

Myths are the expressions of the intuitions of a transcendental reality. People draw sustenance and inspiration from them in their day-to-day life. Myths have a therapeutic value which helps in the rejuvenation of hope. The installation of hope in the hearts of common man is the biggest gift of mythology to mankind. The morals like 'good wins over evil' and 'everything will be hunky dory in the end', strengthens the will power of an ordinary man. These myths are part and parcel of life and the consciousness of the people, and establish a communication of shared knowledge and tradition.

Myths are the life blood of contemporary literature. They play a vital role in the elucidation of human condition and its identity. Indo-Anglian novelists have realized the inadequacy or inappropriateness of the western novel form for the expressions of Indian ethos and sensibility and have attempted to incorporate traditional forms of narratives in their works. Raja Rao is the first inheritor of this tradition among Indian writers of English fiction. He is the writer who is gifted with a unique talent to blend myth and reality in such a manner that it takes his fictional world to a higher exalted plane. He has a strong myth making consciousness. The effect of myths is persistent and lends philosophical profundity to his novels. Traditional mythology gets ingeniously intertwined with contemporary reality and enlivens the narrative. As P Dayal puts it, "Raja Rao employs myth to extend our understanding of particular situation or give symbolic meaning to the theme undertaken by him. As a great artist he often assimilates the myth into the narrative. The myths drawn from cultural tradition are interwoven in the texture of his novels" (12-13).

'Myths' are 'interwoven in the texture of his novels'. They meander through the plot of the novel in such a manner that they become a powerful medium to explain various situations in his novels and also help in highlighting the different dimensions of the characters in them. Indian readers especially find it easy to understand the story line with the help of myths as they have

grown up listening, reading and even watching on television the mythological stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanisads and others. Harish Raizada comments: “ By using mythological situation and characters in the modern context, they can review contemporary human situation in a larger prospective of time and leave an immediate impact upon the readers ,who because of their previous knowledge of myth find their response enriched by element of recognition” (195).

The present day human problem or the predicament of a character which he calls ‘contemporary human situation’ can be analyzed and understood through the mythological background of the story because mythological stories are deeply embedded in Indian consciousness. Raja Rao has used this aspect in most of his novels. He has revised our age old myths, legends and traditions in his fictional world. The perfect example of a meticulous usage of myth is Raja Rao’s first novel *Kanthapura*. It is a classic of its own kind. With the complete fusion of the nationalistic fervor and the traditional religious faith, with its snatches of poetic realism in the scenic details of the countryside and its powerful and realistic evocation of the scenes of action, *Kanthapura* appears superior to the other Indo-Anglian novels on this theme. K. Ratna Shiela Mani calls it a *Kavya* ‘poetic composition’,

Kanthapura is *itihasa* and *purana* both unified into a ‘*Kavya*’. As *itihasa* it is packed with historical action while as *purana* it is full of legendary memory and archetypal imagery. But above all as a *Kavya* it integrates historical action and racial consciousness in such a way that its temper is at all levels equal to that of the Indian life itself, which Raja Rao himself declares to be his main artistic intention. (56)

The word '*Kavya*' means 'literary composition of poetic form'. The famous Sanskrit poet and dramatist Kalidasa used to write *Kavya* 'Poetic composition'. It is a style of classic Sanskrit poetry characterized by ornate and artificial language. In *History of Classic Sanskrit Literature*, M. Krishnamachariar says:

The term *Kavya* literally and its widest sense connotes all that is the work of a poet. . .

.In the words of Mammata, *Kavya* is described as, '*Kavya* is that which touches the inmost cords of the human mind and diffuses itself into the crevices of the heart, working up a last sense of delight. It is an expression in the beautiful form and melodious language of the best thoughts and noblest emotions, which is the spectacle of life, awakening the first souls.(79)

Kavya is used as an equivalent to poem in prose or verse form using predominantly metaphor and simile. Its chief characteristics are that firstly it springs from a historical incident or some fact. Secondly, the hero is clever and noble, thirdly there is a description of the birth and rise of a prince and fourthly there is a description of mountains, oceans and festivals. Raja Rao's novels are compared to such *Kavya* 'poetical composition' as he lays the story in front of the readers like a religious prayer or a poem. The novel integrates historical action and racial consciousness and makes it appear poetical. Mythology is mingled with contemporary reality in such a way that reality itself appears mythical. There is a powerful and subtle usage of myth such that the line between myth and reality blurs.

The characteristics of a *Kavya* 'poetic composition' as described above are very much present in *Kanthapura*. As *Kavya* 'poetic composition' is based on some historical event, *Kanthapura* is based on the independence struggle and influence of Gandhi on Indians. Just as a *Kavya* 'poetic composition' describes the birth and rise of a prince, in *Kanthapura* there is an account of the

birth of Gandhi who is raised to the level of God. In a *Kavya* 'poetic composition' the hero is always clever and noble, similarly in the novel the hero Moorthy is clever, smart and noble who always stands by the truth.

As in a *Kavya* 'poetic composition', there are descriptions of the festivals and seasons in the same way in *Kanthapura*, *Kartik* 'month of October' is described in poetic prose as follows:

Kartik has come to *Kanthapura*, sisters-*Kartik* has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red lights from copper-stands, and diamond lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; lights that glow from banana-trunks and mango twigs, yellow light behind white leaves, and green light behind yellow leaves, and white light behind green leaves; and night curls through the shadowed streets, and hissing over bellied boulders and hurrying through dallying drains, night curls through the Brahmin Street and the Pariah Street and the Potters' Street and the Weavers' Street and flapping through the mango grove, hangs clawed for one moment to the giant pipal, and then shooting across the broken fields, dies quietly into the river- and gods walk by lighted streets, blue gods and quiet gods and bright-eyed gods, and even as they walk in transparent flesh the dust gently sinks back to the earth, and many a child in *Kanthapura* sits late into the night to see the crown of this god and that god, and how many a god has chariots with steeds white as foam and queens so bright that the eyes shut themselves in fear lest they be blinded.(K 87)

This is a true example of poetic prose used in Raja Rao's novel. It very much resembles the poetic form present in *Kavya* 'poetic composition'. One sentence is more than half a page long.

Therefore, *Kanthapura* can be called a *Kavya* 'poetic composition' and Raja Rao could be compared with the literary genius of Kalidasa who wrote many *Kavyas* 'poetic compositions'.

As mentioned earlier, the word myth has broadly two connotations. Firstly, it is referred to as mythological story from the epics and the *Puranas* and secondly it is referred to as false belief or misconception. *Kanthapura* is described by many critics as a Gandhian *Purana*. Although Gandhi is not physically present, his spirit pervades in the novel. The principles for which he stood throughout his life are raised effectively. *Kanthapura* is the story of how Gandhian principles of truth, non-violence and many such others prove to be myths. The relevance and effectiveness of these principles is questioned by the villagers.

(A) The Gandhian Myth

Raja Rao's fascination for Gandhism is reflected in his affirmation of Gandhian values in the novel. In fact, Gandhi had such a towering personality that his advent on to the political scene revolutionized the society in every respect. As Jawaharlal Nehru puts it, "Gandhi is like a powerful current of fresh air like a beam of light that pierced the darkness removed the scales from our eyes, like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's mind" (358). This 'powerful current of fresh air' aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened by the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in the thirties. Gandhi revolutionized the social milieu by transforming the status of women in India by his humanism and bringing about social equality and spiritual regeneration. Nehru is right when he says that 'Gandhi is like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's mind'. It is natural that Gandhi left an indelible mark on India's literary firmament. Literature could not in any way remain untouched by Gandhian revolution.

'Like a beam of light' Gandhi 'pierced the darkness' and 'removed the scales' from the eyes of many writers. Many novels were written based on him and his effects on the society. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, could not ignore the impact of Gandhian ideology. In R K Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* and in B Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, Gandhi has an important place in the story. *Waiting for the Mahatma* offers an interesting contrast with *Kanthapura*. If *Kanthapura* has a strong hero Moorthy, a disciple of Gandhi, *Waiting for the Mahatma* has a heroine Bharati, an ardent disciple of Gandhi. Gandhi's presence is indirect in *Kanthapura* whereas in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Gandhi plays a role in the story. *Kanthapura* ends with Gandhi's departure for the round table conference whereas *Waiting for the Mahatma* ends with Gandhi's assassination.

Raja Rao surpasses all other writers in presenting Gandhi as he added mythical elements to Gandhi's character. Even the birth of Gandhi is described as a mythological phenomenon. In *Kanthapura*, there is man, Jayaramchara, who is brought to sing in the praise of God or narrate the legends related to God called the *Harikatha* 'mythological legend'. This man narrates the story of Gods and goddesses and relates them to the freedom struggle. He narrates the story that sage Valmiki approaches Lord Bramha and tells that the beautiful land of India is enslaved by foreigners, people are dying of the atrocities. He requests Lord Bramha to take some action and Bramha blesses him saying that Siva himself will take birth in a Gujarati family and so is Gandhi born. Jayaramchar says while reciting *Harikatha* 'Legend of God', "And lo! When the sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality, there was born in a family in Gujerat 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 then he began to lisp the language of wisdom" (K 17).

Therefore the innocent villagers take Gandhi to be an incarnation of Lord Siva and they worship him like God and follow him religiously. It becomes easier for the illiterate villagers to understand the importance of freedom struggle through mythological stories, after this they actively participate in the struggle. The mythological comparisons are immense in the novel.

Among many other comparisons another significant comparison is between Gandhi and Raja Harishchandra who always stood for truth and nothing but the truth. "Like Harishchandra before he finished his vow, the gods will come down and dissolve his vow, the Britishers will leave India, and we shall be free, and we shall pay less taxes, and there will be no policemen"(K 124). The 'vow' refers to the pledge taken by Gandhi in his famous salt march to Dandi. The villagers feel that the Britishers will quit India before Gandhi reaches Dandi as Gods will rescue him and grant him what he desires. When Gandhi moves from village to village to suppress the foreign rule, the people of Kanthapura compare it with Krishna's victory over the serpent Kaliya. Gandhi's effort to free India from the clutches of Britishers is compared to Rama's effort to free Sita from Ravana. "He will bring us *Swaraj*, the *Mahatma*. And we shall all be 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 . . ." (K 183).

