

WIDE-RANGING NARRATIVE PATTERNS IN RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA

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Abstract:

Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* has written in an unconventional manner wherein he has used English language from the perspective of a typical south Indian individual and he has fused the traces of Kannada language which can be easily observed in his English speech rhythm patterns. Raja Rao's rationale behind choosing English as his medium was to find in a far-off foreign language the stylistic and aesthetic likeness of the Indian know-how. In doing so Rao has tried to express through English his understanding and interpretation of the Indian lifespan. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* exceptionally highlights its significant style and diction. The language is quite restrained, easy-going in a way trying to intermediate between the emotive quality of the Indian milieu and its expression of English language in scholarly terms. An attempt has been made to Indianize the language which can be seen with the smidgions of the physical representativeness of India and the traditional behavioural patterns of the Hindu community. A stylistic representative of Raja Rao's rhythmic point of view represents how he repeatedly accomplishes an amalgamation of conversational chatty tendencies that of the raconteur and of the different characters in question, at the same time conserving nous of diverse individual rhythm and pulses.

Key words: Narrative, Language, Speech rhythm, Patterns, Indianize, Behavioural and Traces

In '*The Wretched of the Earth*' 1963 Frantz Fanon has stated the three phases through which writers in the former colonies steadily mature. In the first phase, their works are imitative of the colonizer's literature. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* belongs to the second phase where there is a thoughtful attempt to resuscitate the glorious past and we find an assertion of the national identity. Raja Rao has laid the Indian tradition of imaginative love over the Western form of the realistic novel and interspersed actual history with mythic Purana to create a poetic work in prose. The novel too like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* follows a breathless narration. *Kanthapura* being a novel of memory, so we see the free use of reflection, flashback, dream, recollection, and narration of interrelated episodes by Raja Rao. He rejects the stream of consciousness technique and executes the indigenous form of narration, which is a kind of non-stop, breathless style of storytelling. At the onset, the village and its surroundings is presented followed by the introduction of main characters and then Rao directly dives into the description of the how Satyagraha Movement arrived in the village and effects it had on the village community in *Kanthapura*.

In the 'Foreword' of the novel, Raja Rao describes the book as a sthalapurana, a legendary history of a particular place. He writes:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthalapurana, or legendary history of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village - Rama might have rested under this Pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. (5)

K.R. Rao rightly points out in *The Fiction of Raja Rao*:

Kanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively, but as a living experience moving in time and space. The three levels of action in the novel, political, social and religious, are all related to a unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present (49)

Raja Rao constructs a distinct sense of the village Kanthapura and represents realism in its descriptions. "Our village was one of many small obscure villages which perched high in the Western Ghats." (1) The disposition for the Puranic content in Kanthapura is also set at the very onset through the narration of the legend of Goddess Kenchamma of the hill. "We had a goddess who protected our village. She was Kenchamma." (1)

Achakka is the narrator of Kanthapura, and it is through her eyes and from her point of view that we get to see everything that is happening around. Being an old grandmother, Achakka has seen life closely in Kanthapura and has a good deal of experience about the place and its people. She utilizes her knowledge of legends and epics and of Puranas which she refers to while narrating the story of her village. She can be referred to Valmiki of Ramayana.

Achakka is a loquacious old woman, who actively participates in the Satyagraha movement which is led by Moorthy. Bestowed with an acute sense of the past, she is a superb storyteller who garners the attention of the reader and indulges its listeners to the very end. Through her vivid imagination she is still able to envisage what must have ensued at the Skeffington Coffee Estate wherein she was not present, and this is possible as Raja Rao deposes her as his mouthpiece and allows her the author's freedom of omniscience. Whatever she says in her narrative is allowed by the author and by doing this she appears to be a reliable and undoubted narrator.

In Achakka's womanly touches and manners, in her unforced rotation of the tongue, meandering sentences and huge paragraphs Srinivasa Iyengar notices a flawless art of the narrator. She only informs us of the necessary details which are important for the progression of the story and does not dwell into all the details about the characters. In this plotless grandmother's tale, we can find a method. The narrative method of her story exhibits the flair of a village storyteller, having in it all the structure and the acquainted elements like the garrulity, the use of direct address to the reader, the language with its repetition and lengthy description.

Achakka is a dramatized first-person narrator and Raja Rao has embraced this convention as an appropriate standby for the oral tradition of storytelling which is told by a common man. Raja Rao has not made Achakka as the narrator of the novel by choice but he had done this after a deliberate consideration and this can be found evident from what he manages to write of the story at the end of the 'Foreword': "It 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 tale of her village."

In this context S.C. Harrex rightly points out in *The Fire and the Offering: The English Language Novel of India*:

The narrator is a physical and psychological presence in the story, like that of the Harikatha-man, who, surrounded by an enthusiastic all-night audience in the village temple, retells the religious epics. Raja Rao employs a number of rhetorical devices to

sustain the illusion that the reader is part of a live audience listening to the grandmother telling the tale of her village of Kanthapura... The narrator is a Brahmin and, accordingly, her perceptions and feelings derive from a tradition-oriented sensibility. Thus she is quite at home in the immemorial conventions of the story-teller. In her mind past naturally mingles with the present and gods with men, and so it is with proper and sincere reverence (as distinct from artificial rhetoric) that at the beginning of her story she prays to the village goddess, Kenchamma: 'O Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair...' (155)

Message that Raja Rao conveys is very apparent as the grandmother plays a vital role in the Hindu society as she is known to be a person who takes the family together and binds it with love, authority and affection and it is she who also recites stories to her children and grandchildren. This way we find Achakka also playing all these roles with precision, and this is how Raja Rao intends her to be reserved by the readers.

