats” should have followed “is” which should have come after “it.” That is, the grammatically correct sentences would be: “It is high on the Ghats... It is up the Malabar coast.”

*Example 2. Deviation in the Use of “And”:*

Roads, narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads, wind through the forests of teak **and** of jack, of sandal **and** of sal, **and** hanging over bellowing gorges **and** leaping over elephant-haunted valleys, they turn now to the left **and** now to the right **and** bring you through the Alambe **and** Champa **and** Mena **and** Kola passes into the great granaries of trade. There, on the blue waters, they say, our carted cardamoms **and** coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring, **and**, so they say, they go across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live. (Rao, 1936, p. 1)

In this extract, “and” has been used eleven times. It is commonly used between the last two items of a series of similar grammatical items separated by commas. However, in this extract, every single grammatical item is separated by “and.” This is because, in most Indian languages, there is no rule for placing “and” between the last two similar grammatical items only. In addition, this repetitive use of “and” brings the narration closer to the spoken register, thereby infusing orality into the written text.

These two deviations are profusely used in the novel, which effectuates an orality to the language and makes it syntactically sound close to Kannada, which is the first language of the author as well as the language of the region where Kanthapura is shown to be situated. (For a detailed analysis of linguistic deviations in the novel, see Kachuru, 1983.)

### 3. Teaching *Kanthapura*

*Kanthapura* usually figures in Postcolonial Studies and Indian English Studies papers of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Indian universities. Indian students are aware of the freedom movement and the struggle for independence; it has been part of the collective memory. Gandhi, Nehru, and other freedom fighters are not new names. However, an interesting aspect of teaching an Indian novel to Indian students is that it is alien to them to a certain extent, albeit not exactly like it is to European students. The language in Rao's novel is challenging because, as mentioned, he uses Kannada syntax instead of English syntax. Although Kannada syntax is closer to Indian languages, Indian students are intellectually fashioned to read English syntax in English script.

Cultural terms like *payasam*, Moorthappa (Moorthy+ 'appa' which is an expression of respect for men), *anna* (elder brother), and Rangamma (Ranga+ 'amma' which is an expression of respect for women) are not known to all students in India because they are Kannada terms and salutations. This is where the discussion of the teaching strategies becomes important. Owing to its literary, political, and technical threads of discourses, the novel emerges as a site of multiple theoretical contestations that can be engaged within the classroom.

Recognizing the importance of orality and alternative narratives, I incorporated oral histories and storytelling into the pedagogical framework when teaching *Kanthapura*. By inviting guest speakers from local communities, I encouraged students to connect with the living histories of resistance and resilience. The fusion of traditional storytelling techniques with the novel's narrative structure allowed students to grasp the complexity of truth-telling and the power of oral traditions. This experiential learning approach ignited their imagination and empathy, deepening their connection with the characters and the historical context. Hence, different strategies can be applied when teaching this novel.

In Table 1 (see Appendix), I present different strategies adopted by me to teach *Kanthapura* over the past twenty years. I term this as "postmodern thought," using the term anachronistically. Although *Kanthapura* is generally considered a modernist rather than postmodernist work due to its publication in 1936, it is my teaching in the postmodern time frame as well as its anachronistic reading that defines the process as postmodern. At the narrative level, *Kanthapura* employs a non-

linear narrative, multiple perspectives, and unreliable narrators. For example, Achhaka's narrative throws the readers into the past and present many times, and she treats the identities of her listeners (readers) as females when she addresses them as "sister." Moreover, Achhaka's emotional response to the events and incidents is sometimes visibly subjective, so the readers have to take her words with a pinch of salt. Engaging with intertextuality, *Kanthapura* references Gandhi's protests, such as the Salt Satyagraha and Dandi March, in a way that adds layers of meaning and complexity. The novel has a subversive use of language. By playing with language, deconstructing its meaning, and challenging conventional linguistic norms, *Kanthapura* embodies a critique of grand narratives; that is, it challenges dominant societal or cultural narratives. In addition, cultural hybridity is a visibly dominant thread in *Kanthapura* through its diverse cultural elements and blurred boundaries bordering on the postmodern sensibility.