Raja Rao has elevated Gandhi to the level of God in *Kanthapura*. The whole novel revolves around him and his ideologies. The novel in fact as Iyengar says is "a veritable grammar of the Gandhian myth"(396). Gandhi is not presented as a flesh and blood character in his novel, but his spiritual presence is pervasive throughout the novel like 'Godot' in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It was Gandhi's greatness that he produced hundreds and thousands of little Gandhis throughout the country. One of them is the central character of the novel, Moorthy. He is considered to be the avatar of Gandhi. He is a young south Indian Brahmin who leaves college to

join the freedom struggle. Moorthy, invariably preaches the Gandhian principles of non-violence, love of mankind, abolition of untouchability and truth, "But if Truth needs a defense, God Himself would need one, for as the Mahatma says, Truth is God, and I want no soul to come between me and Truth"(K 92). Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* 'Self rule' is compared with the three eyes of Shiva. "Siva is the three-eyed, he says, and *Swaraj* too is three-eyed: Self purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar" (K 16). Gandhi's visit to England to attend the round table conference in 1931 is described in terms of mythical tradition. It is like Lord Rama's visit to Lanka to save Sita from the hands of Ravana. Sita is *swaraj* 'self rule' and Ravana is the British rule.

The mythic design makes his novels more effective and impactful to the readers. Gandhi believed in the philosophy of karma yoga of the *Bhagavad- Gita*, he made action as part of man's drama. It is the spirituality of Gandhian thought which emphasized the conditioning of human mind through the control of the negative aspects of oneself, leading to liberation and strength. It is from this perspective that Raja Rao perceives Gandhi and it is in these terms only that his novels register the effect of the Gandhian thought. For Raja Rao, literature is a means of spiritual discipline and self realization in an interview he said, "For me literature is *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) . . . my writing is mainly the consequence of a metaphysical life, what I mean by *Sadhana* . . . and by man I mean the metaphysical entity. So the idea of literature as anything but a spiritual experience . . . is outside my perspective" (qtd in M. K. Naik 8-9). Therefore writing is a spiritual exercise for Raja Rao even as politics is a means to serve humanity and accomplish spiritual ends for Gandhi. As the inclination of both Gandhi and Raja Rao is towards spirituality, we find that Raja Rao can present Gandhi in the most spectacular manner.

Among all his novels *Kanthapura* in particular depicts how the whirlwind of Gandhian revolution which shook the village to its roots. As Gajendra Kumar puts it: "*Kanthapura* evinces this divine

truth that man's status in the society is spiritual as much as it is political. In the ontological framework, the theme of *Kanthapura* is the liberation of Indian spirit by Gandhian ideas" (36). It is this 'liberation of Indian spirit' which Raja Rao has reiterated in his novels time and again. Freedom which is sought here is not merely a political freedom restricted to geographical boundaries. It is the freedom of one's spirit and identity from the shackles of narrow mindedness and backwardness. As Gajendra points out, man has spiritual subsistence. The main motive of Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* is the acute awareness of the spiritual values of ancient India, as expressed in various myths and their place and impact on the emotional makeup of Indian mind during the period when Gandhi's personality and thought was a force to be reckoned with.

Under the leadership of Moorthy all the villagers follow the principles of Gandhi and consider him a deity. Towards the end they start getting disillusioned by these principles. The whole experience of freedom struggle appears to be a myth to them. They realize that in reality they are not getting what they are seeking from this independence struggle. Moorthy is fighting for his inner freedom that is the freedom from *maya* 'illusion' of this materialistic world which will quench his thirst for self realization. The villagers are fighting for freedom from poverty, illiteracy, unequal distribution, unemployment and so on. Both the villagers and Moorthy fail to achieve their goals through Gandhian principles and therefore the Gandhian myth emerges.

The ideals or principles of Gandhi appear mythical and thus Moorthy moves towards Nehru's ideology. He has the inkling that Nehru's policies will bring about the revolution and respite from the struggle which the common man is undergoing. He says, "You know Jawaharlal is like a *Bharata* to the *Mahatma*, and he, too, is for non-violence and he, too, is a *Satyagrahi*, but he says in *Swaraj* there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an 'equal-distributionist', and I am with him and his men"(K 183). Gandhian principles prove to be a myth

and therefore Moorthy moves towards Nehru only to get disillusioned from it again. This is nothing but an attempt of a restless soul trying to move from myth to reality. An interesting fact appears in the biography of Gandhi written by Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul*. He claims that Gandhi was himself disillusioned and disappointed by the turn of events during independence. Like Moorthy, Gandhi's aim was not just of political freedom but of a social renaissance where all men have equal rights and India becomes an ideal picture of harmony, equality and unity in diversity. But he was disappointed as all his dreams and aims proved to be myths. The reality that emerged in 1947 was of the partition of the country, riots and a socially and economically backward India. This reality shattered the very crux of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi's beliefs turned mythical at the time of independence.

Joseph Lelyveld says in an interview: "My subtitle speaks of Gandhi's struggle with India, rather than as it might have been: Gandhi's struggle for India. Of course he struggled for India, but I wanted to understand why he didn't celebrate when India achieved her freedom in 1947, why he called himself a "spent bullet" and a back number and remarked this is a "sorry affair" "(10). Gandhi considered himself a failure, a 'spent bullet' (even as Moorthy felt after leading the freedom movement in Kanthapura) as India achieved freedom at the cost of disharmony and bloodshed. He did not celebrate India's independence as his heart pained to see Hindu Muslim riots during that time. India achieved freedom but an ordinary Indian still appeared apprehensive and skeptical about the future. Gandhi felt sorry for this scenario as the bitter reality of partition turned all his principles and hopes into myths. The violence during the time of partition put a big question mark on the principles on which the freedom movement was undertaken.

(B) Falsity of the Freedom Movement

Like any other youth of that period, Moorthy is attracted to the Gandhian principles, he jumps into the freedom struggle and even leads the villagers. Following Gandhian principles of nonviolence, the villagers get beaten up brutally, many of them are even killed. "And the Police Inspector this time shouted out 'Attack!', and they lifted the lathis and bang-bang they brought them down on us, and the lathis caught our hair and rebounded from our backs, and Pariah Ningamma beat her mouth and wailed, 'Oh, he's gone, he's gone, . . .'" (K 132). The peace of the village goes haywire and the life in the village comes to a standstill. The whole village turns into a dilapidated condition and the villagers are forced to migrate to some other place. At this juncture, Moorthy and the villagers wonder about the cause for which they are fighting the freedom battle. They question themselves that is it the freedom of their country or village or the freedom from economic disparity and poverty that they are fighting for? Actually the villagers do not want lathicharges, protests and demonstrations. There is a telling conversation between two villagers in the novel:

We are not going to sit behind the cage- bars like kraaled elephants, and when I say, "What does that matter, we are for the Mahatma," they say, "Yes, yes learned sir, but our lands will go uncultivated and there will be neither child nor woman to pull the weeds or direct the canal water," . . . and they say, "Oh, father, we cannot hope for *Ramrajya* in these days; We live in *Kaliyuga*, learned sir," . . . "Nay, nay we shall fight, but we don't want the prison . . . (K 112)

As mentioned above, the villagers 'do not want prison' lest that would disturb their humble life. If they are all out to struggle for freedom, there will not be anyone left back home to earn bread and butter or to plough their fields. The children would remain hungry at home as women also have joined the struggle. The villagers hope for good roads, freedom from poverty, diseases, and

equal distribution of money. But their dreams prove to be myths as in reality they get broken homes, dead and injured people and a village where, as Range Gowda reports, “there’s neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura . . .” (K 184).

Therefore, not only Moorthy but also the villagers get disillusioned by the whole concept of freedom struggle and the Gandhian ideology. The hope of the freedom struggle and fighting with the weapons of non-violence turns to be a myth. In fact, Moorthy had never hoped for political freedom only for such a freedom does not suggest for him the real independence for which his inner self is yearning. He is apprehensive that after achieving the independence, the system will not change only governing bodies will change. He therefore wonders, “And yet, what is the goal? Independence? *Swaraj*? Is there not *Swaraj* in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? . . .” Therefore Moorthy concludes, “. . . it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, . . . there will always be pariahs and poverty” (K 182-183).

Mere change or alteration of the government machinery from the western bosses to the eastern masters does not hold any hope of true independence. This is exactly what T. S. Eliot has also observed in his play *Murder in the Cathedral* through the voice of the women of Canterbury who form the chorus and represent the common people,

King rules or barons rule;

We have suffered various oppression,

But mostly we are left to our own devices,(22-24)

No matter who the rulers are the common mass always suffers as politics has become a selfish game for politicians. Politicians are not bothered about the interests of the people at large. The people of Kanthapura have the fear that Indian leaders will also be similar to the Britishers.

Kanthapura not only deals with the Gandhian philosophy but it also highlights the social problems that the society was facing in those days. One of the major issues was the problem of caste differentiation that existed in the social setup. People of the village lived in the myth of caste differentiation.

(C) Myth of the Caste Differentiation

Caste is one of the major factors responsible for the division of society. During the time of freedom struggle the caste distinction was more prominent. In the social set up there was a clear cut demarcation between the upper and lower caste.

The *Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences* describes the word caste as:

A status group, within a system of hierarchical social stratification, in which membership is hereditary. Caste differentiations are usually based on religious and mythical traditions and caste membership, determines occupational roles, place of residence and legal and customary rights and duties. Caste is maintained from generation to generation by the practice of within caste marriage (endogamy) and strict formality in social interaction with other castes.

The concept of dividing the society into various *varnas* 'castes' has been prevailing since time immemorial. As Heinrich Zimmer observes in *Philosophies of India*, "Caste is regarded as forming an innate part of the character. The divine moral order (*dharma*) by which the social structure is knit together and sustained is the same as that which gives continuity to the lives of the

individuals; . . ." (152). Originally, the division of people into various castes was done to 'sustain' the 'social structure'. Caste differentiation brought division of labour which helped in the smooth functioning of the society. In the olden days, feelings of disparity, due to the caste division did not exist.

