CHAPTER-VI
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND STYLE

The success of a literary artist lies not only in his ideas but also in his expression. The style reveals the nature and the intention of the writer. Raja Rao and L.S. Ramamirtham wrote for different readers and their aims and challenges were different. Raja Rao’s oft-quoted preface to Kanthapura expresses his problems in writing in English for the Indian readers. In the preface he observes that “the telling has not been easy” (K: 5). He had to “convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (K: 5). Raja Rao has experimented it in Kanthapura and in all the novels that followed he has tried to give expression to the thought and the feeling, the culture and ideology of the Indians in English. As Kachru rightly says, “what Rao articulated in his credo, he has accomplished very well indeed during his last 50 years” (1988: 582).

Raja Rao has achieved this by using language creatively. To begin with, instead of the western narrative technique, he has used the ancient Indian Puranic method of story telling, which according to him would be natural and true to our climate. Kanthapura is narrated by an old woman Achakka. As Raja Rao has stated in his preface the story is told in the oral tradition of story telling without any break. He says, “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). The Western method of chapter division is not followed and it is one continuous tale. The long sentences show the flow of thought. This technique is employed in many of his works. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Rama tells his story and in *The Cat and Shakespeare* Ramakrishna Pai shares his experiences with the readers. In all these novels the narrators talk to the readers, as it will be clear from the following lines:

Our village - I don’t think you have ever heard about it - Kanthapura is its name and it is in the province of Kara (K: 7).

I shall be honest, there is no need to be otherwise (TSTR: 243).

I don’t know, if you’ve heard of a bilva tree - it has three leaves and a crust of thick horns (TCS: 10).

In many of his short stories also this method is followed. This narrative method enables the writer to go on in a friendly conversational style and also to present freely the reflections of the narrator.

Slightly different from this technique is the one employed in *The Chess Master and his Moves* which, in the “stream of consciousness” method, presents the story through the consciousness of the character: “You remember, J. You said to me: Tell me you need me and I’ll come”
Both these narrative methods give the writer ample opportunity for portraying the characters, by presenting the various moods, and conflicts and the spiritual, inward realities of the character.

Similar narrative techniques are seen in L.S. Ramamirtham's works also. He has employed the stream of consciousness technique in many of his works. The incidents are presented through the consciousness of the character. This style suits the nature of the subject matter. His concern with character, the inner realities, and the evolution of character is given best expression through the stream of consciousness technique. He is alert and keen and is conscious of maintaining the artistic unity and uses the technique to a great advantage in his works. In his novels Apitā and KaJuku and also in many of his short stories like "Nēraŋkaṭ", "Māyamān", "Tīkkulī" only to mention a few, he portrays the individual's emotion, feeling, ego, desire for self-actualization, protest etc. In "Tīkkulī" the jealousy of the wife and the change in her attitude after the accident has been brought out well. She pities her husband who is now helpless and dependant. In Apitā, Ampi's conflicts - his infatuation for a girl much younger to him and his fear of crossing the limits - receive the focus of attention. In KaJuku also the protagonist's experiences are presented as they are recollected by him. He also uses first person narrative and third person narrative in some of his
works. In some short stories, like Raja Rao, the author himself narrates the story to the readers ("Rāja Rāñī"). In this method the writer uses an explanatory, friendly, conversational style. In some stories like "Ṭīpak" the events are narrated by two characters, a device that enables the writer to give different points of view and at the same time avoid monotony. When the story is narrated by a character the writer is careful about the suitability of style. In "Jiṅkli", the incidents are presented by a boy as perceived by him. The boy’s fear, admiration and other feelings are expressed in his language. Even the similes are from the boy’s world: “His face shrank like the heated Appaḷam” (Tayā: 129).

