

## Anthology : The Research

# Raja Rao's Kanthapura ; A Critique

Paper Submission: 10/12/2021, Date of Acceptance: 21/12/2021, Date of Publication: 23/12/2021

Raja Rao tries to depict the Indian culture as realistically as possible and he succeeds in doing so by making the narrator speak instead of saying things himself. Since the narrator belongs to Kanthapura and is very familiar with the customs there, she narrates them as she experiences them.

**Keywords:** Kenchamma, commonwealth, Kanthapura

### Introduction

Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' depicts a typical Indian sensibility in English. Though he uses English as a medium for his novel, the sentences by and large, have some Indian element about them. Raja Rao, in his preface to Kanthapura, himself pointed out:

"One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not..."[i]

It has been a conscious attempt on the part of the novelist to use English with rich Indian overtones. Infact, when he says, 'We should not', it becomes almost clear that Raja Rao is trying to create a new style for Indian writers – he wishes to get his novel identified as an Indian product. Since the theme of the novel moves around a small village, Kanthapura, in Karnataka, Rao has used a language befitting the Indian culture as it existed in Kanthapura. Moreover, the narrator of the novel does not speak or think in English but in her own native language. Even if the novelist had attempted to use British English, the novel would have failed to bring out the Indian sensibility that is a major part of this novel.

Since the emergence of Commonwealth Literature most of the writers hailing from colonies under British domination have tried to create a language structure suiting their own culture. Though it might be difficult for any reader, not well-versed with these multiple cultures, to comprehend the sensibility captured in each culture, it is probably the best way the commonwealth writers could assert their belongingness to a particular country. However, language is not the only concern for the commonwealth writer. There may be several other factors like abrogation, appropriateness, hegemony which would categorise a work under the label of commonwealth. It should however be understood at this point that Raja Rao did not wish to belong to the line of commonwealth writers. Kanthapura can be said to be the first among the post-colonial novels in India.

Raja Rao is being ruthlessly true in depicting the Indian society as it was in those days. Without identifying himself with any of the characters – Moorthy, Rangamma, Venkamma, or Rachanna, and producing the novel in the form of story narrated by an old grandmother, Raja Rao's story telling became a break-away from English style of novel by having an element of orality about it. 'Orality' again in one such criteria which separates Kanthapura from other commonwealth writings Kanthapura deals with the Indian struggle for freedom and it is the novelist who presents a vision that appeals to us as quickly as the effect of spoken words. Moorthy convincing the villagers that the Mahatma is a God-incarnate may appear superstitious but for a moment even the reader is ready to believe in the Indian struggle, specially the non-cooperation movement by the Mahatama.

Throughout the novel, Raja Rao has made use of similies and metaphors from Indian life. Right in the beginning of the novel we are introduced to goddess Kenchamma.

"Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she. She killed a demon ages, ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives. Kenchamma came from the Heavens – it was the sage Tripura who had made penances to bring her down – and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why Kenchamma hill is all red "



**Vartika Raj**  
Associate Professor,  
Dept. of English,  
JDVM PG College  
Kanpur, U.P., India

## Anthology : The Research

Anybody who is not familiar with the Indian culture would probably not be able to comprehend how the goddess killed the demon, how could she be brought down from heaven etc...

The narrator tells us of goddess Kenchamma at the very onset of the novel for she wants its reader to understand what kind of relationship exists between Kenchamma and the villagers.

Then there is the smallpox, and we vow that we shall walk the holy fire on the annual fair, and child after child gets better and better and, but for that widow of a Satamma's child, and the drunkard Dhirappa's brother's son, tell me, who ever has been taken away by smallpox? Then there was cholera. We gave a sari and a gold trinket to the goddess, and the goddess never touched those that are to live- as for the old ones, they would have died one way or the other anyway.

It is not Kenchamma alone who acts as their protector and Goddess, in fact they also have immense faith in the prowess of Goddess Kenchamma. Though the novel is not as religious as it is political; infact, we can't escape by saying that the novel is political, or religious etc. It is a slice of life picked up by Raja Rao and presented as a story. It, unlike any other history, brings to the fore the sacrifice of the innumerable villagers-men, boys, girls, and women-to act at the call of Gandhi – to support his cause through non-alignment. It is not for nothing that the villagers call Moorthy as their 'Gandhi' or 'saint' from their village. It is the saint who brings about a reform in the social prejudices held dear by the people. The division of society into castes comes to signify nothing by the end of the novel. All become one and ready to lay their lives for the cause of their nation.

Raja Rao tries to depict Indian culture as realistically as possible and he succeeds in doing so by making the narrator speak instead of saying things himself. Since the narrator belongs to Kanthapura and is very familiar with the customs there, she narrates them as she experiences them.

Raja Rao may be said to have written the first post-colonial fiction in India as we find the novel portrayed that national consciousness which was hitherto not taken up by any other writer. Raja Rao openly brings to the surface the social, political, religious problems that existed in India at the time it was under British domination.

**Objective of the Study** The objective of this paper is to study Raja Rao's Kanthapura as among the first novels depicting the urban society by the lips of an old woman. The society he portrays is the society that could be observed during British rule.

**Conclusion** In the end, one can say that Raja Rao has succeeded in telling the story of Mahatma Gandhi's movement from 1919 to 1930. He has very well described, through Achakka, the impact of Gandhi's movements on the people of south India.

- References**
1. *Narasimhaiah C .D: Raja Rao Kanthapura II edition.(Madras: Oxford University Press, 1974.)*
  2. *Drabble Margaret. The Oxford Companion to English Literature.(United States: Oxford University Press Inc 2000.)*
  3. *Narasimhaiah C. D. The Swan & the Eagle. (New Delhi: Vision Books.1999)*
  4. *Bhatnagar K.C. Realism in Major Indo-English Fiction. (Bareilly: PrakashBook Depot.1980)*
  5. *Sharma Meenakshi. Postcolonial Writing: Between Co-option and Resistance. (Jaipur:Rawat Publications.2003)*
  6. *Naik M.K. Aspects of Indian Writing in English.(New Delhi: Macmillan. 1999)*

**Endnotes** 1 *Narasimhaiah C.D. Kanthapura. (Madras:Oxford University Press. 1974)P.v.*