But then gradually the feelings of inequality emerged disturbing the social order of the society. Many mythological books also mention about a clear cut distinction of the castes. These books lay down duties of the people belonging to various castes bringing about disparity and the concept of superiority and inferiority. In *Shri Shri Visnu Purana* there is a verse,

भाद्रस्य सन्नति गौचं सेवा स्वातिन्यमायया

अमन्त्रयज्ञो ह्यस्तेयं सत्संगो विप्ररक्षणम् (3.8.33)

To be extremely polite, to serve the master religiously, to do *havan* 'sacrifice' without mantras and to protect the Brahmins, these are the primary duties of a Sudra.(trans. mine 185)

These epics are religiously followed by the people and thus the seeds of caste divisions are sown. Raja Rao himself through his protagonists has reflected upon this fact many a times in his novels that Brahmins are considered to be of a superior caste. The myth developed around a Brahmin is that he lives a simple and religious life abiding by the norms of the society and his caste. Moorthy suits this description the most as the narrator in the novel says: "Moorthy, particularly, was a nice brahminic boy-he neither smoked nor grew city-hair, nor put on suits and hats and boots" (K 37).

The fact is that the Brahmins of the village Kanthapura are always after money and feasts. "Bhatta became richer and richer. He could lend out more money. And now he was no more a

pontifical brahmin. He was a land owner" (K 30). These Brahmins like Bhatta never maintain the sanctity of their caste and thus break all the norms of Brahmin hood. They exploit the sentiments of the people and extract money and good banquets while performing rituals for them. Raja Rao defines a Brahmin, mockingly, as, "There is another, a roguish definition. A Brahmin is he who loves a good banquet" (SR 406). The exploitation of the poor done by the Brahmins brought a disparity in the society. This leads to the myth of caste differentiation that existed more during the time of the freedom struggle.

The people of Kanthapura firmly believed in the theory of caste differentiation. The villagers lived in separate places according to their caste. "Our village had a Pariah quarter too, a Potters' quarter, a Weavers' quarter, and a Sudra quarter" (K 11). Brahmin is considered superior to all the other castes. Sudras are considered the lowest caste and they are treated as untouchables and nobody is allowed to sit or eat with them. Muslims also remained out castes and therefore untouchables. Bade Khan being a Muslim does not get a quarter anywhere in the village. The people like Range Gowda threaten to excommunicate anyone who mingles with the lower caste. "If he does not stop mixing with the pariahs, this very hand-do you hear?-this very hand will give him two slaps on his cheeks The Swami has said that if this pariah business is not stopped immediately the village will be excommunicated" (K 43-44). The problem of caste differentiation is a major issue in the pre-independence era. It creates a lot of problems and complexities for a harmonious living in the society. This problem is raised by many novelists in their novels.

Gandhi endeavours to uproot the problem of caste distinction from the society. He raises this issue and tries to abolish untouchability and caste distinction in order to unite the people of various castes such that they join hands in the freedom struggle. He calls the people of lower caste as *Harijans* 'disciple of god' and gives them equal respect and honour as any other caste.

The myth of caste differentiation is broken by Moorthy. Following Gandhi's principle, Moorthy visits the Pariah quarter and mingles with them. The myth initially is so strong that he himself is hesitant to mingle with them. The concept of caste division is so deep rooted in his psyche that when he goes to pariah Rachanna's house he trembles with indecisive mind:

But Rachanna's wife quickly sweeps a corner, and spreads for him a wattle mat, but Moorthy, confused, blurts out, 'No, no, no, no'. . . he smells the stench of hide and the stench of pickled pigs, and the roof seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread, the holding it, he feels he would like to say, 'Hari-Om, Hari-Om'. (K 77)

Moorthy sprinkles the Ganges water and also takes a dip in Himvathy, the sacred river of the village to purify himself. The narrator tells, "So Moorthy goes by the backyard, . . . and taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him, and lest anyone should ask about his new adventure, he goes to the riverside after dinner to sit and think and pray. After all a brahmin is a brahmin, sister?" (K 79). These lines project the dilemma of being a Brahmin on one side, and a Gandhian on the other side. For breaking caste taboos he is excommunicated from the Brahmin community. This gives a rude shock to his mother who eventually dies. Towards the end, Moorthy gradually overcomes all inhibitions and joins the movement against untouchability in a full-fledged manner. He also inspires pariahs to join the freedom struggle along with the people of other castes. Initiated by Moorthy, this evil of caste differentiation gets feeble and people of all communities plunge into the movement shoulder to shoulder. Freedom movement breaks the shackles of caste differentiation and provides a glimpse of the reality of being human. Moorthy

not only breaks the myth of casteism but also the myth of a son's love. Narsamma believes in her son Moorthy's love which ultimately proves to be a myth .

(D) Illusion of Son's Love

In mythological stories the archetypal son is the one who is completely obedient to his parents especially mother as Rama in the Ramayana and the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. In the Hindu society a mother is an object of reverence. The Taittiriya Upanisad teaches, *Matridevo bhava* 'Mother is equivalent to God'. Importance of a mother is more than a father and she is worshipped like a Goddess. In *Manusmriti*, the sage Manu states,

उपाध्यायान्द ाचार्य आचार्यणां भातंपिता ।

सहस्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते ॥ (2.145)

The teacher (akarya) is ten times more venerable than a sub teacher(upadhyaya), the father a hundred times more than the teacher, but the mother a thousand times more than the father.(trans mine).

God creates, maintains and destroys the universe but the power with which he performs these functions is called *Shakti* 'strength' and this takes a female form. This *Shakti* 'strength' or power is worshipped alongside God as the Divine mother. *Mahakali*, *Mahalaxmi*, *Mahasaraswati* are all worshipped as symbol of *Shakti* 'strength'. These Goddesses are the consciousness transcending all things. In the village Kanthapura, there is Goddess Kenchamma who is worshipped by the villagers as Mother Goddess. Every action of the village is performed after her blessings. Moorthy, the protagonist is a religious boy and a believer of goddess Kenchamma. He also has great regard

for his mother. In the beginning of the novel Moorthy always obeys his mother, "No, mother. I swear upon my holy thread I shall keep pure and noble and will bring no evil to my ancestors' . . . "(K 41). Moorthy's mother Narsamma is a religious lady. She educates her son and brings him up thinking that he will bring good name for the family. She hopes that one day he will marry and have a family of his own. She has a great affection for her son and hopes that he would follow the norms of the society in which he is living.

But the whirlwind of Gandhi shattered the trust of Narsamma. In the pre-independence era, Gandhi's impact on the youth of the country was stupendous. He came very much like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, blowing the trumpet of freedom struggle and the people from all walks of life especially the youth followed him blindly as they were completely enchanted by his ways. Raja Rao compares this enchanting power of his with that of Lord Krsna, "And as he grew up, . . . his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna the flute-player ; . . ." (K 18). Moorthy becomes an ardent follower of Gandhi forgetting his caste and the expectations of his mother. He becomes more loyal to his motherland than to his own mother. Following Gandhi's principles he mingles with the pariahs. Though his mother stops speaking to him, still he mingles with them thus disobeying her. "Then Moorthy comes in, . . . Bhatta goes away, leaving Narsamma shaking with sobs. Moorthy does not go to her, says not even a kind word" (K 48).

Narsamma is completely heartbroken by her son's apathy. Moorthy's love and affection for her turns out to be a myth. The harsh reality dawns upon her that Moorthy is not going to act as per her wishes and dreams and his love is an illusion. She feels cheated and betrayed when some people inform her of Moorthy's excommunication, she gets a shock and subsequently dies in that pain. Therefore the trust of a mother gets torn into pieces or one can say that what her mother is

thinking to be real proves to be a myth. Her expectations from her son, her bonding for her son, all prove to be a myth. Raja Rao has shown in *Kanthapura* that the youth of the country are so much overwhelmed with Gandhian philosophy that everything else gets overshadowed. The youth forget their relationships, their class status, the norms of the society and just plunge themselves into the Gandhian movement blindly. Following confession of a village woman gives a clear picture of the Gandhian impact, "Mad we were, daughters, mad to follow Moorthy. When did Kenchamma ever refuse our three morsels of rice - But some strange fever rushed up from the feet, it rushed up and with it our hair stood on end and our ears grew hot and something powerful shook us from head to foot . . ." (K165). In this process of blindly following Gandhi they break the hearts of their family members and loved ones. Moorthy's love turns to be an illusion for his mother and thus Narsamma dies in this grief. Moorthy disregards the mother's love and gives regards to Gandhian love. But slowly he discovers the reality of Gandhian myth. Whatever Moorthy considers as the reality (Gandhian faith) proves to be a myth later in the novel. Apart from the religious and political myth, Raja Rao has also depicted the social myths of the society in *Kanthapura*.

(E) Malpractices of Society turn Mythical

Raja Rao has depicted some of the social evils prevalent in the society. The malpractices like child marriage, dowry, widow isolation and others are very interestingly woven into the storyline. In the novel where the main focus is on the political activities of the village, the social structure and life is also the subsidiary theme of the novel. During the nineteenth century, due to the continuous oppression of Indians by Muslim rulers and then by Britishers, the Hindu society became very rigid and orthodox. There was a huge amount of orthodoxy, illiteracy and backwardness. Poverty was also a very big factor for their backwardness.

The people of Kanthapura lived in the myth that their daughter's happiness can be guaranteed by giving dowry or by marrying them off to rich people. There is an incidence in the village that a little girl is being married to an elderly person as he is rich. "After all, Venkamma, what does it matter whether it is first marriage or a second marriage? What we ask is that your daughter will have enough to eat, . . . Senappa is thirty-four, . . . and he has only three children . . ." (K 84). The fact is that mostly women are unhappy and use to get beaten up by their husbands whether rich or poor. Those who become widow are supposed to live a life of a recluse, suppressed in their homes. A widow like Ratna is not allowed to marry again whereas advocate Seenappa could marry second time at the age of thirty four. The people of the village nurture the myth that by giving dowry which is considered to be a social norm, their daughters would be happy. Reality is that the dowry practice is an evil and the more it is practiced, the more disastrous are the results. This practice continues because women are considered to be weak even today and are suppressed though they have a power of their own.

(F) Powerlessness of Woman-A Big Myth

In the olden days women were considered the weaker sect as they were less educated and financially dependent on men. Their roles were confined to the kitchen and in raising children. Their powerlessness was evident when they were not involved in taking major family decisions and they remained in *purdah* 'veil'. After independence the picture changed slowly as more and more women got education and with education and economic independence came empowerment. The present age is the age of *stri shakti* 'woman power'.

