

The Narrative Techniques in Rajo Rao's *Kanthapura*

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao makes effective use of myth in both *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope*. Here the freedom struggle is a fight between the Devas and the Asuras. Mahatma Gandhi had a profound impact on the mind of Raja Rao. *Kanthapura* is an outstanding example of the combination of Puranic and folk-tale elements. The myth of the descent of Kenchamma from heaven on earth to kill demine is Puranic but when the narrator chooses to make a specific point of the colour of the hill, the elements of legend and Purana mixed together make a 'Sthala Purana'. Raja Rao makes use of myths, legends and symbols to narrate the story. He draws deeply from the perennial source of the Puranas. He is also inspired by the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as an avatar in the novel. The Puranas give importance to concept of Avatar.

Keywords : Kanthapura, Myth, Legend, Gandhi, British, Freedom Struggle, Ramayana, Mahabharata.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his celebrated foreword to *Kanthapura* Raja Rao's observes :-

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we more, we move quickly. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ass" and "ous" to bother us – we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when over thoughts sop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story thing. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.

Y Y Kantak observes, "*Kanthapura* within its humbler intention lays claim to the profound simplicity of a classic, something that the more self – conscious artistry of the later work seems to miss" (P35) K R Srinivasa Iyengar states that *Kanthapura* is a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth – the myth that that is but a poetic translation of the reality. (P 396)

In *Kanthapura* Raja Rao utilises the Puranic art of storytelling. It is a novel narrative technique.

M K Nair remarks:

The story in *Kanthapura* is told with the breathless garrulity of the Puranas where the style rests principally on the spoken word. There is little attempt at formal organization and a long and continuous outpouring is the only structural principle at work... the novel is not divided into parts or chapters but is a continuous narrative of considerable length and proportions. The Puranas abound in digressions; in episodes and passages connected by only a tenuous thread with the main stream of the narrative (10) Mahatma Gandhi is portrayed as an avatar in the novel. The Puranas give importance to concept of Avatar. M K Nair further elaborates on this:

Both the spirit and the narrative technique of *Kanthapura* are primarily those of the Indian Puranas. The ancient Indian Puranas have been called "the fifth Veda, the Veda of the laity. Taken collectively they may be described as popular encyclopaedia of ancient and Medieval Hinduism, religious Philosophical, historical, personal, social and political.

There are eighteen Upa-Puranas (minor Puranas) some of later deal with holy places and legends connected with them, and are called sthala-puranas (sthala=place). The Puranas are a blend of narration, description, philosophical reflection and religious teaching. The style

is usually simple, flowing and digressive and exaggeration is the key note of most accounts of happenings and miracles. There is much to correspond to this in *Kanthapura*. The opening description of the village is in spirit of a sthala-Purana, describing the significance of a place. The village is hallowed by the presence in it of the goddess Kenchamma, the legend which explains her presence here has a close parallel to the numerous legends of this nature of which Puranas are full (626).

The narrator tells us about a demon who devastates everything, taking children as food and women as wives. Sage Tripura undertook a tapas to save the village. As a result, goddess Kenchamma descends from heaven. Kenchamma, “waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma Hill is red.” (8)

Goddess Kenchamma protects the villages from disaster. The narrator states :-

..... If not, tell me sister, why should it be red only from the Tippur stream upwards, for a foot down on the other side of the stream you have mud, black and brown, but never red. Tell me, how could this happen, if it were not for Kenchamma and her battle. (8)

The story of Goddess Kenchamma is compared by Kaushal Sharma to the coming of the Ganga on this earth from heaven for the purification. He observes that like the Ganga, Kenchamma has come to the rescue of the people of Kanthapura who worship this “great and bounteous” goddess. (15)

The narrator of the novel is Achakka, an old woman. She gives us a brilliant portrait of the village. She is highly progressive. She conveys to us the spirit of the times when Satyagraha Movement dominated the social climate. She is loquacious. She is a keen observer. She gives us a graphic description of the village.

Meenakshi Mukherjee states:

Kanthapura is narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener... Raja Rao’s choice of this narrator serves several purposes at once. Making this old woman the narrator enables Raja Rao to mingle facts and myths in an effective manner. For the old woman, Jawaharlal is

a Bharatha to the Mahatma who she believes will stay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her Gandhi has attained the status of God and Moorthy is regarded Avatar in Kanthapura. The characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as large and blue like the Sahyadri Mountain on whose slopes the pilgrims climb to the top, while Moorthy is seen as a small mountain. To her, the Satyagraha becomes a religious ceremony to which she devotes her sacred ardour. (141)

Raja Rao makes use of myths, legends and symbols to narrate the story. He draws deeply from the perennial source of the Puranas. He is also inspired by the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In his foreword to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao states:

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. (6)

He further writes about the tradition of ‘Sthala Purana’ followed in his novel:

There is no village in India that has not a rich ‘Sthala Purana’ or legendary history of its own. Some god or god like hero has passed by this village – Ram might have rested under this peepal tree. Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself on one of his pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut (5)

Kaushal Sharma observes that *Kanthapura* is an outstanding example of the combination of Puranic and folk-tale elements. The myth of the descent of Kenchamma from heaven on earth to kill Demine is Puranic but when the narrator chooses to make a specific point of the colour of the hill, the elements of legend and Purana mixed together make a ‘Sthala Purana’. (21)

Raja Rao makes effective use of myth in both *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope*. Here the freedom struggle is a fight between the Devas and the Asuras. Mahatma Gandhi had a profound impact on the mind of Raja Rao. Sharma states: “Rao’s philosophical indications make Gandhi a spiritual leader who has the skill of oration like Krishna in the immortal *Gita*.”(22)

The past is beautifully blended with the present in *Kanthapura*. The villages invoke the spirit of goddesses Kenchamma frequently in the novel. The novel is punctuated with Hari-katha narrations, Bhajans, Gandhi and Krishna festivals.

The liberal use of long sentences and the gossipy style of the narrator are the novel features of Raja Rao's style. The narration is rambling:

They say Rangamma is all for the Mahatma. We are all for the Mahatma. Pariah Rachanna's wife, Rachi and Seettamma and Timamma one all for the Mahatma. They say there are men in Bombay, Bengal and Punjab, who are all for the Mahatma will go to the Red-man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. (181).

In short, Raja Rao is one of the first Indian writers to utilize Indian techniques of narration while attempting a novel in English.

II. REFERENCES

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