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Recreation of history through mythical technique in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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Abstract

The focus of the present paper is to show the attempt of Raja Rao to recreate the dominant aspects of history during the British rule with the use of mythical technique. In *Kanthapura*, Rao explicitly delineates every event from minor to major in small village, named Kanthapura, in South India. The happenings in the *Kanthapura* are not particular to the village but a microcosm of whole India. To recreate the history of India, Rao has shown the disastrous events taking place during the British rule with a unique technique of Indian myths. All the characters do not seem to be merely characters but represent real people who are taking part in the freedom struggle of India. The focus of Rao in the novel is not merely on the major leaders of freedom fighters but also on the common people of village who were a major force in getting India freed from the shackles of British rule.

Keywords: harikatha, Indian freedom struggle, mythical technique, Gandhian movements

Introduction

In the history of India, numerous attempts have been made to represent the historical aspects of India such as Indian freedom struggle, prolonged system of caste-based society, deteriorated economic condition of village, hierarchical society, downgraded position of women in society, marriage, devotion to gods, superstition, illiteracy, self-centered policies of British rulers, violence and unification of Indian villagers etc. during the period of British rule. Such endeavor to represent the Indian culture has been made by Raja Rao, an acknowledged Indian English novelist in English literature through his famous novel named *Kanthapura* (1938). In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao tries to recreate the history of Indian freedom struggle from British Government which has been exploiting India for many years with the help of old Indian method of story-telling called myths.

Myths have been an integral part of Indian culture for many years. These myths have been transporting from one generation to another generation through the Indian story-telling method in which an old man/woman tells the story of important events. The story may be true and false. Rao is a master of narrating the story. Rao has mixed the myth with movement of freedom struggle to show that the freedom fighters are also like gods who fight the demons to end their tyranny for the welfare of people so that a beautiful world may be established. Demons are British rulers while freedom fighters are gods who fight with the demon to free Bharat Mata (India) from the shackles of British rule which has severely ravaged Bharat Mata for several years.

Being a master of mythical technique like T.S. Eliot, Raja Rao has juxtaposed the contemporary society of India during the British Rule with the situations of Puranic stories such as story of legend of God Shiva, Krishana, and the *Ramayana*, the greatest epic focusing on the triumph of Rama over the Ravana, in *Kanthapura*. With the mythical technique, Rao has effectively glorified the present time with past time to show that there is enough similarity between Puranic stories and real situations of contemporary predicament of India. British rulers have severely ravaged and devastated the sacred land of India to fulfill their vested interest. In the novel, Mahatama Gandhi has been compared with Lord Rama while British rule with the reign of Ravana. To save people from the exploitation of British rule, a great and sacred soul, Mahatama Gandhi Ji, takes birth in the land of India who fights and ends the British rule as Lord Rama vanishes long prevailing reign of Ravana. As Srinivas Iyengar says: 'Kanthapura' is a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth- the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central pace in Gandhi literature" (Iyengar 1)

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In the novel, Harikatha narrated by Jayaramachar, a very well versed in narrating Harikathas, plays a significant part to show the tragic situation of India. One of the Harikathas recited by Jayaramachar is about the birth of Mahatama Gandhi. He recites:

... There was born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world has never beheld. As soon as he came, forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the Kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom. You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas has begun to fight against the enemies of the country. (Rao 17-18)

Being an ordinary man, Gandhiji has played a remarkable role to get India freedom for which he is always remembered. Gandhiji is also known as father of India. In the novel, Gandhiji does not personally and physically appear but his ways of fighting against British rule appear which are non-violence. Gandhiji believes that real freedom cannot be achieved through the use of violence but through non-violence. He finally proves his philosophy of non-violence by getting freedom. He does not even kill a British national and persuades them to leave India without any violence.

Along with the ideology of Gandhi, Raja Rao also focuses on the role of common villagers who are major forces behind the freedom of India. The historical books are mainly centered upon the major leaders of freedom movement. But Rao does not follow this pattern of historical writers. In *Kanthapura*, Rao shows that the Kanthapura village, the villagers do not know about the Gandhian movement but with the remarkable efforts of Moorthy, the central character of the novel, he spreads the Gandhian movement in the village and persuade them to participate in non-violent fights against the rule of British. The major characters in the novel are Waterfall Venkamma, Nanjamma, Akkamma, Nanjundia, Sommanna and Ramachandra. The role of the village can be felt and experienced in the following lines when Range Gowda says while protesting the police: "If you are the sons of your father, stand up and do what this learned boy says, My Master, I shall spin a hundred yards of yarn per day, and I shall practice ahimsa, and I shall seek Truth" (Rao 81). Range Gowda's speech shows that now they are ready to fight against any trouble. Now they are ready die for their country, India.

In the conclusion, it may be said that Raja Rao has a unique talent of juxtaposing the present situation with the mythological situations of myths. In the novel, the mythical stories do not function as stories but they are employed as tools to inspire and persuade the villager to participate in the fight against British rule. Raja Rao has very effectively recreated the history of freedom struggle. The main objective of the novel is to delineate that the common villagers are a strong force and power in getting India free from the shackles of British rule. Although it is not easy to represent all the significant aspects of Indian culture but Raja Rao has no problem in presenting all these aspects. It can be said that he is the master of employing the mythical technique in his historical novels. As Santh Rama Rao says, "It has all the content of an ancient Indian classic, combined with a sharp, satirical wit and a clear understanding of the present... Raja Rao is perhaps the most brilliant and certainly the most interesting writer of modern India" (qtd. in *Kanthapura*).

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