



# REPRESENTATION OF MYTHS AND SYMBOLISM IN RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA

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## **Abstract**

One of the best novels to come out of India in the middle of the 20th century is *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao. *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, 1938 is about the Indian struggle initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. The novel reflects the pre-independence struggle against British rule. Man's relationship with God sometimes needs to be explored and this paper aims to represent the myths and symbolism which Raja Rao has mentioned in his novel. The paper begins by providing a brief overview of the novel and its historical context. The paper argues that Rao's use of myths and symbolism is the reflection of the cultural and historical context of the novel. As in Indian mythology, there are various characters, similarly Raja Rao tends to mingle those characters with the characters of his novel. The myths and symbolism add a colorful essence in the novel which is set in a fictional village *Kanthapura*. He makes the use of myths, legends and symbols to narrate the story. The novel has mythical and symbolic references, which contribute to the narrative of the struggle of Independence. '*Kanthapura*' is a significant work of Indian literature which highlights the importance of Indian cultural values and traditions. The relation between myths and symbolism is that the myths are interpreted "symbolically" for their ideal meaning.

**Key words: Mythology, symbolism, Swaraj, Pre- Independence.**

## **Introduction:**

'Myth is defined as a traditional story, which is passed down through generations, usually the result of the actions of supernatural beings.' The Indian village of *Kanthapura* is depicted in the book as being in the 1930s, during Gandhi's time. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao has explained about the myths and symbolism. He has connected the characters of the novel with the characters of *Ramayana*. In his interview he has mentioned that the telling of the story was not easy for him. He said that one has to convey different shades of a certain thought movement. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a novel in which myth and symbolism mingle to give extraordinary color to the narrative. The main reason for this is that the novel is based on *Sthala Purana*. Symbols are the representations of reality and truth; they are significant and significant as outward signals of an inward reality. A world that is seen symbolically and poetically is depicted alongside the one we are familiar with in myth through the use of symbols.

Mention of various Indian literature that incorporate a variety of symbols:

The Palace of Illusions is a work by Chitra Banerjee.

There are numerous allusions to natural phenomena and landscapes in this book. The text's allusions to nature help to foster the characters' strong affinity to it. For example- Panchali and Dhri emerge from fire, a natural element, during their birth.

The Lotus Symbol in Indian Literature and Art by Shantanu Roy

In this novel the lotus has a religious significance in Hinduism and Buddhism. Hindu gods and goddesses are always holding it in their hands or is seen sitting on the lotus. Lord Buddha is also seen holding it. It stands for purity, beauty and rebirth. Even in the murky water, the lotus rises above and blossoms. It is the epitome of perfection.

Myth, Symbol and Language by Ananda

This book examines the progressive development of symbol and language in one of the oldest mystic cultures, namely Indian Culture. This book explains how the mythical traditions of Hinduism are intricately woven into the language and symbols used in all of their manifestations.

Indian Symbolism by Rai Govind Chandra

Rai Govind Chandra in his Indian Symbolism has described the symbols as sources of our Indian customs and beliefs. The twelve symbols are the Purna Kumbha, Svastika, Srivatsa, Nandipada, Chakra, Vardhamanaka, Matsya, Bhadrasana, Caturbhujia Cinha, Triratna, Vaijanti and the Kalpatru.

The Pregnant King by Devdutt Pattanaik

It is set against the backdrop of the Mahabharata and alludes to individuals and events from both the Kurukshetra and the Ramayana.

• Sharath Komarraju's the Rise of Hastinapur

In this novel many symbols have been used. Water is the symbol of purification. Nataraj is a representation of the uprising against social conventions and traditions.

Cry, the Peacock by Anita Desai

Peacock not only symbolizes an emotional and ideal love, but it represents life in death in life. The images and symbols in this novel are traditional but functional.

Myths in Kanthapura

The legend of Goddess Kenchamma.

Belief that Kenchamma will come to their rescue whenever they are faced with a calamity.

Jayaramachar narrates Mahatma Gandhi's story as Harikatha.

Gandhi was compared to Rama, Siva, and Krishna.

Sthala Purana

Symbolism in Kanthapura

Women's 'Sevika Sangho' is the symbolism of Durga or Shakti, the destroyer of demons.

Moorthy is Gandhi's man or the symbol of Satyagraha.

Bade Khan as a symbol of oppression.

Bhatta as a symbol of false orthodoxy.

Range Gowda as a symbol of sense and solidarity.

Skeffington Coffee Estate represents the industrialization of Indian life by the Europeans.