This appropriateness of style one can notice in Raja Rao also. Even in the Indianized English he brings out the difference in the language used by the educated, uneducated, young and old. In Kanthapura Achakka uses a language that is typical of an old woman. She expresses her feelings without any inhibition:

If rains come not, you fall at her feet and say, Kenchamma, Goddess, you are not kind to us. Our fields are full of younglings and you have given us no water. Tell us Kenchamma why do you seek to make our stomachs burn (K: 8).
In the same novel, he distinguishes the style of the Harikatha man and Moorthy and many others from that of Achakka. Moorthy’s conversations would be a good illustration. While explaining Nanjamma about the advantages of spinning, he says, “It is your’s sister. And every month, I shall come to ask you how many yards you have spun. And every month I shall gather your yarn and send it to the city. And the city people will reduce you for the cotton charges and for the rest, you have your cloth” (K: 26). He uses the language of the educated. As Yamuna Kachru points out, “In the Indian socio cultural context as in many others, the speaker normally addresses the listener as mother, brother, sister or with some other term in social interaction.... In many of the world’s languages including Indian languages “Uncle, Aunt, older brother, older sister etc, are appropriate terms of address in ordinary circumstances for familiar persons as well as strangers older than oneself” (1998: 94).

But there is a marked difference in the narrative technique and style of these writers. The turn at the end of the story is an interesting aspect of L.S.Ramamirtham’s style. Fatima Jesumani observes that most of L.S.Ramamirtham’s stories move from one mood or attitude to an opposite mood like from enmity to love, doubt to faith, separation to union etc. Since feelings form the central theme of these stories the climax also deals with
that. In a few stories, there are turning points in incidents (1997: 170). 
Pärkavi (Ita]kal) realizes, that she has conceived and there is a change in 
the mother in law's attitude. In Añjali, Taraninki, who loves her husband 
very much, requests him to marry another woman since she is not blessed 
with a child and realizes that she has conceived when she gets the 
information about his second marriage. Tayā's husband comes back in 
"Tayā" and in "Mâyamān" the son comes to know that Cakku is his half- 
sister. Through these turning points the writer brings out the irony of life 
and the meaninglessness of our actions. The unexpected end strengthens 
the quest aspect in his works. In Raja Rao's stories the reader does not 
come across such a sudden turn or a surprising end.

Juxtaposing dreams and reality, recollection of the past and the 
action in the present is a technique used quite frequently in 
L.S.Ramamirtham's works. Even a word or a small item that connects the 
past and the present might provide the connecting link. In Apita, Ampi while 
looking at the rainwater is reminded of Sakuntala, his childhood 
companion: "Rain water was falling on the glass pane of the window. 
Sakuntala's tears" (Apita: 16). In "Nēraṅkaṭ" the central character recollects 
what happened in the office as he is talking to his wife. Here the connection 

is provided by the words used by his wife. A similar expression having been
used earlier by the manager in his office, he goes back to the past. The past and the present are connected artistically with economy of diction. This method of linking the past and the present, dream and reality, by a single word or phrase or action though artistic, sometimes results in obscurity. Even the turn at the end is sometimes only hinted at, by a word or phrase. In Raja Rao on the other hand, especially in his short stories, the narrative is straightforward even though he uses the stream of consciousness method and the flash-back technique.

Raja Rao has by various linguistic devices attempted to Indianise English. As Atma Ram observes, “Raja Rao works to effect a congruity between experience and expression, the inter-penetration of matter and manner. He employs numerous devices to bend the language as it were to produce the desired effect” (1984: 13). He has translated the native similes and metaptors, idioms and culture specific phrases that are used in the vernacular languages. The following examples show how English has been Indianised:

Well, when you have drunk the Himavathy waters, you can’t ever look different (TSTR: 281).

Go and get some milk, you she buffalo (TSTR: 281).

They already think that I am a cloth in their wash bucket (TSTR: 259).
Well, if the heavens will it, and the elders bless it let our family creepers link each other (K: 29).

And we say, “But ask them to send it soon for ten heads make a herd and one head a cow” (K: 126).