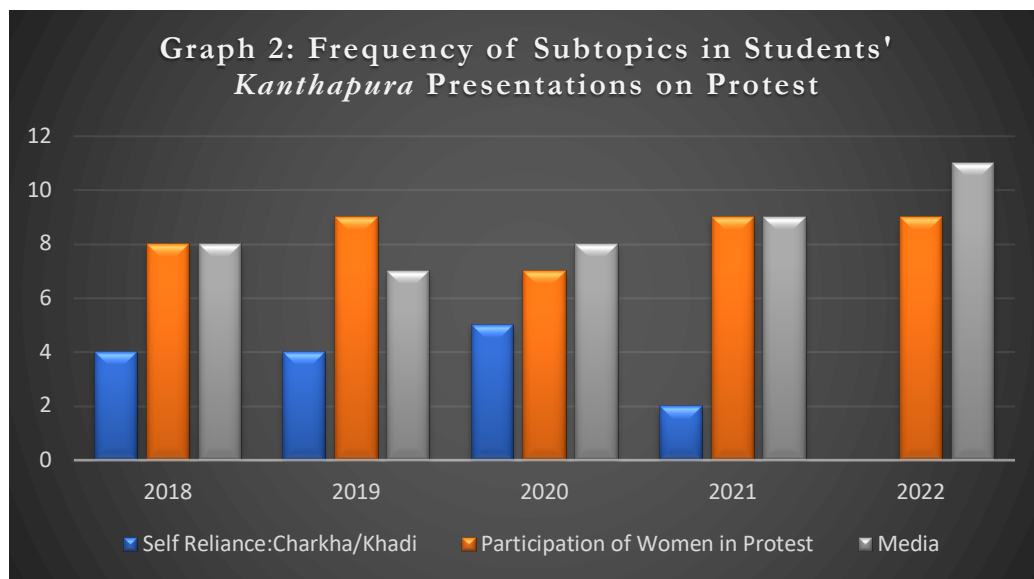
#### 4. Learning *Kanthapura*

Over the years, I have conducted various surveys to assess the students' association with *Kanthapura* and their choices made in selecting topics on *Kanthapura* to prepare term papers and assignments. I have kept the classroom discussion updated with the latest socio-political discussions to make the students understand the pain of the colonial Indians because it is not easy for twenty-first century learners to connect with what mattered nearly seventy years ago. An Indian English literature classroom is rich with the intersectionality of ideas, cultural notions, and critical inquiry in a peculiar manner because the students look up to an English professor as a voice of the world beyond their country. I have often been treated as a representative of world cultures in my literature classrooms. As a result, *Kanthapura's* alienness becomes a stimulus to discuss far-off lands and their issues. This impacts the teaching of *Kanthapura* in that the cultural content acquires significance.

In the second decade of this century, students show a remarkable swing in their interest in protest along with post-truth while writing their term papers and making presentations for *Kanthapura*. Since the Arab Spring Revolution in 2010, I have observed a revival of interest in protest among my *Kanthapura* students. A postcolonial novel that has always held a central role in the discussions of linguistic postcoloniality, freedom movements, and Gandhian ideology now attracted the students for its narration of a series of protests.

Figure 1 presents students' interest in *Kanthapura* through the number of students choosing to present and write their term paper on language, Gandhism, and protest in the novel. It is evident that over the past ten years, my students have consistently increased their inclination to speak and write on protest.

Figure 1, Frequency of Subtopics in Students' Presentations on Protest in *Kanthapura*



#### ***4.1 The Interest of Students Shifting to Engage with *Kanthapura* Less as a Postcolonial Text and More as a Post-Truth Text***

The concept of *post-truth* refers to a political and cultural phenomenon where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs. It involves the manipulation of information, the distortion of truth, and the spread of misinformation or “fake news” to further specific agendas. Although *Kanthapura* predates the term “post-truth” by several decades, it contains themes and elements that can be connected to this concept (Glăveanu, 2022). In this section, I analyze the students' evolving preferences regarding themes in *Kanthapura*.

