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MYTHOLOGICAL MOTIFS IN RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA*

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ABSTRACT

A writer may use ancient myths, legends and folklore unconsciously in his works. Raja Rao uses ancient mythological motifs deliberately as a technique of narration. In *Kanthapura* he depicts the epics like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavatha*. He has consciously used myth as a technique in the manner of such modern English writers like as T.S.Eliot, W.B.Yeats and others. The reason he used mythological motifs in his novel because even the illiterate is familiar with Indian mythological stories and they involve in that stories. Indians will give much importance to the mythological characters. He used myths to glorify the present and to impart the novel to the dignity and status of an epic. He made an attempt to show the parallelism between *Ramayana* and *Kanthapura*.

Keywords: technique of narration, mythological characters, use of myths, parallelism

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"*Kanthapura* is the finest novel

to come out of India in recent years.

The novel is appraised as a classic of resurgent India
told in a poetic almost mythical style"

- E.M.Forster

Mythological elements play a vital role in the human life. They have been connected with our daily life. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* reflects the Indian Vedanta hallucination and the acumen of age-old Indian scriptures. The novel is like a grandmother's tale which depicts an authentic picture gallery with living human beings.

Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* is based on the pattern of an Indian epic *Ramayana*. The way in which *Ramayana* narrated by 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. Gandhiji going to England is compared to Rama's exile and the Indians were compared with Bharatha. Like Ayodhya, *Kanthapura* village is a traditional caste ridden village which is away from all the modern ways of living.

In the novel India or the people of India is compared to Sita in *Ramayana* and how Sita slogs because of Ravana in the same way India also struggles a lot in the clutches of Red-men and at last how Rama lead

Vanara sainya and rescued Sita from the trudges of Ravana in the same manner, Raja Rao showed Mahatma Gandhi to lead the people of India against the Britishers. In *Ramayana*, Rama did a heroic fight against Ravana and in Kanthapura Raja Rao showed Gandhiji as a hero who fight with the ahimsa, satyagrahas and non-violent protest. A war between Rama and Ravana results to the death of many people. Here in Kanthapura Raja Rao showed that many people in Kanthapura also died or imprisoned and lathi blows by the Britishers 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 for Indians by using non-violence.

Every place in India has its own legendary history. In *Ramayana*, the protagonist Rama's place Ayodhya in which Rama is considered to be one of the most important avatars of Vishnu. His wife Sita is considered by Hindus to be an avatar of Lakshmi and the embodiment of perfect womanhood. In the same manner, Raja Rao's Kanthapura stresses the contemporary importance of the myth. It is a regional novel where the village Kanthapura has its own Sthala- Purana.

"There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich Sthala-Purana, or a legendary history of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this papal tree. Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages throughout the country, might have slept in his hut."
(*Kanthapura* 5)

Kanthapura village has a local goddess Kenchamma who has a mythical semblance of the Puranic tales. Her divine presence smacks of the deities in the ancient legends and myths presiding over the fate of the human beings. Like Rama, Goddess Kenchamma protects the villagers from harm and presides over their providence. (*The Fiction of Raja Rao: Critical Studies* 76).

Goddess Kenchamma domicile is on the Kenchamma hill is the presiding goddess of Kanthapura village. She protects the villagers from famine and diseases. The people have full faith on goddess Kenchamma and offer prayers and they believe the story that the goddess Kenchamma killed a demon which squander at the country side that is why the hill is in red colour. The villagers pray her as –

"Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous,
Mother of earth, blood of life,
Harvest – queen, rain – crowned,
Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous". (*Kanthapura* 10)

In the novel, the protagonist Moorthy is a Brahmin. Like a noble cow and an elephant he is honest, generous, munificent, benevolent and open handed person. Everybody in the village call him as 'corner house Moorthy' or 'our Moorthy'. The villagers treat him as a 'small mountain' while Gandhiji as 'big mountain'. He is the person who discovered a half buried lingam from the village and mount it. Slowly a temple is built and it became the centre point of the village where all the important festivals and occasions celebrated in the temple. They also celebrate Sankara Jayanthi, Sankara Vijaya, etc.