Stri 'woman' is worshipped as symbol of *shakti* 'strength in India. Hindus have venerated the feminine element under its different manifestations. God's glory, his cosmic energy and his greatness can best be depicted in the feminine representation. Even the names of Gods are

preceded by the names of their consorts while worshipping as Sita Rama, Radhe Krishna, Uma Mahesh and such others. In G.Buhler's translated *ManuSmriti* it is mentioned,

Where women are honoured there the gods are pleased

But where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields result(3.56)

Hindu society has given a lot of prominence to women since the Vedic age. During that age women were not only considered eligible for education but also enjoyed equal right of property with their male counterparts. None of the religious function could be performed without their presence. However, after the invasions of Muslims and Britishers the entire scene of Indian society changed especially the position of women. The condition of women deteriorated drastically. Due to poverty and lack of education women were confined to the four walls of the house. They were supposed to follow tradition and perform religious rituals to perfection, do house hold chores, worship God and visit temples. Their roles were restricted to their kitchens only.

In Kanthapura the thinking of the people is also orthodox. The deity whom they worship is goddess Kenchamma. They worship the deity blindly but never respect the women in their house hold. If any woman becomes non conformist the society does not tolerate. For instance, when Ratna (a young widow) opposes to remain in isolation like other widows she is looked down upon by the people. She is ridiculed by the people as her behavior is considered eccentric. "But Kamamma silenced her and called her a shameless and wicked-tongued creature and said that she ought never to have been sent to school, and that she would bring dishonour to the house" (K 37). Moorthy's mother Narsamma is threatened by the society that her son will be excommunicated from the cast. She gets a big shock and succumbs under the pressure. Being an

illiterate woman she had no courage to break the norms of the society. This myth of women being the suppressed class gets broken towards the end of the novel.

The reality emerges when women plunge into the freedom movement along with men. They fight against the Britishers shoulder to shoulder with men. Gandhian movement was only a rudimentary beginning of the true liberation of women. The novel traces the material and psychological revolution that accompanied the emergence of the woman from within the twin incarnations of the *devi* 'goddess' and the *dasi* 'servant' that has reigned the imagination of the patriarchy since ages. Gandhi's movements were all feminist in nature as they adopted attributes such as passivity, and activities such as spinning traditionally considered as feminine in nature. Following Gandhiji's ideology of women empowerment, Moorthy encourages women to take part in *satyagraha* 'hold on to truth' in order to make their force strong against the British. "And when it is all over, . . . Moorthy says, 'We need a woman in the Committee for the Congress is for the weak and the lowly'; . . . and then Moorthy says, 'Come, Rachanna, you have suffered much, and you shall be a member,' . . ." (K 81).

The women slowly start involving themselves into the struggle and emerge as strong leaders by taking part in sabotaging and picketing the toddy shop. These women, followers of *satyagraha* 'hold on to truth' when given the provocation also indulge into violence. They became very fierce against Badekhan who was beating the villagers mercilessly. " And the maistri comes to pull them off and whips them, . . . Moorthy cries out, 'No beatings sister. No beatings, in the name of Mahatma.' But the women are fierce and they will tear the beard from Badekhan's face. . . . Badekhan, spitting and kicking, says he will have every one of them arrested . . ." (K 65). Women prove very strong towards the end. They realize that suffering and humiliation are the natural price of

liberty and thus they face the atrocities of lathicharges and get beaten up brutally. Women break the myth that they are weak.

Women's quality of leadership is shown when Rangamma takes the lead to organize freedom movement in the village when Moorthy was in prison. She modulates the deep core religious zeal in the women and adds a nationalistic dimension to it. She motivates all the women by telling stories of Rani Laxmi Bai. She inspires them to fight against the British like the city women. She says, "We are but unworthy of all these people . . . Kamladevi and Sarojininaidu and Annie Beasant all the heroic daughters who fight for the Mother- and we, we think of nothing but the blow pipe and the broom stick, and the milking of the many cows. We, too, should organize a Volunteer corps, . . ." (K 109-110). In the leadership of Rangamma they form *Sevika Sangh* 'organisation for serving'. This unit organizes passive resistance against the wickedness of foreign rule. Whenever Rangamma is imprisoned then Ratna takes the lead. Women face the wrath of the British and still keep their zeal and spirit alive. "And Rangamma cries out, 'Now, sisters, forward!' and we all cry out, *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!* . . . crouching and rising, we move on and on, and the lathis rain on us, . . ." (K 133).

A great leap towards liberation is achieved by the women in the novel by their decision to read and comment on the *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' texts when RamaKrishnayya dies. The women choose Ratna to read the texts and Rangamma to comment on them. " And it must have been all due to her stay with Sankaru, . . . she told us story after story from the Vedas and Puranas and we all said, 'Why, our Rangamma is becoming a learned person, and she will soon be able to discuss philosophy like Ramakrishnayya,' and the more we listened the more she impressed us . . ." (K 107-108). This was a remarkable decision favouring the emancipation of women especially when

one considers the contemporary furor over whether a woman at all has the right to study the Vedas or not.

Raja Rao himself has no illusions regarding the power of women. One of the finest stylistic devices of the novel is the selection of the old woman as the narrator. This is one of the rare instances where history is looked at from a woman's point of view as opposed to its analytical power structured male version that inevitably leaves the women folk out. The goddess they worship in the village is in the feminine form. Women's participation in the freedom movement is major and they fight equally with men against the British. Therefore the myth that women are weak gets broken. The reality is that they prove to be mentally stronger than men. While facing the *lathis* 'sticks' of British, they do not bend under pressure as easily as men do. Sitara makes an apt comment in *The Emergence of the Woman: A Reading of Raja Rao's Kanthapura*:

Kanthapura is a path breaking work in many ways. It is Raja Rao's sensitive and realistic portrayal of the emergence of the modern Indian woman. From the polar images of the all powerful Goddess Kenchamma and the Pariah Rachanna's wife who would spin only if her husband tells her to, emerge the new women who defy conventions and lead the war of independence.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* thus breaks the myth of the orthodox Indian society which gives a positive message of a phenomenal change brought about by the Gandhian revolution. Gandhian movement pushed women out of *Purdah* 'veil' and from oppressed state brought them into the centre of all activities where they broke the myth of woman being powerless, and emerged as *stri shakti* 'woman power'. Many such believes of the people prove to be myths. When the sun of reality emerges the darkness of myth disappears.

(G) Myth Breaks Reality Emerges

Raja Rao is the first Indo-Anglian novelist who has effectively exploited the Gandhian myth translating reality into the poetry of his novel. Kanthapura is described as the Gandhian myth and people of the village consider him an avatar. Gandhi's life is based on the Karma theory of Indian philosophy. The Indian philosophy mentions three major paths for achieving self realization. These three paths form the backbone of Raja Rao's novels. They are the *karma marg* 'path of action', *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' and *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion'. Gandhi is the personification of the Karma theory. *Kanthapura* reiterates the doctrine of Karma as mentioned in the Vedas, Upanisads and *Bhagavad Gita*. Indians believe in the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and its most important principle is of 'karma' which says that one should do one's karma or our duties and leave the result on God.

Brahmany adhaya karmani

Sangam tyaktva karoti yah

Lipyate na sa papena

Padma-patram ivambhasha(BG 5.10)

One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the Supreme Lord, is unaffected by sinful action, as the lotus leaf is untouched by water.(trans. Prabhupada 283).

One should let the almighty decide the fate and fruit of one's actions, one should not think or expect about the results of one's deeds. One should submit one's duties onto the feet of the Lord and forget about it and never worry about the result. This philosophy of karma is taken up in *Kanthapura*. These principles of Karma are best embodied in the life ideas and deeds of Gandhi. His spirit is omnipresent in the novel and thus the book is described as a Gandhian *Purana*. A Gandhian out and out, Moorthy the hero of the novel is completely given to the life of actions

based on the doctrine of Karma. The reality is that Moorthy and the villagers do not comprehend and follow the principles to perfection and so they get disillusioned from them soon.

Moorthy's ultimate aim in life is self realization which he like Gandhi tries to achieve through politics. His soul is restless to achieve that spiritual satisfaction which one gets in enlightenment. He aims not just for freedom from foreign rule but freedom from *avidya* 'ignorance' and *maya* 'illusion'. The reality is that even the goal of Gandhi is self realization. He says in his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, "What I want to achieve-what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years-is self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal" (10).

To achieve the goal of freedom from foreign rule as well as to get spiritual satisfaction Gandhi used the weapons of truth, *ahimsa* 'non-violence', *satyagraha* 'hold on to truth', *brahmacharya* 'celibacy' and *aparigraha* 'non-possession' and other cardinal values. These principles are linked to *Vedanta*. The concept of loving one's enemies, non-violence, giving up of arrogance and ego and oneness of the universe are all teachings of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. There are many things in the novel which reaffirm the *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' principles. Moorthy's recitation of *shivoham-shivoham* 'I am Shiva-I am Shiva', is *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' in spirit. Rangamma who believes in Gandhian values refers to *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' philosophy to inspire the *satyagrahis* 'agitators' to face the police courageously. As the freedom fighters are scared to face the attacks of the police, she gives the *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' advice "And sometimes, when we stood in Rangamma's courtyard, Rangamma would say, . . . 'No sister, that is not difficult. Does not the *Gita* say, the sword can split as under the body, but never the soul?' . . ." (K 111).

The omnipresence of God, alluded to in the novel is undoubtedly, drawn from *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' philosophy. When the female freedom fighters are stranded in the forest they seek moral strength from their belief in omnipresence of God and this has *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' connotations. In *advaita* 'non-dualism', *Brahman* who is invariably one possesses the characteristics of all pervasiveness. Moorthy's transcending the physical desire is unequivocally *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' in nature for the *Bhagavad Gita* recommends sexual containment as a means of spiritual development. Even Gandhi believes and practices *brahmacharya* 'celibacy'. Gandhi's principles are in consonance with *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' principles.