I must admit that the students' interests have also shaped my teaching. The emergence of the post-truth paradigm offered new challenges and opportunities for exploring *Kanthapura*. In a world saturated with misinformation and competing narratives, I encouraged students to critically analyze the novel's portrayal of truth and propaganda. By examining the techniques employed by the British colonizers and the characters in the novel, students were able to draw parallels with contemporary

issues of media manipulation and political rhetoric. This exercise empowered them to question and challenge dominant narratives, fostering media literacy and responsible citizenship.

#### *4.1.1 Gandhi in the Post-Truth Reading of Kanthapura*

To read *Kanthapura*, understanding Gandhi is essential. Gandhi is read as a freedom fighter, a leader of the Congress party who led the Independence movement, and a thinker who sought to fight all hegemonies and injustices peacefully. This postcolonial relevance of Gandhi is neatly placed in the traditional reading of *Kanthapura*. However, in recent years, Gandhi has interested the students in my *Kanthapura* groups more as an intelligent and savvy negotiator who pulls through in odd situations with limited resources. Moreover, Gandhian principles have been reprioritized according to contemporary preferences.

#### *4.1.2 Badey Khan: A Minority in Kanthapura village*

Badey Khan, the policeman who comes to live in Kanthapura village after Jayaramchar's Harikatha performance, is detested by the villagers not only as a representative of the British regime but also as a Muslim. Moorthy, the local Gandhi, does not address this. It is honest of Rao to depict this truth, but it is rarely addressed in the novel's postcolonial analyses over the decades. However, my students and I cannot ignore it. The fact that Badey Khan faces resistance in the village owing to his Muslim identity adds a dimension of post-truth because Kanthapura natives are influenced by their religious prejudices. This is an honest depiction by Raja Rao because Indians had been plagued with their internal differences too while fighting against the British. These differences would often come to fore during protests and activism. But, the fact that Indians (in the present case Kanthapura people) managed to carry on their struggle for freedom as one community is a heartening truth.

Towards the novel's end, Moorthy writes a letter to Rangamma upon his release from jail. He does not show any plan to return to the village or to lead the villagers into rehabilitation; rather, he hints at moving on to Nehruvian ideology instead of singularly focusing on Gandhism. It is a confusing perspective for a postcolonial reader, but it is more plausible for a post-truth reader because Gandhism is not a totality for Moorthy. For Moorthy, Gandhism fulfilled part of the need that Indians had at the time, and Nehru fulfilled another part, aiming to achieve nationhood.

#### *4.1.3 Narrative Perspective*

As mentioned, the novel is narrated by an elderly woman named Achakka, who recounts the events of Kanthapura's struggle for independence. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that Achakka's narration is subjective and influenced by her personal experiences, emotions, and biases. This subjective perspective can be seen as a precursor to the post-truth era, where personal narratives and subjective interpretations often overshadow objective facts.

#### *4.1.4 Myth, Symbolism, and Truth*

*Kanthapura* incorporates elements of mythology and symbolism to convey its message. The characters in the novel frequently rely on legends, folklore, and religious stories to make sense of their situation and motivate their actions. These mythical elements blur the line between truth and fiction, highlighting the subjective nature of truth and its malleability in the face of personal beliefs and collective imagination.

#### *4.1.5 Manipulation of Information*

Throughout the novel, the villagers of Kanthapura are subjected to propaganda and misinformation spread by the British colonial authorities. The British use these tactics to sow discord, create divisions, and maintain their control over the village. This manipulation of information mirrors that of the post-truth era, where misinformation and propaganda play a significant role in shaping public opinion and undermining the truth.

