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## **Narration in Raja Rao's Kanthapura**

**Dr. R. Krishnaveni**

*Assistant Professor & Head,*

*Department of English*

*Puratchi Thalaivi Amma Government Arts and Science College*

*Palladam, Tamilnadu*

*Email: harishma83@yahoo.co.in*

### **Abstract**

*Raja Rao is one of the pioneers of Indian fiction in English, and in this regard his name is usually associated with the names of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. In general, contemporary with Mulk Raj Anandan and R.K. Narayan, he makes with them a remarkable trade, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist or in his enchanting prose style. According to him, his prose style is rather peculiar and he started writing in his native language, Kannada in 1931-1933, but soon switched to French, and eventually to English.*

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*Kanthapura* (1938), his first novel, is one of the most distinguished works of Indian Writing in English, and is known for its distinct Indian flavor. E.M. Forster recognized it as the first novel to come out of India in recent years. It is different from his other novels and there are three kinds of ideas that one encounters in this novel like social, political, and religious. This study focuses on narration, realism and its perspectives.

Kanthapura is a remote, obscure village, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar Coast with Himavathy as its deified river and Kenchamma as its presiding deity. It is a Gandhian novel, for what is recorded in its the impact on this village of India's freedom struggle waged against the British rule under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Rao's handling of the legendary technique is based on the nature of the traditional Harikathas. In these Harikathas, the past and the present stand juxtaposed together, and contemporary personalities and events are linked up with the Puranic God and Goddess and heroes and heroines, and their exploits.

The central figure in the novel is Moorthy, "as honest as an elephant" (K 18), as noble as now, "quiet, generous, serene, deferent and Brahminic, a very prince" (K 12) as it were, who despite protests and insinuations from certain quarters, does not believe in untouchability or cast distinctions, who practices the Gandhian ideology of truth, non-violence and who is hailed, by and large, as the village Mahatma.

The religious sentiment of the rural people is also shown reinforcing their patriotism. One of the measures of Raja Rao's technique of indirection in communicating ideas, and thereby almost insinuating them, is evident in his references to certain specifics of a locale or to an event in history, real or mythic. Thus, he succeeds in placing his sympathies on the wrong side of British people by passing references, the first one, to the foreign rulers of Kanthapura, in the mouth of the narrator.

*Kanthapura* is a Sthala Purana, a regional record of the dedicated and selfless deeds of the local Mahatma Gandhi, Moorthy. The Narrator, Achakka, herself soaked in the local lores, and brought up on the current myths, legends and fables, cannot resist the temptation of making sumptuous references to them. Raja Rao indirectly underlines the importance of the religious associations in Gandhi's political strategy. The old peasant woman-narrator is fully familiar with the deep religious faith of the villagers.

The ultimate end of the vocation of fiction-writing, according to Raja Rao it is a discovery of one's true self. As an instrument of God, the writer struggles,

facing all sorts of ordeals, to make the best use of language to share his enlightenment with his readers and in the task, the writer completely loses himself. He gives everything of himself, and in the end is an entirely exhausted person. There is nothing more for him to give when he has finished his book. In this, he says: "The (literary) artist, as a Sadhak, transcends time and space and his personal self: he becomes an impersonal being" (K 7). Raja Rao's art is Sadhna, and the ideas that it generates by artistic implication are bound to be authentic in a spiritual way.

The process followed by ideas in their birth, as imagined by Raja Rao is the writer strongly feels and thinks about various things continuously for some time, and suddenly he has a cascade of words being poured out of his whole being, so that the creative activity is essentially the pure vibration of the artist in concentration. It is an outcome of a whole sequence of utterances of his higher, impersonal self. The Sadhna of the writer consists in his escaping from his personal self to reach the depth of impersonality.

As if instinctively, as per his thinking, which accords with the Indian aesthetic view, the writer finds the right word if he is attuned to the right Rasa. Spiritually authentic, righteous, words flow from a character, as they do from Moorthy when he parts with his teaching of peace, love, and order: "As long as there is God in Heaven and purity in our hearts, evil cannot touch us. We hide nothing, we hurt none" (K 96). Here is Gandhi incarnated in his proxy Moorthy characterizing the idea of corporate non-violence.

The narrator of the story is an old woman called Achakka who belongs to Kanthapura. She has, as if, grown with the habitation, and survived its destruction. This story may have been told of an evening when as the dusk falls and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad take of the village.

Achakka is narrating the story to a stranger in a straightforward and apparently artless manner of speech. In the narrative involutions, halt ages, digression and disrupted rhythms of an old woman's utterances. There are significant backward glances and hypnotic repetitions and refrains. All these specifications of language and style are meant to communicate to the reader Raja Rao's vision of things in terms of ideas generated by the scenes and characters and happenings of the village Kanthapura, ideas not discursively phrased, but artistically suggested.

In Kanthapura men and women are ready for action. In the city of Karwar people have already formed defense committees and volunteer groups, but what is far more important is the fact that they have fanned out to various places, including

Kanthapura, to carry on their activities. However, Moorthy knows more than others that the Red Man's Government would act ruthlessly against the agitators, the soldier saints, and that is why both as a warning and reminder, he tells them:

... remember each one of you is responsible for the harm done by another, and the first time violence is done against the police or those that are not with us, we shall stop the Movement and wait for six months and more in penance and in prayer that our sins may be purified. Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the police and the revenue officers, but against the demonic corruption that has entered their hearts, and the purer we are the greater will be our victory, for the victory we seek is the victory of the hearts. Send out love where there is hatred... (K 180).

To sum up, *Kanthapura* does have its own importance as a work of fiction, for it is an authentic account of an Indian village, and is also one of the finest expressions of Indian sensibility, of Indian peasant sensibility. It's narrative style that makes it more a Gandhi-Purana than a piece of mere fiction. It is indeed remarkable to see that the village, its people and its neighborhood are made quite vivid and alive. The story in the novel is narrated by an old grandmother, obviously, to a new visitor to the place, and what Raja Rao wants to adopt the Indian oral tradition of story-telling.

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