Swami Vivekananda says: "Behind everything the same divinity is existing, and out of this comes the basis of morality. Do not injure another. Love everyone as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself" (*Thoughts on Vedanta* 11). The concept of oneness of the universe is the underlying principle of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. There is no duality as everything is merged into one ultimate reality. If one understands this concept then it becomes easy to follow the Gandhian principles. Moorthy was aiming for this *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge. He even followed certain principles of it but couldn't succeed in reaching his goal and therefore in reality he never even comprehended Gandhian principles.

Gandhi used the weapons of truth and non-violence to bring *Swaraj* 'self rule' in the country. People around the country were caught in the whirlwind of Gandhi. They regarded him as a Messiah, their savior. The reality is that Moorthy and the villagers follow him blindly without really imbibing his principles in their lives. During the independence struggle the whole nation got swept away in the tornado of Gandhi and Kanthapurians were no exception. The fact of the matter is that in their heart of hearts the villagers did not agree with the concepts of non-violence,

abolishment of untouchability, loving one's enemies and such others. Range Gowda, one of the characters of the novel, always deviates from the non-violent ideal. When Moorthy tries to explain the Gandhian ideal of loving one's enemy, even the docile women listeners are baffled, "Maybe-I shall love him-with your blessings! Rangamma did not understand this, neither to tell you the truth, did any of us. We would do harm to no living creature. But to love Bade Khan-no, that was another thing...But we could not love him" (K 71).

The most important principle of Gandhi is truth. All his agitations, the *Satyagraha* 'hold on to truth' is based on truth. Gandhi says in his autobiography, "But for me, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in words, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute truth, the eternal Principle, that is God"(11). Gandhi is seeking the Absolute Truth which is also the ultimate goal of Moorthy. For reaching this goal one has to follow 'truthfulness in words' as well as in thought. The villagers couldn't abide by this core philosophy of Gandhi.

Moorthy and the villagers organize a religious procession in the village. The main or the secret motive of this procession is to do field *Satyagraha* 'hold on to truth'. So, here the villagers resort to falsehood to achieve their aim. They violate the fundamental principle of the truth. The reality is that the villagers who follow Gandhi as God shatter the very core of his philosophy thus turning his principles into myths. "We drew two carts across Sami's courtyard so that nobody could see the procession . . . Ratna says, . . . with the Satyanarayana procession in front of us, we would go through the Brahmin Street and the Pariah Street to the village gate and across the lanes and the pastures and the canal to do field-*Satyagraha*"(K 166). Not only the principle of truth but also the fundamental principle of non-violence is violated by the villagers. When the policeman beat up Sidda (a character in the novel) who has thrown dung at a police man, the villagers retaliate with

showers of old slippers, broomsticks etc. During the frenzy of persecution, when the villagers face the attachment of property, Bhatta's home is set on fire, Ratna says in astonishment, "Then when Ratna is up . . . she comes running back shouting, 'Fire, fire, Bhatta's house is on fire! Surely it is the pariah women,' and we all rush to the bathroom door and we see the eaves taking fire and the white flame rising silk-like in the sun, and the pillars creak and the byre spits out jets and jets of stifled smoke . . ." (K 156).

The principle of *ahimsa* 'non-violence' proves a fiasco in the climax of the novel as there is violence, hatred and animosity among the villagers. The narrator describing violence says, "But a voice is heard saying, 'No violence', . . . and there is such a confusion that men grip men and men crush men and men bite men and men tear men and men tear men, and moans on moans rise and groans on groans die out, . . . man after man falls like an empty sack . . ." (K 178). The Gandhian Philosophy which the villagers ardently believe turns to be a myth for them and so they start moving away from it. The agitation and demonstrations which the villagers make, moves towards skepticism and confusion. They start feeling that their efforts for attaining the freedom are proving to be futile. Esha Dey comments, "The sharp juxtaposition of the historic reality of vindictive violence and the ideal of non-violence and love indicate the deep gulf that separates the mythical category of action where such blatant contradiction is unthinkable and the concrete existence of reality which is always a web of human complexities" (29).

'The ideal of non-violence' which Esha Dey talks about is actually the Gandhian myth which gets broken due to 'the historic reality of vindictive violence'. But the concrete existence of reality in an ultimate analysis of Raja Rao proves to be another myth, the myth of the very existence which is described in *advaita* 'non-dualism' *Vedanta* of Samkaracharya as *jagat mithya* 'the world in an ultimate analysis is false'. Thus the whole world is a myth or by extension can be called unreal.

This is presented in *Kanthapura* as well as other novels through the use of various myths. In an ultimate analysis 'the concrete existence of reality' in 'a web of human complexity' remains neither concrete nor real. In fact the reality is far different and complex for the comprehension of an ordinary man who is too much involved in the attraction of *maya* 'illusion' which takes him away from the ultimate truth or reality, that is *Brahman*.

In fact, Gandhi's quest and Moorthy's thirst were the same - the Absolute Truth or Reality. If Moorthy had comprehended Gandhi's principles and followed them unadulterated, he would have reached his goal. But the Gandhian values turned out to be myths for him as he misunderstood them and was perplexed about following them. At the same time his heart and mind were not pure enough to move on the path which he aspired. Gandhi stressed on self purification to exercise self restrain. Moorthy did not succeed in exercising this control of senses. Therefore he remained completely restless and baffled in the end. Gandhi says in *My Experiments with Truth*:

Without self-purification the observance of the law *ahimsa* must remain an empty dream; God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification in all the walks of life...To attain to perfect purity, one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion.(397).

As Gandhi emphasizes, if one has to attain the goal of ultimate reality one needs purification of the mind. This desire of self purification appears to be lacking in most of the protagonists of Raja Rao and Moorthy is no exception to that. Freedom of the country can be attained by the struggles but the freedom of the mind and the spirit can be achieved by removing *avidya* 'ignorance' and conquering *maya* 'illusion'. The struggle here will be against the senses and desires which are

influenced by the materialistic world. 'One has to become absolutely passion free in thought spirit and action'.

In the novels of Raja Rao it is not just the theme but also the plot and structure of the novel that has a mythological plane. The technique used to present the story is akin to *Puranas* and mythological epics. Raja Rao has made a deliberate attempt to follow the traditional Indian narrative technique and it is the Indian sensibility that informs *Kanthapura*. Both the spirit and narrative technique are those of the Indian *Puranas*. There are three main aspects of the technique used by Raja Rao. Firstly there is imbibing of the *puranic* technique secondly there is the use of *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth' and thirdly there are rites and rituals providing mythical framework to the novel.

(H) *Puranic Technique-Fulcrum of Kanthapura*

Raja Rao has adopted the *Puranic* technique while writing his novels. Srinivas Iyengar says in *Indian Writing in English*, "What happens in *Kanthapura* is by no means a unique experience, but the telling of the story gives the whole affair an itihasic-atleast a puranic dignity"(392).It is the technique which imparts *Kanthapura* a 'puranic dignity'. In order to allow an easy interchange between the world of men and the world of Gods, between contemporary and antique, the *Puranic* technique acts as a synergy. The story of *Kanthapura* is 'by no means unique' but the equilibrium between the two contradictory levels of writing myth(poetic) and politics(realism), is the defining characteristic of the novel.

The word technique according to *Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary*, is defined as, "a particular way of doing something, especially something requiring special skills". Style of writing or telling of the story is basically called technique. *Puranic* is something related to *Puranas*. Therefore

Puranic technique is the technique adopted in *Puranas*. *Kanthapura* has essentially many features similar to *Puranas*.

The etymology of the term *Purana* as given in *Vayu Purana* is 'records of past events'. *Purana* comes from the Sanskrit words *puranam akhyanam* 'old narrative'. Swami Vivekananda has described *Puranas* as,

The *Puranas* are the modern representations of the ancient Narasamsi (anecdote portion of the *Vedas*), supply the mythology. They can be ascribed as the post Vedic texts narrating the history of universe from its creation to destruction genealogies of kings, heroes and demigods with a detailed discussion of Hind cosmology and philosophy.(CW 4: 335)

The *Puranas* are eighteen in number and they basically explain the teachings of the *Vedas*. They serve as the encyclopedias of religion and culture. Human beings have four main purposes in life, *dharma*, *artha* 'money' *kama* 'desire' and *moksha* 'salvation'. The *Puranas* teach the beings the path to achieve these aims. As given in *Encyclopedia of Hinduism A Continuing Series*: "The classic definition of *Purana* mentions five characteristics, *sarga* 'creation', *pratisarga* 'dissolution and recreation', *vamsa* 'divine genealogies', *manvantra* 'age of Manu' and *vam sanuaarita* 'genealogies of kings' "(207). However, most of the *Puranas* contain more than these and some scarcely touch these features.

Therefore broadly the style of *Puranas* could be described as simple, flowing and digressive and the language is easier than the language of the four *Vedas*. The main features of *Puranas* are that they speak quite extensively about the battle between the Gods and the demons and the ultimate victory of the truth. They are dedicated to the glory of a

specific God as the *Visnu Purana* is dedicated to Lord Visnu, the *Siva Purana* glorifies Lord Siva and so on. The *Puranas* also narrate the incidents of influential kings, their supremacy as well as the rivalry of princely clans. They contain elaborate descriptions of seasons, festivals and rituals to be performed every day.

Kanthapura has many characteristic features of the *Puranas*. It depicts the battle between two powerful clans Britishers and Indians. The struggle of Kanthapurians against the Britishers is compared with the struggle of Gods and demons. As Dore, a character in the novel says, “But Dore, who hears this, laughs and says ‘This is all Ramayana and Mahabharata; such things never happen in our times’, at which Pariah Rachanna gets angry and says, ‘It is not for nothing the Mahatma is a Mahatma, and he would not be Mahatma if the gods were not with him . . . ’”(K 124-125). As described in epics the characters of the novel are also divided in two sides the good and the evil. Among the good characters there is the hero who dominates the entire action, young south Indian Brahmin, Moorthy. He is a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi and intends to remove untouchability in the village. The villagers regard him and Gandhi as the shields that protect them. Rangamma says, “ ‘And what shall we call Moorthy?’ said Radhamma. ‘Why, the Small Mountain,’ said Rangamma, and we all said ‘That is it’, and so from that day we knew there were the Small Mountain and the Big Mountain to protect us” (K 127).