#### *4.1.6 Power Dynamics and Truth*

*Kanthapura* explores the power dynamics between the British colonial rulers and the Indian villagers. The colonial authorities have control over the means of information dissemination, enabling them to shape the narrative and control the truth. This theme resonates with students in the post-truth era, where those in power often have the ability to control or manipulate information to serve their interests.

### **4.2 Protest in Post-Truth Times**

While the term "post-truth" may not have been explicitly used in *Kanthapura*, the novel's themes and elements can be seen as precursors to the phenomenon. The novel highlights the subjective

nature of truth, the power of narratives, the manipulation of information, and the struggle for freedom from oppressive systems – all of which reflect the challenges posed by the post-truth era.

In addition, protest in *Kanthapura* is a central chord bearing shades and nuances of success and failure because villagers are sometimes successful and sometimes not successful in staging the protests peacefully. The novel depicts several protests organized by the villagers in solidarity with the freedom struggle led by Gandhi. Many failed protests in the village present the reality of protests. Most of the time, we witness leaders like Moorthy, Range Gowda, and Rangamma discussing the failures of the protest since no protest is perfectly peaceful. There is always room for improvement regarding how the villagers can sustain their protests. This lack of perfection in the protests and demonstrations is closer to reality. A protest is a product of negotiations struck between aggressions and commitments. Unlike a corporate project, a protest is not expected to meet its target fully. If a protest is gratifying for all stakeholders, it is not a protest but a staging of an unreality. This is why the classroom discussion of protests in *Kanthapura* has become crucial for me as a teacher like never before. The ongoing radical atmosphere in the country, charged with politics of bigotry and polarization, makes it imperative for my students and me to delve deeper into the imperfection and truth of the protests that the villagers in the novel undertake. Instead of relegating it as a failure of Gandhian ways, students view the imperfect and not-so-successful protests in *Kanthapura* as models of perseverance against the odds. Thus, from a postcolonial position of simply talking of protest as a successful venture to dismantle the British regime in colonial India, I have witnessed the discussion in my lectures shifting to the post-truth view of the Kanthapura protests as a way to confirm one's ideas, ideology, and identity.

Another prominent theme is the media and its impact in the novel. Owing to a dearth of information, Moorthy has to run to the city to procure a newspaper or any piece of news from the Karwar Congress Committee office about the Gandhi movement. There are times when the news reaches the village late. The villagers await letter from Moorthy when he is jailed in the city for being a protester, and they are frustrated by this delay in the dissemination of information. Meanwhile, Gandhi's Dandi March against the ban on salt farming in the Kutch region of Gujarat became a success story of media coverage, which in turn benefitted the movement. Thus, the need for media attention is felt in the whole narrative of India's freedom movement. In contrast, the world today is swept off its feet by a whirlwind of information outlets and news broadcasts. In this



scenario, does the truth reach the relevant people? Do people's pains and problems get disseminated appropriately or inappropriately? Today's world has come a long way from *Kanthapura*'s lack of access to information. There is a need to filter the news to reach the truth buried in the piles of truths. There is a need to safeguard from over-exposure to reporting. There is a need to minimize the coverage lest there is an appropriation of facts for propaganda purposes. Gandhi sought to garner attention to inform the world of the plight of his countrymen, whereas today people's plight needs to be safeguarded from desensitized over-coverage that creates detachment among the receivers. These comparisons between the novel and the students' current lived experiences provide interesting discussion points, attracting the students' attention.

## 5. Discussion: Teacher-student Dynamics

My pedagogical journey with *Kanthapura*, through the shifting paradigms from postcolonial to post-truth, has been a transformative experience. By incorporating intersectionality, oral histories, and critical thinking exercises, I aimed to create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that not only enriched students' understanding of the novel but also equipped them with the necessary skills to critically engage with the world around them. Recognizing the diverse backgrounds and identities of students, I strived to create a classroom environment that honored their unique perspectives and experiences. By incorporating cultural references, local traditions, and community engagement, I aimed to foster a sense of belonging and authenticity in the learning process.