In continuation to this we also come across to the Harikatha element which is a religious ceremonial that an earnest Hindu is expected to organize or be present at. The term refers to the narration of the story of incarnation of Vishnu or Hari and in this ritual the entire village or the surrounding communities participate. Like Harikatha is known and famous in most part of India so it was equally popular in Kanthapura also. Jayaramachar was the famous Harikatha-man who was known to present the Harikatha in a special way. He used to somehow introduce the elements of Gandhian teaching into the stories that he used to narrate. Signifying to the Gandhian note of self-purification and Hindu-Muslim harmony he used to represent Siva as three-eyed and Swaraj too as three-eyed, while talking the villagers through the story of Siva and Parvati. In his unusual Harikatha, Jayaramachar mentions the names of the great kings who made India proud of like the Asoka, Chandragupta, Vikram Aditya, Akbar, and of the sages like Krishna, Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. He elaborates how the rishis requested Brahma to do something to free this country from foreign rule. He then comes to Mahatma Gandhi who was born to wage an unyielding combat against the Britishers and how one day Gandhiji will succeed in bring about Swaraj in India. Jayaramachar's reporting of the birth of Gandhi is the politically operational way of presenting Gandhi to the uneducated villagers in his role of the national leader of India. His narration of Gandhi is an allegory of India's freedom tussle, and it also serves to introduce the political theme of the novel.

Paranjape has commented on the religious fervour observed in the village in *The Best of Raja Rao*:

Kanthapura is . . . imbued with a religious spirit akin to that of the Puranas. An important idea which runs through it is that of incarnation [which] . . . is central to the puranas... The avatar in this novel is Gandhi, whose shadow looms over the whole book, although he is himself not a character. Incarnation . . . extends into Kanthapura itself, where Moorthy, who leads the revolt, is the local manifestation of Gandhi, and by implication of truth. (8)

The tradition, myth, religion, politics and social conduct intermingles to create a sthalapurana that Raja Rao in the first place had set out to write. Gandhiji even acquires the status of a saint and avatar wherein he is projected as Krishna by the Harikatha man, and the villagers also call him the Big Mountain which is one of the alternative names of Lord Siva. Similarly, Moorthy is called the Small Mountain and thus Gandhi becomes Ram and Moorthy becomes Hanuman and the villages anticipate that the

two mountains will protect them. Achakka, the storyteller of Kanthapura, in a progressing, breathless style, recites the story not as a historic event but as the Puranic tale of a village acquiring the perpetuity of a legend. The events reported were of the first half of the twentieth century, but still the way they were presented contained the essence of an ancient epic, where supernatural being and humans came together in sublime action and thereby, we can conclude Raja Rao's attempt at writing a sthalapurana was not a failure, but an exclusive success.

We can see the blend of the three elements of action: politics, society and religion which are beautifully woven together by Rao in Kanthapura. It would be a denial if we said that the novel had a political contextual. There is mention of Gandhiji's Dandi March, Satyagraha Movement which is carried out by Moorthy in Kanthapura. Then there is a description of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Swaraj has been linked with Rama Rajya and Bharata of Ramayana has been referred to Jawaharlal Nehru. The social content of the novel can also be found in the extended space that is allotted to the considerations of caste and how it divides the community into distinct groups. "We had a Pariah quarter, a Potter's quarter, a Weaver's quarter and a Sudra quarter." (3) Rao employs a very close way of individualizing the villagers by referring to the individualities of their houses, calling or idiosyncrasy. In this way, the author takes the reader in the existing world of a South Indian village at a certain point of time. Moorthy is given a special treatment in this regard for his willing entry with the untouchables as he was the undisputed leader of the village in whom the social and political elements of the action had got interspersed. The three levels of action are amalgamated to form the tripartite pillared structure of the novel. With reference to this aspect Esha Dey writes in *The Novels of Raja Rao*:

With the Mahatma's political programme translated into the paraphernalia of worship as practised in the Hindu religion, the whole political action of Kanthapura, generated by an avatar, an incarnation, has to centre in a temple, the temple of Kanthapurishwari. The election of the Congress Committee is preceded by a god's procession and devotional song. The aim of the Congress has to be explained with an offering of camphor and coconut to the gods. It is right in front of the gods in the temple that the very vow of spinning, practising non-violence (ahimsa) and of speaking the truth, is to be sworn. (28)

Raja Rao has used big sentences which contribute suggestively to the structure of Kanthapura and in keeping with his comments that he has used in the Foreword about the interminableness of the Indian story telling style. Long sentences also turn to be beneficial in conveying the reader to unacquainted locality in terms of providing a sense of action, of varied arrivals and goings and vehement conflicts; and in generating a perceptible image of the populous diversity of India.

Another illustrious narrative quality of *Kanthapura* is Indianized English language which is also known as appropriation in Postcolonial criticism where in Rao uses a new language and style which closely replicate native Kannada Idiom and rhythm. He has transformed the native similes and metaphors, idioms, and culturally specific expressions that are used in our daily or in vernacular

language. For example, "well when you have drunk the Himavati waters, you can't ever look different.", "Moorthy is holly bull, elephant and cow."

He has used descriptive epithets and compounds to make the narrative engrossed like Corner House Moorthy, Nine beamed house and Waterfall Venkamma. In addition to this he has used Calques which are from his mother tongue Kannada like: 'Invitation rice' – it refers to a ritual wherein rice is mixed with turmeric and given to the neighbour's along with the oral invitation on any auspicious event or marriage and similarly we find Ratna being called 'bangled widow and these are the expressions which can be used in any cultural orthodox pretext.

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