

## **Fantasy Trace in Raja Rao's Kanthapura**

**Nitin Antil, Assistant Professor (Extension)**  
**Deptt. of English.**  
**Govt. College, Israna**

### **Abstract**

**Raja Rao has applied his mythical insight to explain the and realities in his novel Kanthapura. He tries to interpret realities in terms of myth. He emphasizes on the significance of myths drawn from both the Sthala Puranas and the more widely known Indian Classics in all their social, political and religious implications.**

**Key-Words: Basic truths, Ancient culture, Mythology, Pre-historic, Political activities.**

Myth is a pervasive as well as a recurring motive in Indo-Anglian fiction and its importance can't be undermined on being an ancient culture with rich mythology. It is the very basis of religion, philosophy art and literature and all thoughts of fruition and emancipation. The Living Webster Dictionary defines myth.

A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other personages, their own origin and early history and heroes connected with it; or the origin of the world; in a loser sense any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact. (632)

Myths are the stories of pre-historic age which have descended to us by oral tradition. Myth is a form of verbal art dealing with the life stories of super-human beings or gods or some other forms of creatures more powerful than the worldly creatures. Myth enables a man to know the origin of things and also enables him to manipulate the tales of ancient lore according to his own will.

The present research paper is an attempt to focus on the mythical elements employed by Raja Rao in his first novel Kanthapura. Raja Rao is one of the most significant writers in the galaxy of Indo-Anglian fiction. He was born in Hassan, Karnataka in South India, into an orthodox and well-known Brahmin family. He started writing in his native language Kannada in 1931-32, but soon switched to French and eventually to English. Kanthapura (1938) his first novel, is a major work in Indian writing with a distinct Indian flavor. It is the story of Gandhi's struggle for independence from the British came to an unknown village in South India and energized the villagers for mass movement. This novel has a mythical structure. The story takes the form of an oral tale narrated by Achakka, an old village woman. His second novel the Serpent and the Rope appeared in 1960. The great novel took shape under the grace of his guru, Shri Atmananda. It is also called the spiritual autobiography of the novelist. His other works include the Cat and the Shakespeare (1965) and Comrade Kirrilove (1976). Raja Rao has deep knowledge of all the sacred books of Indian literature,

and through the ancient mythical stories he peeps in to the soul of India. India for Raja Rao is not merely a country with hill and valleys, cities and villages. India for him is a myth, an idea above all consciousness.

Kanthapura is a pioneering work in Indo-English fiction for its extensive employment of myth to extend the understanding of what may be called 'the present situation'. Though timeless in appeal, myth is always as relevant in the present as it may have been in the past. Raja Rao calls Kanthapura a Sthala Purana. Defining the purana, K.K. Sharma asserts:

A purana, which is an old Indian poem of literature, is an amalgam of history, totality of human existence, philosophical reflections on life and religion, stories, fables, legends, long poetic descriptions of places and nature, mystical experiences, observations on ideologies etc. (26)

In Kanthapura, on the level of myth, we have a fusion of poetry and politics, religion and social reform. The present analysis of Kanthapura reveals the novelist's deep grounding in the Indian scriptures and classical Indian literature. Raja Rao banks heavily on myths and folklore. Though the mythical elements he not only explores and communicate his vision of life but also give a contact form to his stores. With the help of myths he has linked the present with the similar mythical parallels. In Kanthapura, Raja Rao dramatizes the national struggle as a sort of mythic and symbolic event. The main plot of the novel revolves around Moorthy, an educated Brahmin who is very conscious of his duties towards his people. He inspires the people to join the freedom movement. He goes through life like a "noble, low, quell, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic, a very prince....."(Kanthapura 14). Moorthy makes every effort to inspire the villagers on the Gandhian principals. He goes from house to house disseminating the ideas of Gandhi among the villages. After sometime the sanctity of the Gandhian Movement is recognized everywhere and the villages support Moorthy with enthusiasm.

In the novel Kanthapura most of the political activities begins with bhajans of God or Gandhi bhajans. At one place religious and political slogans co-exist, even, merge and "Satyanarayana, Maharajki Jai" echoes with "Vande Matram" and "Inqulab Zindabad". Moorthy is arrested and the villagers realize that suffering and humiliation are the price of liberty, and make sincere prayer. "Moorthy forgive us: Mahatma forgive us" (Kanthapura 231). Moorthy's release renews the morale and dedication of the villagers. Ultimately, it proves an unequal fight, and the villagers are mercilessly put down, and the whole struggle ends in terrible destruction. But this movement attains the dimensions of a heroic myth. "Kanthapura is destroyed but not defeated and the memory and the image of this battle are cherished in tale and legends in the living tradition of folk lore" (Rao 54)

Kanthapura is full of mythical elements. The story of the novel is told in the story-telling style of India Puranas. The narrator of the novel is an old grand-mother named Achakka. "She is a superb conception of any myth-maker, who combines art and acumen and the narration takes a meandering course flowing backwards and forwards mixing memory with desire" (Iyengar 392). Raja Rao himself believes that the grand-mothers especially of Indian villages are a storehouse of

myths. They preserve the myth of traditional gods and transmit them to the younger generation in the oral tradition.

Kanthapura can be read as a political novel, but the complex of political events in it follows the mythical patterns. But Kanthapura is not merely a political novel; its economic and social concepts are subsumed into myth and legend. It is a classic of resurgent India told in a poetic almost mythical style.

In Kanthapura, Raja Rao explores man's relationship with the divine in terms of contemporary social reality. He uses myth to broaden our understanding of the present situation. The villagers of Kanthapura are shown as reading Gandhi's fight with the foreign rules in terms of the Ram-Ravana battle in the Ramayana. Moorthy is a veritable Hanuman to Gandhi in the novel. Moorthy as a driving force of the village Kanthapura, is shown as a small Gandhi. He follows the guiding norms in personal and public life laid down by Mahatma Gandhi. The puranic myth of good and evil is the heart of the story.

In the end it may be safely said that Raja Rao has applied his mythical insight to explain the basic truths and realities in his novel Kanthapura. He tries to interpret realities in terms of myth. He emphasizes on the significance of myths drawn from both the Sthala Puranas and the more widely known Indian classics in all their social, political and religious implications.

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