In my pedagogical journey with *Kanthapura*, culturally responsive pedagogy played a significant role. Culturally responsive pedagogy not only enriched the exploration of *Kanthapura* but also provided students with a deeper understanding of the novel's context and themes. By encouraging them to draw connections between their own cultural knowledge and the struggles portrayed in the text, I empowered students to become active participants in the learning process. This approach cultivated a sense of pride in their cultural identities, while simultaneously fostering empathy and understanding for other cultures.

In a rapidly changing world, where globalization and interconnectedness are transforming educational landscapes, culturally responsive pedagogy is more critical than ever. By valuing diversity in culture and ideology, teachers can prepare students to navigate an increasingly multicultural and interconnected society. Through the lens of *Kanthapura*, I witnessed the

transformative power of culturally responsive pedagogy, as it not only enhanced students' academic growth but also nurtured their emotional and social development, thereby expanding their horizons of understanding, empathy, and critical thinking.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Theory/Post-Truth

When did we enter the neoliberal atmosphere of critical inquiry? 1991 was a momentous year in India because before this, the Indian economy and market were not open to global companies. This meant that Indian markets were available only for Indian companies unless a license was granted to a foreign company, which only occurred after a rigmarole of procedures. The overnight switch to an open-market economy was a significant shift in the journey of a four-decade-old nation. A boom in the economy led to the emergence of galore of choices for consumers; jobs resulting out of

these choices; access to dozens of television channels of entertainment, sports, and news; access to privatized educational institutions; access to facilities in education and research; and politics of high stakes with more engagement with money and media. After a decade of liberalization in India, 9/11 happened. The was a paradigm shift in world politics, and India was not untouched. Interventions of radical nature increasingly infiltrated intellectual discourse. The aftermath of these events influenced how a literature classroom was to be conducted.

#### Post-Theory

Literary theory has been here for a while, and stock-taking is imminent. Literature readings have been dependent on literary theoretical interventions. Reading literature has been reduced to exploring the utility of literature in the light of social sciences like anthropology, psychology, linguistics, economics, and commerce. Literary theory has pushed studying literature toward an essentializing of identity politics. Beginning from high art theories and progressing to cultural theories has led literature classrooms to a scenario wherein the aesthetics of literature is never the concern. Too muchness of cultural studies has led to recent debates seeking to distance literature from cultural studies. Among the scholars who have remained committed to the meta-literary interventions in reading literature, a sense of dishonesty is apparent in their rejection of the notion that literary theory is passé. Against this backdrop, literature classrooms appear set to embrace changes in the methods and modes of reading literature emerging beyond post-modern times.

#### Post-Truth

The internet and social media have emerged, and there is no looking back. On social media, even the most objective of news generates multiple opinions. There is no objective truth anymore. Information is abundant and its dissemination platforms motivate people to speak up and opine on anything and everything. A smartphone is not a luxury to a huge section of India's more than 1.4 billion population. Thousands of online news portals, hundreds of news channels, and social media applications like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp exist in our classrooms. We encounter hurricanes of coverages of even the most mundane events and cyclones of points and counterpoints on them. Emotions and subjective beliefs are to be negotiated if one has to assert oneself in this scenario. As a result, the plurality of truth has become a reality. Like a chain of signifiers, truths are endless and continuous. This is the post-truth time and space that we live in.

## Appendix

Table 1 An Overview of Teaching Approaches to Kanthapura

| Postmodern thought | Desired outcome<br>(Students will be able to<br>employ the concepts<br>and philosophy of the<br>theory concerned as<br>tools to critique the<br>themes related to each<br>postmodern theoretical<br>lens) | Strategies   | How and when it<br>evolved   |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Postcolonialism    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deviant use of Language</li> <li>• The political backdrop of the novel</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the postcolonial methods of literary inquiry with helps of definitions and jargon.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since the novel was prescribed in the syllabus of a course titled Indian Literature (intended to be taught as postcolonial</li> </ul> |