The use of adjectives, as used in the vernacular languages also lends the language a native colour. Some examples are, “coffee-planter Ramayya, Fig-tree house people, corner-house Moorthy and cart-wheel Sivarama. By using words associated with Indian culture, like the names of festivals, food, places, functions etc., he has “infused the tempo of Indian life into...English expression” (K: 5). ‘Karthik’, ‘Harikatha’, ‘Sankara Jayanthi’, ‘Payasama’, ‘thothi house’ and ‘Mayavada’ are only a few of the numerous instances.

In *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Chess Master and his Moves*, a number of Sanskrit and Hindi words are used respectively. Sankrit hymns and explanations of philosophical ideas from Sanskrit texts are rendered in English. In his *The Cat and Shakespeare*, he has also tried the Upanishadic conversational style:

Where does water come from?

From the tap

And the water in the tap?
From the lake
And the water in the lake
From the sky (TCS: 46)

Raja Rao has tried to convey the thought from Sanskrit texts without changing the style of the original and this he has achieved by changing the sentence structure of English. The following sentences would illustrate the point:

Not one is the Truth, yet not two is the truth. Savitri proved that I could be I (TSTR: 172).

Not wavelet or crest, however breathless with foam is life water is the meaning of life, or rather, the meaning of life is lila, play (TSTR: 217).

What fear of his enemies has he who worships you? The Gods who worship your feet, stamping on beast and noose, having abandoned the form of Man-lion, whose towering mane reached the summit of Mount Sumeru and whose fingers are outstretched to tear (the breast of) Hiranyakasibu, now worship the lion, the enemy of the elephant (TCMM: 133).
Raja Rao uses various other stylistic devices too, like repetition, additional modification in sentences, in order to bring the rhythm and structure of the Indian languages:

He went round and round the God and Goddess, once, twice, thrice, curling himself at the foot of the divine couple (PR: 11).
That Motilal, the wretched bania, was poor as a cur-poor as a cur in a pariah street (PR: 61).
But my son, who can ever imagine that your own brothers are going to murder you, so that they may have the money - holy money too - holy money that your grandfathers have offered to the Gods (PR: 8-9).

Kachru mentions the aphoristic use of language as one of the linguistic devices that contribute to what has been termed Rao's metaphysical style (1998: 70).

To have pain is to give pain (TSTR: 369).
Rejoice in the rejoicement of others (TSTR: 369).
Pain is the residue of action (TSTR: 369).

Meenākshi Mukherjee points out that though many other writers attempted stylistic experiments, their experiments are limited to the dialogue of the characters thus helping in characterization. But according
to her, Raja Rao’s stylistic experiments, special effects permeate his entire style. She goes on to add that even a perceptive foreigner can attempt the first type whereas the second is a far more subtle and difficult undertaking (1971: 187).

His use of images, similes and metaphors also displays the originality of his style. Some of his similes are very striking because they are apt, concrete and culture-specific:

- Trees indeed do grow in Khandesh. But they stand shaven and somber like widows before their husband’s pyre (PR: 22).
- You know there are Sadhus, so they say for I am ignorant of such things, who are supposed to eat three pinches of sand one day and the mantra does the rest. For three months they need no food. I am such a sadhu dispensing numbers. I give magical cards, and my wife eats pearl rice (TCS: 12).
- But Gauri would pass by them all like a holy wife among men.... (PR: 37).

Even when Ramakrishna Pai (TCS) describes the nature of the boils on his skin, he describes it from the point of view of an Indian with a sense of humour: “The boils - they’re of British make and like everything British it works without your knowing” (TCS: 16).
Raja Rao acknowledges the influence of the French writers Gide and Malraux in his writings. Atma Ram quotes from Stories from India, where he has said, “Gide influenced my literary style and Malraux my literary expression” (1984: 9-10). His brief poetic expressions like the following reveal the influence of the French writers.