In *Ramayana*, even though Rama was a King he goes to the door of Vanaras and enlightens them to destroy the evil Ravana, in the same manner Moorthy goes about from door to door carrying the message of Gandhiji even to the Pariah Quarter and made to know about the political, social, economic resurrections. Like how, Rama set his warriors with important people like Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuma, etc, Murthy also formed the Congress Panchayath Committee with Pariah Rachanna, Ranganna, Range Gowde and Seenu. Like Hanuman Seenu also stands as the symbol of selfless service. Like how Hanuman serves and helps Ram Seenu also helps Moorthy. Like how, Vanaras fought bravely to free Sita from the clutches of Ravana. Here the people of Kanthapura also fought bravely like Vanaras and do self-sacrifice for the sake of Kanthapura i.e., to free their mother Bharathmata from the hegemony of Red-Men. Like how Sita suffered in Lanka, Raja Rao also portrayed the life of the workers their passions, sorrows and sufferings in the Skeffington Coffee Estate under the colonial rule of Red-Men.

In the beginning of the novel, Harikathas was practiced in the village. Here the name 'Hari' itself indicates 'God' which means the stories of Vishnu and his avatars. Sastri, a learned scholar, singer and poet performed Harikathas in Kanthapura. He recites a Harikatha of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvathi and how Parvathi win Lord Siva. Later, Jayaramachar invited to recite Harikatha where he recited Harikatha based on Gandhiji and his ideals. He used to say the stories about Mother India and its noble sons. In his Harikatha, he represents Goddess Parvathi struggle for Lord Shiva as the country's struggle for freedom and the Lord Shiva represents for Swaraj. The three eyes of Lord Shiva represent self-purification, unity, Making and wearing of Khadi. In between of his Harikatha, along with god and goddess Jayaramachar would bring the conditions of the Indians, to oppose Red-Men, to follow the path of Mahatma and to acquire Swaraj. For instance, he raises Gandhi to the level of a god by identifying his activities with one particular feat of Krishna. He shows congruence between Lord Krishna and Mahatma. Like how Lord Krishna kills Serpent Kali in the same manner Mahatma exterminates foreign rule.

"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 too 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." (18)

The novelist represented Women as various forms 'Shakti' i.e., Goddess Parvathi or Kali, etc. He depicted Indian Women as demure, decorous, delicate and docile person. But when she became infuriated she becomes Shakti. The novelist represented Ratna as Shakti where she takes over from Moorthy and leads the Satyagrahis against the British government. When the police ill-treat them and brutally thrash them with sticks and boots she gives strength to all the women by saying that lathis and blows can affect only the body, but never the soul.

"Well, 'we shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hum out the name of the Mahatma,' And we all grow dumb and mutter 'Yes, sister, yes'." (112)

This results that all the women acts as one like Shakti.

The novelist also made an attempt to show the parallelism between *Ramayana* and Kanthapura. He reflects Sita as Swaraj, Mahatma as Rama and Jawaharlal Nehru as Bharatha. Like how Rama freed Sita, Mahatma also brings Swaraj. In spite of many obstacles and pains like Rama, Mahatma is adherent to dharma and is portrayed as a perfect man. In *Ramayana*, how Lord Rama went to Lanka to bring Sita, the villagers of Kanthapura heard that the Mahatma was going to the Red-Man's country, and they were sure he would bring Swaraj for them.

"They say the Mahatma will go to the Red-Man's country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be all happy. And Rama will come back from exile and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air and brother Bharatha will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya, there will be a rain of flowers." (183)

In Kanthapura, Raja Rao uses his effective mythical technique where the past is juxtaposed with the present. *Ramayana* became an extraordinary epic and in the same way Kanthapura became an excellent Gandhian epic. By using the myths Raja Rao has augmented the consistency of the novel and divulged to it a rare expansiveness and dignity.

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