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THE SUCCESS OF 'KANTHAPURA' LIES IN ITS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, 'Kanthapura' is the first marvellous creation of Raja Rao which came up in 1938 with a resounding success all over the world.' 'Kanthapura' is a typical South Indian village which gets united at the call of Mahatma Gandhi for the motherland. In reality, it is a political story of India's freedom struggle amalgamated with the traditions and culture of India. The narrator [Persona] who is an old woman in the village enlightens the reader with her fascinating and realistic narration. As a student of literature, I feel the success of 'Kanthapura' lies in its narrative technique

KEY WORDS- Technique of Narration, Persona, Socio- Political aspects, Myths and Motif, Ex-Communication

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Before entering into direct discourse, it would be lovable to see the glimpses of the novel. 'Kanthapura' is a typical caste-ridden South Indian village situated amidst the beauty of nature in the province of Kara [Karnataka]. The village is an epitome of 'Unity in Diversity'. Moorthappa or Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel is a young boy who comes in contact with the personality and charm of the greatest Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi. Utterly transformed inwardly and outwardly, Moorthy leaves for his village leaving behind his study to become Gandhi of the village, Kanthapura. Fearing of his dedication and his impact over others, some unsatisfied and hypocrite persons like Bhatta, the first Brahmin and others raised an arm against him and his colleagues. Somehow, they managed to ex-communicate him and by this terrible shock, his mother Narasamma dies. But, Moorthy continues his work without break even with greater force and the formation of the Kanthapura Congress Committee has been done. Kanthapura becomes the microcosm of the macrocosm since the village undergoes the same kind of experience as India was in that crucial period of transition. Now, it is an ideal village, a dedicated village which has taken a different shape under the leadership of Moorthy balancing the havoc of Colonialism and progressing day by day towards the dawn of freedom. The whole story is narrated by the narrator Achakka, an old woman who happened to be the witness of all the minor and major events of the village and narrates them as a detached observer. It is not only realistic observation but it is flooded with her comments and her unique style of narration. This style is so lively that the reader gets dependent and sometimes kept in suspense for the favour of this wise narrator.

This narrator is fully equipped with the legends and myths and the whole credit goes to the novelist for his wonderful creation. In 'Kanthapura', Rao depicts the epics like Ramayana or Mahabharata in its

grandeur and richness. He has consciously used myth as a technique in the manner of such modern English writers like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and other. The reason he used mythological motifs in his novel because even the illiterate is familiar with Indian mythological stories and they involve in that. He used myths to glorify the present and to impart the novel a rare dignity and status of an epic. He has made an attempt to show the parallelism between Ramayana and Kanthapura. The way in which Ramayana is narrated by the sage Valmiki, Achakka who is an old woman of Kanthapura acted as the narrator and commentator. She compares Gandhiji with Rama and India with Sita. Gandhi's going to England is compared to Rama's exile and the Indians were compared with Bharatha. Like Ayodhya, Kanthapura is a traditional caste-ridden village which is away from all the modern ways of living. In Ramayana, Rama did a heroic fight against Ravana and in 'Kanthapura', Rao has presented Mahatma as a hero who fight with the non-violent weapons. A war between Rama and Ravana results to the death of many people. Here, in Kanthapura, Raja Rao has shown that many people also died or imprisoned or were faced lathis by the British people when the village people cronies itself with rebel coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The way in which Rama fought with Ravana and liberates Sita, Mahatma Gandhi also bought Swaraj [Freedom] for Indians by non-violent weapons.

In the beginning of the novel, Harikathas were practised in the village (i.e. the stories of Lord Vishnu and his incarnations). These Kathas were the part of narration as it is the quality of great epic as well as a vehicle for the narrator to explain the admixture of the past and the present. Shastri, a learned scholar, singer and poet performed Harikathas in Kanthapura. Later, Jayaramachar invited to recite Harikatha where he recited Harikatha based on Gandhiji and his ideals. In his Harikatha, along with God and Goddess, Jayaramachar would bring the conditions of the Indians such as to oppose Red-men, to follow the path of Mahatma and to acquire freedom. For instance, he raises Gandhi to the level of God by identifying his activities with one particular feat of Lord Krishna. Like how Lord Krishna kills serpent Kali, in the same way Mahatma exterminates foreign rule. If we see the example cited below, the idea will be clear to us.

"You remember how Lord Krishna when he was but a babe of four had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country.....Men followed him as they did Krishna, the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule." (*Kanthapura*18)

If we observe the above lines, we are at once startled with the charm and simplicity and fluidity of these lines. What a wonderful lines these are! One can't imagine them without the genius of Raja Rao. See the technique of narration! Is the theme of the novel can be expressed in shorter terms or an example? Certainly this can be happened with Raja Rao.

The tale has not been narrated by the novelist himself, but a persona [imagined character] called Achakka. It is the same device as has been employed by Joseph Conrad in his novels like Lord Jim. Achakka is an old grandmother, that most ancient of story-tellers. She had been personally involved in the events which form the substance of the novel and she narrates them years later for the benefit of a new-comer. She is a woman with a balanced mind, sound common sense, the gift of shrewd observation with humorous style. Her personality colours the whole non-cooperation movement, the brave resistance of the people and their consequent suffering. All is recollected and narrated by this persona. Achakka is both the narrator and commentator. Her manner of telling the tale is, according to Srinivas Iyengar is "characteristically Indian, famine with a spontaneity that is coupled with swiftness, raciness suffused with native vigour and exciting with a rich sense of drama shot through and through humour and lyricism." Not only does Achakka narrate, she also comments. They serve to impart realism and authenticity to the narrative. Here are a few instances of her racy comments.

1. Rangamma did not understand all this, neither, to tell you the truth, did any of us.
2. Bhatta left us after harvest on a pilgrimage to Kashi. I tell you, he was not a bad man, was Bhatta.

The story is narrated simultaneously on two levels and this acquires a dramatic character. Narration and description go hand in hand with a chorus-like evaluation of character and action. Achakka's evaluations are

those of the novelist himself for she is a mouthpiece of him, a true example of how should be mouthpiece. They increase not only understanding but it is a journey into the culture and tradition and legacy of India. However, this may sound odd to the foreign reader and those familiar with the circumlocution of Indian speech habits will be delighted with Achakka's narrative style and its gossipy digressions.

As Raja Rao tells us in the Preface, the repertory of a grandmother is always bright, fact and fancy, reality and imagination, men and gods, constantly mingle in her narration, and in this way the happenings in a remote, obscure, out of the way village are transformed into a Gandhi-epic. In this way instead of remaining a mere sthala-purana or regional novel, *Kanthapura* acquires the dimensions of an epic- the epic of India's struggle for freedom.

Conclusively, we are in a position to tell that 'Kanthapura' would have lost its essential charm, suspense and natural beauty in the absence of its real narrative technique.

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