‘Was Benares a city or a Sanskrit statement (TSTR: 14).

Affection is just a spot in the geography of the mind. (TSTR: 20)

The sun was spreading his feathers like an amorous peacock (PR: 22)

Where the cauvery gallops forth into the narrow gorge, gurgling and swishing and rising majestically into air like a seven headed cobra (PR: 48).

As J.P. Sharma points out that, “Raja Rao has made a rich use of French, Italian, Sanskrit, Kannada and Hindustani words” (1980: 11).

“Ça Va?” answers Jayalakshmi, adjusting her necklace.

“Est qu’on va le trouver aujourd’hui,’ he continues, the last word said with such heaviness.

“Si le Seigneur veut”

“Mais quel seigneur?”

“Lui.” she said with a mischievous smile, as if thinking of someone far away, very far away (TCMM: 95).
Many critics have already spoken of the enigmatic nature of his works and have discussed the reasons. The complexity arises from various factors. Being philosophical, the writer has tried to give expression to his surmises about the nature of the Absolute, the spiritual truth. Complexity of thought thus leads to complexity of expression.

Secondly, in order to express complex ideas, he has resorted to Sanskrit texts and has tried to translate them into English. The structure of the two languages being different, the English rendering has resulted in complexity. Frequent use of words from Indian languages like Hindi, Kannada, Sanskrit and from French adds to the reader's problem of comprehension. Raja Rao, being intent in his search for Truth has read widely and brings in a lot of analogies from different fields- from myths, history, mathematics and so on. There are a number of Hindu, Buddhist and European mythical analogies like the Satyavan-Savitri myth and the Radha-Krishna myth and the renunciation of The Buddha that recur in his novels. By the use of myth, by comparing the past and the present, the writer successfully conveys his point of view. He mythicises the contemporary and thereby gives the contemporary event a significance. Myths are also employed for digressional purposes and also as similes that help in the concretization of abstract philosophical ideas. However, a
reader, unfamiliar with these mythical parables or historical events finds it complex. Raja Rao also uses symbols to convey his abstract ideas. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, he uses the Sun as a symbol for the all knowing Guru. "Such a Sun I have seen" (TSTR: 401). In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Ramakrishna Pai, while narrating his experience says, "I have a system of no logic and that is the story" (TCS: 30). Throughout the novel "Cat" is a symbol for motherhood and mother Goddess and the writer professes the *Bhakti Marga*, the way of absolute surrender. There are many other symbols in the novel like building house with two storey, crossing the wall etc. which will be intelligible only if the reader has some *Vedantic* knowledge. Otherwise, these symbols will add to the complexity. But, for the readers who have some knowledge of Indian philosophy, these symbols are loaded with meaning.

Curiously enough, L.S.Ramamirtham's works are also considered as complex and he writes thus in defence: “From the time I started writing, there is a complaint that I am an incomprehensible writer. I have tried to analyse the statement and I feel that the language gets shaped according to the subject” (MPT: 209). L.S.Ramamirtham is indeed one of the few writers in Tamil who tried to give form to philosophical speculations. The metaphysical overtone in his writings is difficult for the average reader.
However, the serious readers with a literary and philosophical background appreciate the thought and style of L.S. Ramamirtham.

The complexity in his writing is partly due to the subject and partly due to his narrative technique and style. The Advaitic notions that find expression in his stories and the symbolic language that he uses to express them result in complexity. In majority of his works he uses the Brahmin dialect of Tamil in conversations, narrations (if it is narrated by a character from the Brahmin family), which may not be familiar to many readers. In order to convey abstract ideas, to throw light on characters, to describe a situation or feeling, he brings in mythical analogies. Sometimes the myth is implied as in the story “En Piriyamulla cinēkitanukku” where by using the phrase “Patim dehi” he compares the heroine Anu with Nalayini. Philosophical notions are often expressed symbolically and this again results in complexity:

We are unreal.