The character of Gandhi is presented like an omnipresent God in a *Puranic* tale. This is also in keeping with the characteristic of *Puranas*. For instance, in the *Siva Purana* there are stories glorifying Lord Siva and in the *Shri Shri Visnu Purana* there is emphasis on the supremacy of Lord Visnu,

न केवल तात मम प्रजानां

स ब्रम्हभूतो भवतश्च विश्णुः ।

धाता विधाता परमे वरश्च

प्रसीद कोपं कुरुशे किमर्थम् ॥(1.17.24)

Prahlada says to his father Hiranyakashyap, Lord Vishnu is the lord and protector of not only me but of the world and also you. Therefore be happy and carefree. Don't be angry unnecessarily (trans mine 77).

Similar to the *Puranic* tales, in *Kanthapura* there is an exposition and glorification of Gandhi and his philosophy. As Range Gowda says to Moorthy, "All I know is that . . . the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma's word be the word of God"(K 76). Thus *Kanthapura* can be rightly called the Gandhian *Purana*.

Moorthy's character is also presented in such a way that his character gets elevated to the level of Christ. People worship him and Pariah gets sanctified by touching his feet. Swain mentions it in *Myth in Raja Rao's Kanthapura*, "Moorthy is Jesus Christ of Kanthapuraians. He has come to deliver them from sin and suffering. He is their Gandhi. They say with exultation that he is the saint" (74). In every mythological story the hero is the ideal man with supernatural qualities. Moorthy is not a normal villager and his deeds and actions are similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi. Like Gandhi, he leads the people of the village who follow 'selfless action' *nishkam karm* as enunciated in the *Bhagavad -Gita* such that the villagers will be purged of their sins and sufferings.

Moorthy is identified with both Christ and Gandhi and like both of them he is a saint. He follows Gandhi's principles like Prahlada does of Lord Visnu or Hanumana does of Lord Rama. Moorthy practices *brahmacharya* 'celibacy', *ahimsa* 'non-violence' and undergoes fasting in the manner of Gandhi. "That evening Moorthy speaks to Rangamma on the veranda and tells her he will fast for three days in the temple, . . . Moorthy says that much violence had been done because of him, and that were he full of the radiance of *ahimsa* such things should never have happened . . ." (K 67).

The freedom movement is equated with the Mahabharata *Yudh* 'battle'. In the novel there is a blending of myth and reality to such an extent that one gets the feeling that Gandhi is the incarnation of Rama and Krsna, born to liberate mother India from demons Ravana and Kansa. The battle between *suras* 'deities' and *asuras* 'demons' is a recurrent theme in the Hindu mythology. The fact that Raja Rao summons to his aid the Indian epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for the creation of his myths suggests that he is greatly influenced by the Indian mythic tradition. Keeping in mind this mythic tradition, in every mythological story there are villains and helpers of the villain. In *Kanthapura* there are characters who betray the motherland befriending the enemy. These characters help in making the situations look identifiable and real. The characters like Swami and Bade Khan are compared with *asura* 'demons'. The agents of Swami exercise their diabolic designs to dissuade the villages from joining Moorthy's non cooperation movement. Bade Khan the policeman commits atrocities on people following instructions of the British. So in the novel there are heroes and there are villains, completely black and white like the characters of any mythological story.

Another important aspect of *Puranic* technique is digression. Raja Rao is said to be a champion of this technique. The technique used by him is akin to the ancient Indian technique of narration. According to *Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary*, digress means 'to leave the main subject

temporarily in speech or writing'. It is derived from the latin word *digredi* which means 'to step away'. In mythological stories of the *Purana*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* there are many stories within the story. The *Ramayana* is basically the story of Rama and Sita. But in the epic there are many small stories like that of marriage of Siva and Parvati, the birth of Ganga and the fight between Bali and Sugreev. "In Bal Kand" of *Valmiki Ramayana* , Vishvamitra explains to Rama,

Tasyaamganga iyam abhavat

Jyesthaa himavatall sutaa

Umaa naama dvtiiyaa abhuut

Kanyaa tasya eva raahava(1.35.16)

This Ganga has emerged as an elder daughter to Himvana through Mena, Oh, Raghava, and that way a girl renowned by the name Uma becomes a second daughter to him.(trans Rao and Moorthy).

These episodes digress from the main story of Lord Rama in *Ramayana*. This kind of digressional technique is also used by Raja Rao in his novels as he is inspired from these epics. For example, in *Kanthapura*, Rangamma tries to motivate women to join the freedom struggle. She narrates the story of Rani Laxmi Bai which is quite inspiring to them, "Now there was an imprisoned king in India called Tantia Topi, and then there was Rani Laxmi Bai, and then there were small king and big kings and many landless kings, and they all said, "We shall throw the Red-man into the sea," and they all waited for the propitious moment"(K 109). The story of Laxmi Bai used for motivation actually digresses from the main storyline of the novel.

Raja Rao has mentioned in an article that he was chiefly influenced by the epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. According to him these books are summations of Indian tradition and

wisdom. In the article "Books which have Influenced Me", Raja Rao states: "The book that has influenced me most, as it has every Indian, is the Ramayana. What could be more glorious, more sacred, more fantastic, a book of books-showing every beauty and treachery of this our tragic-comic existence"(46). These epics provide Raja Rao with the formal and technical ingenuities which he tries to implicate in his fictional work. The mythical technique makes his style unique and renders it a distinct class. He is chiefly influenced by these mythological books.

Raja Rao has himself written in the foreword to *Kanthapura*:

The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana 48,000. Puranas are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us-we tell interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story: (K 6).

There are no 'punctuations' and 'episodes follow episodes'. This style of breathless garrulity and nonstop flow of storytelling is followed in the novel *Kanthapura*. It is a long non-stop outpouring of his creative imagination inspired by mythology. This kind of structure of the novel with scanty respect for formal organization is similar to the technique of epics. The novel is not divided into parts or chapters but it is a continuous narrative punctuated by breaks when they become necessary. As M.K. Naik observes, "Not only the sensibility that informs *Kanthapura* truly of the Soil; Its form and narrative technique also belong to a living tradition. Raja Rao has made an organized attempt to follow the traditional Indian narrative techniques in *Kanthapura*"(61). The 'living tradition' which Naik mentions here refers to the impact of epics and the *Puranas* on Indian people. Epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are part and parcel of Indian life. We

live with those principles and ideologies which are mentioned in the *Bhagavad- Gita* and the *Ramayana*. They are not only holy books but also provide guidelines to live a good life. For the Indian people they have become a way of life. So these living principles are easily adopted by Raja Rao while writing novels. *Kanthapura* is a beautiful example of the impact of the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* on Indian lifestyle 'truly of the soil'.

A very important feature of the *Puranas* is the description of seasons. Specifically in *Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana* there is a whole chapter devoted to the significance of winter season.

खम गोभत निर्मेथं भारद्विमलतारकम् ।

सत्त्वयुक्तं यथा चित्रं भाब्द ब्रह्मार्थद निम् (2.10.43)

Shukdeva says describing the ambience of winter, As the person who has Vedantic knowledge appears to be bright and graceful with an aura about him, similarly during the night time in winter season the sky appears to be bright and shining due to sparkling stars without the cloud.(trans. mine 257)

Similarly there are verses in *Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana* welcoming the rainy season.

तपः कृ ण देवमीढा आसीद् वर्षीपसी मही ।

यथैव काम्यतपसस्तनुः सम्प्राप्य तत्फलम् ।।(2.10.7)

Shukdeva says, As the rainy season brings water and relief to the hot and dry earth and greenery is caused by April and May Summer. Similarly a person becomes healthy after getting the fruits of his penance and he was slim while doing the penance. (trans. mine 257).

In *Kanthapura* the advent of *Vaisakh* is described in a poetical manner. This poetic lyric is not related to the main plot of the novel but it is a part of digressional technique and adds to the mythical ambience of the novel.

In *Vaisakh* men plough the fields of Kanthapura. The rains have come, the fine, first-footing rains that skip over the bronze mountains, tiptoe the crags, and leaping into the valleys, go splashing and wind-swung, a winnowed pour, and the coconuts and the betel-nuts and the cardamom plants choke with it and hiss back (K 114).

Similarly the arrival of *Kartik* has been described in poetic prose, "Kartik has come to Kanthapura, sisters- Kartik has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods; . . ." (K 87).

Another technical device which Raja Rao employs and is quiet *Puranic* is the shift from past to present tense which is called the use of historic present tense. It gives a dramatic slant to the narrative. The narrator sets the stage with the use of past tense; "One day when Bhatt was returning from the river after his evening ablutions, he did not turn around the Mari- Temple corner, but went straight along the Lantana Lane and hurried up the steps . . ." (K 32).

The complete passage mentioned above is in past tense. The narrator skillfully switches over to the present tense to give a clear and lively idea of setting and what individual characters are doing. For example: "Then the byre door creaked and Rangamma came out with sobbing lantern in one hand and bright frothing milk pot in the other, and when she hears a stranger's voice, she says, 'Is it Bhattare? What an honour!' And Bhatta speaks again of the rains and the cattle and the peasants, . . ." (K 32). This passage starts with past tense and changes to present tense describing the present reality. Such use of the present tense occurs in the dramatic portions of the novel.

Kanthapura is also a daring and highly meaningful experiment in style, Raja Rao has given Indian flavour to the English language and in *Kanthapura* especially there is a Kannada touch to English. The names of most of the characters are typically 'Kannada'. Moorthy, Achakka, Range Gowda, Sidda and so on. Raja Rao has translated Indian words and phrases literally into English which added to the Indian flavour of English language. He translated names from Kannada and made them picturesque like 'Waterfall Venkamma, Nose -scratching Nanjamma. Only the words are English, the meaning behind them and their soul is all Indian. In certain places there is also repetition of words or phrases. Here is an example, " They say there are men in Bombay and men in Punjab, and men in Punjab, and men and women in Bombay and Bengal and Punjab, who are all for the Mahatma. They say the Mahatma will go to the Redman's country and he will get us *Swaraj*. He will bring us *Swaraj*, the Mahatma"(K 183).