| Postmodern thought                              | Desired outcome<br>(Students will be able to employ the concepts and philosophy of the theory concerned as tools to critique the themes related to each postmodern theoretical lens)  | Strategies   | How and when it evolved  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gandhian movements and Gandhism</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the Indian freedom movement in the 1930's and significant Gandhian protests that had a bearing on India's independence.</li> <li>• Highlight literary techniques like orality, deviant use of language, and myths adopted by Raja Rao to assert Indianness through a novel in English.</li> </ul>   | <p>literature), this has been my approach to teach <i>Kanthapura</i> right from the beginning, that is, since I began teaching it nearly two decades back.</p>   |
| <b>New Historicism and Cultural Materialism</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical events like the Civil-Disobedience Movement and the Dandi March as contexts of literary texts</li> <li>• Gender, class, and race aspects of the novel under the lens of political historiography</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberate on the significance of historical events as a resource for literary techniques employed by Rao, e.g., Jayaramchar's innovative biographical song in which he likens Gandhi's birth to that of Lord Krishna.</li> <li>• Present the Dandi March and the Civil Disobedience Movement not as the backdrops of the novel but as a</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These two approaches became significant for me after I had covered a few years of teaching the novel. The discussion of postcolonialism was not exclusively required in the revised title of the syllabus paper in which <i>Kanthapura</i> figured. The novel is now figured as a component of Postcolonial Literature and not just Indian literature.</li> </ul> |

| Postmodern thought | Desired outcome<br>(Students will be able to employ the concepts and philosophy of the theory concerned as tools to critique the themes related to each postmodern theoretical lens) | Strategies  | How and when it evolved |
|--------------------|--|---|-------------------------|
|                    |  | <p>component of Rao's narrative plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problematize the episodes of gender, class, and race orientation in the novel to highlight the texts within the text.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of these episodes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Venkamma curses the widowed Ratna for not being docile enough and defying societal norms.</li> <li>✓ The narrator, Achakka, a brahmin woman, proudly describes the sectors of her village based on high-born and low-born classes.</li> <li>✓ The white race being referred to as "Red Men" and coolies on Skeffington Coffee Estate being referred to as "animals" by their white employer.</li> </ul> |                         |

| Postmodern thought                | Desired outcome<br>(Students will be able to employ the concepts and philosophy of the theory concerned as tools to critique the themes related to each postmodern theoretical lens)   | Strategies   | How and when it evolved   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Feminism</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender representation in the novel's Gandhian movements through female characters'</li> <li>• Anti-women narratives inherent in patriarchal expressions of the characters in the novel</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the participation of women in the Gandhian movement in Kanthapura village in the presence and absence of Moorthy. The characters of Ratna, Rangamma, and others emerged as crucial in this regard.</li> <li>• Analyze the characters of Venkamma, Bhatta, and other men with inherent patriarchal mindsets that make them dislike the activists in their village. Venkamma and men like Bhatta and others studied for their inherent patriarchal mindsets that make them dislike the activists even more.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This has been one of my approaches to teaching the novel ever since I started teaching it. It evolved over the years by including the emerging points of concern related to gender studies.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Post-Theory and Post-Truth</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The significance of protest and resistance as crucial forces to sustain the freedom movement</li> <li>• The need to respect the diverse aspects of truth</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the Salt Satyagrah, Civil Disobedience, Women's protest against toddy, and the protest by the coolies. The modus operandi and the sustainability elements</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This has been an approach to teaching the novel in recent years only because of the need to keep the students updated on the application of these new discourses.</li> </ul>                           |

| Postmodern thought | Desired outcome   | Strategies  | How and when it evolved |
|--------------------|---|---|-------------------------|
|                    | (Students will be able to employ the concepts and philosophy of the theory concerned as tools to critique the themes related to each postmodern theoretical lens) |   |                         |
|                    |   | of the protests formed the highlights of the discussion.  |                         |
|                    |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the wake of Moorthy's departure from the village forever, the right and the wrong aspects of Moorthy's actions and the subsequent impacts held importance for the post-truth analysis.</li> </ul> |                         |