You are also unreal. In order to deceive yourself in your laya you created us. Unreal over unreal, we are devouring each other (Aval: 78).

...Is She really there? Is that She or He? If we leave the argument to the learned what remains is the beauty of thought. Probably this is the way She expresses Herself (Aval: 399).
L.S. Ramamirtham has been greatly praised for his poetic prose. Even the critics who object to his obscurity, appreciate the poetic quality of his prose. Padma Narayan writes about the musical quality of his prose;

L.S. Ramamirtham’s language is like a river that flows, now over rocks and now through the plains - His language is very often labyrinthine and works through riddles - how else could the meandering thoughts of an active mind be expressed in words? and has to be read as you would listen to pure unalloyed musical notes, let them soak through and gradually make sense to you" (Hindu: 17th May 2001-Metroplus)

The reader cannot miss the alliteration, assonance and the rhythm in his prose. He says his interest in music could be seen in the construction of his sentences. L.S. Ramamirtham’s ambition as a writer is to “reduce the gap between the word and its meaning” (MPT: 188). He describes how he used to wait for days and months to get the precise expression as he believes that writing is a ‘Sadhana’ and the writer a ‘sadhaka’ (MPT: 26).

L.S. Ramamirtham has indeed carved a niche for himself in the Tamil literary field by his individual style. His poetic prose and his narrative technique distinguish him from the other writers of his time. His metaphors, similes and images reveal the poet in him, give shape to his feelings and to describe
appearances and actions. This Tamil novelist acknowledges that he has tried to imitate the style of Hemingway and to modify it to suit our culture (MPT: 162). His similes are expressive, concrete and apt. Many of his similes are new and striking. Here are a few sparks that illustrate his poetic skill.

The moon, like a crimson eye kicking the horizon, rose at a distance (Pc: 169)

The face that looked like a tuber plucked from the ground (Pc: 38).

The clouds were holding one another and rolling with one another like quarrelling puppies (Tuḷaci: 4).

In Pārkatāl he describes a futile exercise in the following manner: “Like searching in the noon for the diamond that had fallen in the sands of the desert” (PK: 79).

He describes beautifully the feeling created by the music heard in a silent atmosphere: “The music from her Tampoor, chased him like a snake” (Tayā: 41). There are also metaphysical expressions and images that enhance the poetic quality. While describing their days of prosperity he writes, “The magic wand days started from then onwards” (CN: 200). The pleasure he felt at the sight of his mother is evoked through a rich image: “The
quill of peace fell on me gently at the sight of my mother" (CN: 201). In another story “Nēraṅkaṁ the innocent pure laughter of the child is described thus: “crystal pure laughter-I could feel the water flowing from the depth of the heart cleansing every part of the body as it was flowing”. (Tayā: 69)

He uses concrete images to describe feelings that are otherwise inexpressible: “He felt as if he sank into the wide, still depth of her eyes and could not escape. Even after he came out of the ward he felt as if he left a part in the depth of her eyes” (Tayā: 67). An extended imagination of personification could be found in Añjali which took form from the writer’s desire to visualize the nature of elements in human form. “Taraṅkinī”, the first one of the collection, presents a woman, pure, loving and selfless as the river water. “Jamatakñī”, describes how the protagonist’s dear and near ones are consumed by fire, which plays a great role in his life. “Pūrani” sketches a woman as patient and benevolent as the earth. “Kāyatri” portrays a wife who wants to be free like the wind. “Ēkā” describes the life of a woman who is pure and broad-minded like the sky.

The styles differ as the two novelists wrote in two different languages and for different readers. However, there is also a similarity and this similarity can be attributed to the influence of Hindu scriptures and puranas on them. They have tried both the ancient narrative technique and the
stream of consciousness technique. The influence of the Hindu tradition could be perceived in their use of myths and symbols. However, the complexity is more because of thought than style in Raja Rao and more because of expression than thought in L.S. Ramamirtham.

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