## Literature Review

According to Dr. Srikant Singh, India had a long tradition of English writing prior to the current interest in post-colonial literatures, but her authors were previously seen as insignificant, unimportant, and provincial. Indian English literature changed and became more unique when Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. The new literatures might have joined the modern world only after mastering modernism and giving it local importance (Encyclopedia 1114). Therefore, Raja Rao established a type of modernism in his *Kanthapura* using sardonic, skeptic, and inventive techniques like puranic texture and frequent usage of Hindu myths and stories that are Indian in subject. Myths are literature in the same way that fables are; they give literary ideas and patterns, as well as plot, characters, themes, and images.

The *Last Critic* claims that, *Kanthapura* doesn't really emphasize on the story, struggle or achievement of any particular character. There is no hero or heroine that the author has invented. Rather it is the story of an entire town and it's against colonial rule. According to the *Times of India*, the word "Kanthapura" conjures up a feeling of belonging and independence and is thought to have a spiritual quality that transcends all boundaries and obstacles. Rao gives his novel a protagonist whose job it is to persuade the peasants to support the political cause of India's fight for unrestricted independence in order to facilitate an easy transition between the world of man and the world of gods, between contemporaneity and antiquity. According to some critics, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* has never been in the mainstream except the academic corridors. Readers are either the students or teachers who understand the taste of literature. All the books have been criticized for its language as Rao has used an old English here. A reviewer stated that Raja Rao is "one of those enigmatic authors whose novels have received warm acclaim from critics like C.D. Narasimhaiah. Brief Synopsis of *Kanthapura*: Raja Rao's fictional tale of a village and its residents' involvement in the liberation struggle then raging throughout India is titled *Kanthapura*. The 'Satyagraha Movement' of Mahatma Gandhi is the story's main action. Achakka, a local of *Kanthapura* hamlet, tells the tale as a "Sthala-purana," or legendary tale of a location. Achakka, who has experienced it all, is reminiscing an amazing memory of the village's bravery and suffering. With its caste system and division of Brahmin, Sudra, and Pariah sections, the village is shown as a miniature representation of India and its customs. Regardless of the division of castes, the villagers are united in the belief of "Goddess Kenchamma" – village deity, who fought a demon on Kenchamma Hill and has been protecting the village since.

The protagonist of the story is Moorthy, whom the narrator describes as - "like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and Brahminic" and loved by all. Moorthy is an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and strongly supports his struggle for freedom. He believes that the village of *Kanthapura* ought to participate in the struggle. With the aid of Harikatha-man "Jayaramachar," he persuades the community to adopt the Gandhian viewpoint by presenting Gandhi as the reincarnation of God Vishnu. Villagers join Moorthy in his fight and protest against the colonizers' injustice as a result of this political awakening. Moorthy moves from one house to the other and preaches the importance of "swaraj". He gains more support as he teaches villagers to become self-sufficient, and Gandhian views on non-violence, love, truth and discrimination against marginalized groups. *Kanthapura* becomes united in the struggle for freedom and organizes various rallies and movements to protest. Moorthy and other young men lead the formation of a village Congress Committee. The Congress creates a corps unit tasked with training supporters to be nonviolent at all times, including when confronted with oppression from government forces. Moorthy and his followers rally the village to protest the mistreatment of Pariahs (coolies) on the Skeffington Coffee Estate, a local British plantation. They start a 'don't touch the government' movement and refuse to pay taxes. In response to the freedom movement, we see opposing forces in the form of characters like Bhatta, Bade Khan and Waterfall Venkamma. The government reacts by sending troops to *Kanthapura* and brutally beating and shooting protests, injuring thousands. The merciless shootings provoke protestors to retaliate violently. The government overwhelms the protesters, forcing them to escape, but some of the women set fire to the huts in the village before they left and made a permanent home in the nearby community.

## Discussion

Myths in *Kanthapura*

The Legend of Goddess Kenchamma:

Goddess Kenchamma is symbolized as the protector of the village. She is mainly at the center of the novel as well as the village. According to Indian myth, demons used men as their food and women as their wives. The incarnation of Goddess Kenchamma saved the lives of the villagers. She fought against demons and they were defeated.

Belief that Kenchamma will come to their rescue:

The villagers believed that Goddess Kenchamma was the life savior of the villagers. They said that whenever there was a flood or drought, she saved them. And whenever they fell ill or there was no rain, they prayed to her and everything was recovered.

Jayaramachar narrates Mahatma Gandhi's story as Harikatha:

Jayaramachar narrates Mahatma Gandhi's story as a Harikatha, which is an attempt to mix politics and religion. He elevates Gandhi to a supernatural level by drawing comparisons to Siva and Krishna. Similar to Siva's three eyes and Gandhi's swaraj (self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, and spinning), he travels from village to village destroying the serpent of foreign tyranny. Harikatha is a parable of India's struggle for independence. Ram- Sita- Ravana are the dominant myth of Kanthapura who have been used to demonstrate how the Mahatma and the British fought. The Buddha is Ram, India is Sita and the British Raj is Ravana.