These repetitions of words and phrases are just to emphasize the gossip style of talking of most Indians in their mundane existence. These repetitive words are quite conspicuous in the novel and they create a new style which is very traditional and native of India. It is like catching the pulse of the Indian villages such that the village scene gets visualized in front of our eyes. As C.D. Narasimhaiah comments in an article, "Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*: An Analysis"-

The outstanding contribution of Raja Rao to Indian writing in English is to have struck new paths for a sensibility which is essentially IndianIndian Fiction in English can, it seems to me, make headway by continuing the Raja Rao line, which is to say one must have not merely his technique, but his amazingly high intellectual equipment and awareness of the Indian tradition . . .(256-257).

Raja Rao has created 'new paths of sensibility' by creating a new direction for Indian English. For the readers around the globe, his novels give an insight into our 'sensibility' which is

essentially Indian. They have the flavour of Indian villages. He has carved a niche for our culture and tradition at the international level by writing in English. Therefore one can say that he has promoted Indian culture, mythology and tradition to the international readers through his novels. It is all due to what Narsimhaiah calls this 'amazingly high intellectual equipment and awareness of the Indian tradition'.

Another important quality of the presentation of the material in *Kanthapura* is the chorus actor technique. When the actors in the drama are onlookers, just watching the drama they are chorus actors and suddenly as the need arises they become part of the action in the scene that is from chorus they become actors. It is called the chorus actor technique. This type of technique is often observed in mythological epics and stories. This device has been used in the various incidents of action rendered in the latter half of the novel, such as marching of the Skeffington coolies in the village and village women become chorus actors. The other two events of chorus actor narration are the picketing of the toddy groves and booth and the *Satyanarayan puja* 'worshipping of the lord' procession becoming the procession against auction of land and cutting of crops by coolies of Bombay men. "And as we began to march, . . . we shouted out '*Vande Matram-Matram Vande!*;' and then suddenly from the darkened Brahmin street and the Pariah Street and the Weavers' Street and the lantana growths came back the cry '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!*' and the police were so infuriated that they rushed this side and that, and from this courtyard and that garden, . . . "(K169).

The Bible is considered to be a holy book of Christians. It is very much mythological in nature. It has the same significance as any other holy book of Hindus. Raja Rao is influenced by both the eastern and the western philosophies and mythologies which are reflected in his writing technique. In *Kanthapura* there is an impact of the technique of the holy book Bible. Therefore we

find that there is also an inspiration from the technique of western mythology in his novels. Raja Rao has used The Bible as the source for the characteristic syntactic pattern of *Kanthapura* namely the repetition of short, regular structures. In *Kanthapura* Raja Rao writes, "The Mahatma says we should love even our enemies, and closing his eyes tighter, he slips back into the foldless sheath of the Soul, and sends out rays of love to the east, rays of love to the west, rays of love to the north, rays of love to the south, and love to the earth below and to the sky above, . . ." (K 68).

It is close to what is expressed in the *Family Devotional Study Bible*, "It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking towards the north and three looking towards the east and three looking towards the south and three looking towards the east and the sea as set above upon them all hinder parts were in ward" (1.7.291).

These influences from The Bible show the impact of the western world on Raja Rao. He is also inspired by Shakespeare and is conscious of the rhythm of the language. A striking feature in *Kanthapura* is the planning of words in unusual position at the rhythmic peak of the sentence. Inversion is used as a device which is similar to Shakesperean use of blank verse. Esha Dey makes an apt comparison,

In Shakespeare's blank verse, the use of inversion is essentially an evocative device. Compare these examples from *Kanthapura*: a) "Never will I sell my soul to a pariah" b) Truth must you tell; c) Him they put in morning bus"-with the following from Shakespeare : a) "For Banquo's issue have I fill'd my mind" b) "No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall; c) "But this rough magic/I here abjure". No wonder that Rao has always regarded Shakespeare a major influence on him as a writer.(51-52).

The utility of inversion as a device is not merely decorative, but ingrained in the whole poetic technicality of *Kanthapura*. Like the Shakespearean sentences, inversion becomes a means of focusing attention. In sentences a, b and c our attention is drawn to focus on 'never', 'truth' and 'him'. This 'inversion is essentially an evocative device' and it also adds to the richness of description. It has contributed to marked degree of impressionism in *Kanthapura*. By innovative use of English language Raja Rao establishes that though his roots are Indian but he is influenced by The Bible and western literature too.

In the *Puranas*, the *Harikatha* 'mythological legend' has a single narrator who recites or reads the story. These are generally told by an impersonal narrator say Bramha, Vyasa or sage like Markandaya. In *Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana*, the narrator is Shukdeva. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao has used this *Puranic* technique of storytelling. A senior lady Achakka is the narrator and also a character of the novel. She herself participates in the action described in the plot and keeps all details of her life hidden except an occasional mention of her son. "And I know he would have said: 'Achakka, you are of the Veda Sastra Pravina Krishna Sastri's family, and is it greater for you to ask something of me, or for me to answer "Yea"?' He's the age my Seenu is, and he and Seenu were as, . . . Rama and brother Lakshamana"(K 11).

Kanthapura is also described as a stylized skaz. A skaz is an orientation towards oral speech. The grandmother narrator of *Kanthapura* thus performs the function of a story teller of a skaz who belongs to the common people. The illiterate old lady tells the story in her own style with no art or decoration but at the same time adding a lot of mythological inputs. One can expect only this kind of religious and mythical narration from an old village woman. K.R. Rao Points out:

The manner of narration is typical of the unlettered simplicity of the village woman, which is loaded with spontaneity, raciness and suffused through and

through with a native humour and lyricism. The grandmother thus represents the repertoire of ancient wisdom and sensibility which range links between the past and present with artless perfection. (27)

The 'native humour' here refers to the idioms from Kannada language which is native of Kanthapura. There are two kinds of orientation in the novel, one is the kind of spontaneous oral speech which is natural and the second is the paraphernalia of literary devices like archaic words, idioms rhymes etc which requires careful manipulation by the writer. The old lady narrator not only adds 'ancient wisdom' to her narration but takes the description to new heights by linking it with religion. The story of the freedom struggle is linked with legends of the Ramayana. This 'link between past and present adds to the beauty of narration and gives it a mythical touch.

An important aspect of the technique of novel writing is the art of characterisation in the novel. Characterisation is the art of presentation of the lives and deeds, joys and sorrows of men and women inhabiting a landscape. Presenting characters in an effective manner is an important aspect of story writing. Raja Rao's characters are the projections of the author's own self. His spiritual ideologies and bent of time are incorporated in them. Every aspect of Raja Rao's technique shows the mythological influences. Even the characters are coloured with the mythological design. Characters in *Kanthapura* are simple and primitive people with belief in religion, good and evil and the Gods. Some belong to the educated class such as Moorthy, Ratna and Rangamma.

The speciality of characterization in *Kanthapura* is that Raja Rao individualises every character by connecting him or her with the locality of his or her house or certain special habits, as 'Waterfall Venkamma' or 'Nose- scratching Nanjamma' and 'Beadle Tinaya'.

The men who are villainous or are on the evil side are Bhatta and Bade Khan. Bhatta is opposed to the Congress party as he is orthodox and wealthy. "When Bhatta heard of the Congress Committee, he said to himself, 'Now this is bad business,' and seated on the veranda, he began to think, . . . every squirrel has his day, and now for every Congress member the interest will go up to 10 and 20 per cent"(K 83). Like a typical villain of the story, he plots against the hero Moorthy. He plans for his excommunication and is a very greedy traditionalist. He accepts the dictates of the Swami and rejects Gandhi and the mythical aura around him. Another opponent of Moorthy is Bade Khan. He works for Britishers and beats men in agitations. There is Ramkrishnyya who is skilled in recitation and interpretation of holy books and therefore held in high esteem. Another important character is Range Gowda who is a rich man and whose words are law.

In the picture gallery of village women in *Kanthapura*, the most important is Rangamma who takes charge of freedom movement after Moorthy's arrest. She exhorts women to form *Sevika Sangh* 'organisation for serving' to fight like Laxmi Bai. Ratna is another character who is considered to be a mouthpiece of Raja Rao. She revolts against the traditional widow norms. The narrator says, "Then Rangamma's sister Kamamma came along with her widowed daughter Ratna, . . . who not only went about the streets alone like a boy, . . . she kept her bangles and her nose-rings and ear-rings, and when she was asked why she behaved as though she hadn't lost her husband, she said that that was nobody's business, . . ." (K 37). She is psychologically justified in her rebellion to the orthodox concept of the child widow.

These women characters in an ultimate analysis reject many mythical believes regarding Indian woman. Last but not the least is the most important character Achhakka,

the narrator without whom we wouldn't have known the story of *Kanthapura*. Here, Raja Rao differs a little bit from the *Puranic* technique in a way that the narrator is also one of the characters whereas in *Puranas* the narrator like the chorus in Greek plays remains indifferent. Achhakka is not indifferent but totally involved in the story which reminds one of the women of Canterbury who form the chorus in Eliot's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and who are also the participant in action of the play. An example of chorus of this play is already mentioned earlier in this chapter. Raja Rao's characters are not just the ordinary characters but they are people with spirits and soul and with an urge for self realization. Even the villainous characters undergo self realization at some or the other point of time in the story. Raja Rao's primary concern is to convey the philosophical and metaphysical views through his characters and writings as is done in a traditional manner in the Vedas and the *Puranas*. Another major influence of *Puranas* in Raja Rao's novels is of providing the mythical frame work through the religious rites and rituals.

(I) Mythical Framework

The rites and rituals shown in the novels of Raja Rao are an important aspect of the mythical framework of the novels. The performance of rites and rituals are not part of the myth but they provide a mythical structure to the story. For instance, the offerings of coconut and betel nut at the altar of deity are frequently found in *Kanthapura*. All the rites and customs are actually taken from the epics and the *Puranas*. As these epics clearly explain as to how the religious practices have to be performed. The method of keeping fasts and doing *poojas* 'worship' is shown in these scriptures. Therefore these rituals when depicted in Raja Rao's novels provide a mythical atmosphere in the village. In *Valmiki Ramayaan* when preparations are going on for Lord Rama's coronation then both Rama and Sita keep fast and worship according to rituals,

Tatrashrinvan sukhaa vaachah suutamaagadhavan

Dinaam

Puurvaam sandhyaamupaasiino jajaapa yata-

Maanasah(2.6.6)

Listening to the pleasing verse of professional reciters, Rama worshipped the early sunrise and meditated on Gayatri mantra with undisturbed mind.(trans.Rao and Murty)

These kind of descriptions as given in the Ramayana, where Lord Rama is himself seen reciting mantra and worshipping God, inspires people to follow him. Lord Rama is an ideal for millions in Hindu religion. Rama's activities as described in the Ramayana, are followed by many. Therefore in *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao has described in detail how Hindus of the village perform rituals as described in scriptures. Kanthapurians offer Goddess Kenchamma 'saree' and gold drink to ward off the malefic influences. During the ploughing time they wait for the rohinistar, " 'Oh! Tomorrow is the rohini star and people will yoke their bulls to the plough'(K 114). Similarly to plough through fields is considered to be fruitful only if the omen of the eagle-the vehicle of Goddess Kechamma, shows itself. The villagers light bonfires, sing and dance in Kenchamma's honour. When Moorthy is in prison then Kanthapurians sing *bhajans* 'hymns' with conch and camphor, clapping and the smell of sandal paste engulf the environment. The villagers while praying to Goddess say, "And when Moorthappa comes, let the rice be fine as filigree and the mangoes yellow as gold, and we shall go out, horn and trumpet and gong before us, and break coconuts at his feet"(K 117).

Fasting is an important ritual. It is mentioned in the Vedas and *Puranas* that a person who is on a spiritual quest must observe self restrain with the sense organs. Hunger is one of the needs of sense organs. By exercising control over hunger one can practice self restrain. It is also believed

that self discipline observed through fasting makes God happy and He grants the devotees their wishes. In *Bhagavad-Gita*, Lord Krishna says,

Raga-dvesa-vimuktas tu

visayan indriyas caran

atma-vasyair vidheyatma

prasadam adhigacchati(2.64)

A person free from all attachments and aversion and able to control his senses through regulative principles of freedom can obtain the complete mercy of the Lord.(trans. Prabhupad 154)

During the freedom movement, Mahatma Gandhi underwent fast many a times. Similarly Moorthy undergoes fasts several times. The congregational worship ritual for appeasing Kenchamma is another instance of the mythic fashion and style. In order to please Kenchamma for the recovery of Moorthy, Ratna performs rituals, "I shall offer ten coconuts and a kumkum worship. God, keep him alive for me. Then she rose and fell prostrate before the gods in the sanctum"(K 72).

Rice and coconuts are to the Kanthpurians, traditional symbols of fertility, of prosperous marital status of a woman. These symbols and rituals help us in understanding the characters and their viewpoints. The villagers also celebrate various festivals in the temple like *Sankarajayanthi* 'Birth of Lord Shankara'. They organize *Bhajans* 'hymns' and distribute *Prasada* 'food offered to God' during these festivals. Here is a description of one such occasion, "How grand the *Sankarajayanthi* was! Old Ramakrishnayya read chapter after chapter . . . and this way and that we had quite a marriage army and they served like veritable princes . . . There used to be bhajan"(K 13-14).

Towards the end there is also a mention of *Satyanarayana pooja* 'worship of Lord *Satyanarayana*'. Raja Rao also mentions the rituals related to the ceremony. "Ratna stopped every hundred steps and blew the conch three times, and camphors were lit again, and the coconuts broken, and *Satyanarayan maharaj ki Jai!* was shouted out into the night air" (K 168). These rituals had an important place in the novels of Raja Rao. He achieves a depth and artistic blending of the mythical and the real.

The description of these rituals and customs help Raja Rao in presenting a point of view and thus explains the characters and situations. Meenakshi Mukerjee rightly points out in the chapter "Myth as Technique". "Thus the reference to the rituals of ploughing, of worship and sacrifice, becomes a means of establishing the atmosphere in which the village live, as well as a device for concretizing the point of view, i.e. delineation of character of the unsophisticated narrator" (142).

The 'unsophisticated narrator', is none other than 'Achakka', an old illiterate woman, who does not know the modern way of storytelling. It is natural for her to explain everything through the mythical angle. It makes her narration not only effective but also interesting. Delineation of the character that is the descriptions of characters can be achieved with the help of depiction of these rituals for example the characters of Ratna and Rangamma can be understood through these symbolic customs. Ratna's leadership quality and strong headed nature becomes evident when she leads the religious procession of *Satyanarayana pooja* 'worship of lord *Satyanarayana*'. "Ratna blows the conch three times and says, 'Stop!', and we stop, and he says to Ratna, 'Where do you go?', and Ratna says, head up, 'Where the gods will,'. . .and she gave three long blasts with her conch"(K 169). Raja Rao uses the device of mythicising facts in order to give his narrator an exalted status.

(J) *Sthala-Purana* 'Localised Myth' as a Religious Myth

Raja Rao in his Foreword to *Kanthapura* observes,

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village-Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate.(K 5)

These lines explain the concept of *Sthala-Purana* 'localised myth'. Raja Rao believed that *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth' is a part of every village or town in India. Every place is associated with some story of Gods and Goddesses making that place a place of religious importance with a local legend called as *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth'. This *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth' gives us the myth of religion in *Kanthapura*. "*Sthala-puranas* 'localised myth' are collection of short stories that have clustered around individual shrines and their environment are by definitions repositories of localised myths and legends"(K.S.Venkatramani 72). The repositories of fables of myths of a particular place are called *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth' of that place. The village *Kanthapura* is full of myths of religion or *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth'. The novel is regarded by critics as *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth'. The religious activities and religious myths of the village are an important aspect of the novel. A very important legend of the place is that of the timeless figure of Kenchamma, the presiding deity of the village.

The temple of Kenchamma is a significant place in the novel. It is here that the activities of freedom movement, observances of festivals and religious functions take place. As Gandhi is described as God, so everything related to him takes place in and around the temples. The *Harikatha* 'mythological legend' is an important activity taking place in the temple, where stories

of Gods and goddesses are narrated or sung by elderly people or sometimes the priest of the temple. There is a folk song which evokes in us the images and attitudes as to what Kenchamma means to the people of Kanthapura,

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,

Goddess benign and bounteous,

Mother of earth , blood of life,

Harvest queen, rain crowned,

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,

Goddess benign and Bounteous. (K 9).

By singing such *bhajans* or 'Hymns', the inhabitants of the village invoke goddess Kenchamma. They strongly believe that with her blessings all problems could be solved. The myth of Kenchamma as told is, "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, . . .Kenchamma hill is all red"(K 8). This is the *sthalapurana* 'localised myth' of Kanthapura. It reminds us of the goddess Durga killing Mahishassur in *Shri Durga Saptshati Sachitra*

ततः सोऽपि पदाऽऽक्रान्तस्तया निजमुखात्ततः

अर्घं निश्क्रान्त एवासीद् देव्या वीर्येण संवृतः (3.41.95)

The demon Mahishassur came out of his body in a different form and started fighting with Goddess Durga. Then the goddess in anger cut his head with a sword.(trans mine 95).

अर्धं निश्क्रान्त एवासौ युध्यमानोमहासुरः

तया महासिना देव्या िरि छत्त्वा निपातितः (3.42.95)

Thus the whole army of the demon ran away in fury and chaos. All the Gods were delighted.(trans mine 95)

People in the village believed in Kechamma ardently, that she would never disappoint them. It is shown that there are two kinds of existence in the village past and present. One is of Kenchamma which is eternal as she is the presiding deity. The second temple is of Kanthapurishwari, Gandhian activities take place in this temple. It is symbolic of the present existence. It provides the venue of *Harikatha* 'mythological legend' in which Gandhi is introduced as the new avatar. It is here that all the political activities like civil disobedience and oath taking ceremony take place. From the temple, Moorthy encourages people to participate in the freedom movement, and practice Gandhian principle of non-violence and *Swadeshi* 'own country' movement. There is intermingling of religion and political myths. The political activity of the citizens gathers strength from the religious faith. Towards the end of the novel a political procession is taken out in the guise of religious procession. Political activities are mixed with religion in the novel.

Another localized myth is of the river Himavathy, considered to be the daughter of Kenchemma. Himavathy is to Kanthapurians what Ganga is to all Indians. A holy dip in the river purges them of all evils. Moorthy is asked to take bath in the river to get purified again as he had visited Pariah quarters. There is a myth that Kenchemma plays with Himavathy at night. An example of blending of myth and reality occurs when an elderly person dies and his last rites are performed. The legend says that the river Himavathy stood silently to pay respects to the man and as the rites were over it came in its fury and washed away the ashes. The narrator says, "The next

day the rain set in . . . but all of a sudden the river began to swell and when it came crawling by the pyre, people asked, 'What shall we do? . . . but the swell bubbled out by the pyre . . . when the body was ashed down whole and only a few cinders lay blinking . . . a huge swell churned round the hill and swept the bones and ashes away"(K 106).

Kanthapurians believe in the myths related to the river and regarded it as a part and parcel of their lives. Meenakshi Mukherjee says: "As soon as the local legend has been narrated and established, its function becomes the same as that of a more well known myth"(135).

As Mukherjee rightly points out the myths of goddess Kenchamma and river Himvathy become reality for the villagers. They do not consider it as myth but believe in them as they believe in other Gods and Goddesses. These myths are related with the religious beliefs of the people. Through the stories of Kenchamma and Himavathy, Raja Rao has depicted the religious mindset of the villagers and thus he has mythologised the reality. The reality of the freedom struggle is also influenced by the mythical thinking of the people.

Kanthapura is conspicuous as a novel for its picturesque description of the village scene, the Gandhian influence, the social custom and malpractices existing in the society that time. Raja Rao has elevated the Gandhian movement to a mythological plane. This mythicising of the movement adds new dimensions to the struggle for freedom. Raja Rao also projects the freedom struggle as a quest for the reality through karma *marg* 'path'. Gandhi is the practitioner of karma philosophy and therefore karma philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, forms the backbone of *Kanthapura*. However Hindu philosophy also advocates two more paths for the realization of the reality- the *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' and the *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion'. Raja Rao who believes in *Vedanta* philosophy is also of the opinion that different paths as per one's temperament and level may be chosen to approach the reality. His protagonist Ramaswamy in the next novel *The Serpent*

and the Rope, is an intellectual unlike Moorthy who is a man of actions. *Jnana marg* 'path of knowledge', therefore, appears to be more appropriate for him.