- Sthala purana

The plot of the story is set in an imaginary village. Raja Rao makes the narrative in Sthala- Purana and an old lady, Achakka is the narrator of the story.

### Symbolism in Kanthapura:

REALITY	SYMBOLS IN KANTHAPURA
Durga or Shakti	Women's Sevika Sangho
Satyagraha	Moorthy
Oppression	Bade Khan
Sense and solidarity	Range Gowda
European Industrialization of Indian life	Skeffington Coffee Estate

Women's 'Sevika Sangha' Symbolism of Durga or Shakti, the destroyer of demons:

Raja Rao has done a great job portraying women. Among the village's women with literacy is Rangamma. Her own eyes are on the newspaper. Although she does not seem to agree with Moorthy's belief that all brahmins and untouchables are equal, she literally helps Moorthy. She is primarily responsible for forming the Sevika Sangh, which consists of all the Kanthapura women. She tells Sevikas once that they shouldn't put off taking care of their home by taking concrete action. Ratna, a child widow, follows next. Modern thought has an impact on her. By patriarchal society's standards, she is not greatly valued. She was called Kenchamma. The community revolved around her. Various techniques exist for expressing one's love and attachment to one's mother. Kenchamma represents motherhood by shielding the inhabitants from disease.

- Moorthy is referred to as Gandhi's guy or the Satyagraha symbol:

A young Brahmin called Moorthy is in charge of the Gandhi movement in Kanthapura. Moorthy began the Gandhi independence movement in Kanthapura. Gandhi is the novel's most important symbol, despite never appearing in it. Everyone in Kanthapura pays special attention to his achievements. Moorthy adheres steadfastly to Gandhi's ideals. The activities of Moorthy's campaign and Rangamma's later development follow Gandhi's well-known salt march. Gandhi is

viewed in this country as a mythical character who motivates people all around India. The untouchables received charkhas from Moorthy. Like Gandhi, he inspired all the locals.

- Bade Khan as a representation of oppression:

Khan, who enforces and expresses the government's will in Kanthapura, attacks Moorthy in the book's opening act of violence. The Gandhians imagine Khan attacking them as they practice their satyagraha techniques. Khan finally aids the police in putting an end to the uprising despite Moorthy's attempts to convert him to Gandhianism and his attempts to persuade him to attend some of his bhajans. Waterfall Bhatta is a representation of false orthodoxy, while Venkamma stands for superstition and blind tradition.

Range Gowda the symbol of sense and solidarity

As a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy, the village Mahatma, Range Gowda represents reason and stoicism. Everyone in the hamlet despises him, and when he joins Moorthy's movement as his deputy, the majority of the locals follow him because of his faith in Mahatma Gandhi.

- Skeffington Coffee Estate

The Skeffington Coffee Estate is a metaphor of the effects of European industrialization on the Indian way of life, and the red hue of the British (the red-men) denotes their violent nature. The Skeffington Coffee estate is a representation of British imperialist tyrants who used Indians for various purposes.

## Observation

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana both use the same Indian storytelling method. It develops the pace of Indian life while telling an entertaining story without punctuation or prepositions. The approach fits with the subject. Even though she speaks in an English idiom that is distinct from that of the British, the grandmother tells the tale, and it represents a generation that was affected by exploitation, injustice, slavery, and a desire for independence. Kanthapura is a tediously protracted story. The literal translation of Indian expression and visuals of proverbs, phrases, idioms, and pictures best capture the sensibility of India. The illustrations are based on mythology, tales, historical events, and natural phenomena that may be found in India. The installation and consecration of the Linya, the Rama festival, the Krishna festival, and many other notable public festivities and prayers, which bring all facets of Kanthapura society to a single center, depict the all-encompassing nature of the Indian religion.

## Conclusion

Raja Rao deftly uses the conventional mythical device. The extensive use of Hindu myths and stories in Kanthapura reveals the puranic texture of the city. The blending of myth and history, reality and fiction, is exquisite. Raja Rao's Ramayana is set in Kanthapura. By eliciting feelings, communicating difficult concepts, embellishing themes, fostering unity, engaging cultural background, and allowing for reader interpretation, Raja Rao's use of symbolism in Kanthapura significantly contributes to the novel's richness. The literary masterpiece Kanthapura by Raja Rao is captivating and profound. Rao's use of symbolism in Kanthapura makes it his most well-known work since it gives the book a strong sense of cultural authenticity. Rao is able to tell the story without relying entirely on explicit explanations or didactic storytelling thanks to the vast and sophisticated use of symbolism that not only distinguishes this work from other similar works but also adds depth to it. The audience can better comprehend and react to the story when characters are compared to myths and stories from India, such as the Ramayana.

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