

# Nuances of Narratology in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

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**Abstract – Narratology refers a discipline of humanities which is devoted to the study of the logic, principles and customs of narrative representation. Narratology denotes not only theory and the study of narrative but also narrative structure and the distinctive ways that these affect our perception. Being a multicultural country, India possesses numerous style of storytelling. While some narrate, other use props like masks, puppet etc. And few narrate story through dance & music. Raja Rao portrayed 'Katha' an Indian style of religious storytelling in the novel *Kanthapura*. This article attempts to exhibit the narrative elements and techniques used by Raja Rao through his significant novel *Kanthapura*. Further this article throws light on the facets of Narratology in the select novels of Chetan Bhagat. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao distinctively employed religious metaphor as a narrative technique by keeping in tone and content of the novel. The narrator of the novel, shrewdly mingles the past with the present and by means of the religious metaphor she explains the subtleties of freedom movement. In *Kanthapura*, he depicted witness narrator vividly. Chetan Bhagat employed innovative narrative technique such as news, diary entries, scrapbook, transcripts, telephonic conversation, speech sessions, SMS, e-mails, epilogues and prologues etc. Chetan Bhagat employs technological devices and methods in his story-telling which attracts numerous readers.**

**Keywords – Raja Rao, Chetan Bhagat, Narratology, religious metaphor, witness narrator etc.**

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Raja Rao is a significant writer of Indian English Literature, known for his distinctive themes and techniques. Being an ardent supporter of tradition and culture, he has made numerous acclaimed experiments and innovations in the technique of the novel. In addition to this, he is known for his ideological mind, many of his novels are filled with abundance of philosophy which bestows knowledge to the society and the readers. Raja Rao's contribution as a writer and a philosophical humanist to Indian English Literature is laudable and memorable. This article endeavours to exhibit the narrative components and techniques employed by Raja Rao in his momentous novel *Kanthapura*. Further this article throws light on the facets of Narratology in the select novels of Chetan Bhagat.

A meticulous analysis of his novels discloses that he has been very much interested in introducing novel form in his writings which is deviating from the conventional writing style such as story telling as we found in the Puranas, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* etc. Instead of using western style, Raja Rao employs the ancient Puranic way of story-telling. He believes that this method bestows the Indian atmosphere in the story. Throughout his novels he uses Indian phrases and words which related to Indian

culture by which he endeavours to Indianize English Language. The writer's quest for an ideal narrative technique suitable for depiction of Indian life, sensibilities and his ideological concerns begins with his eminent novel *Kanthapura* which was published in the year 1938.

Commonly Narrative is defined as a story and it can be explained by means of images, songs, poetry, fiction and non-fiction as well. Enormously, narrative technique is an aesthetic enterprise and it is merging vine of the narrative. Supriya Bhandari in her seminal essay 'Emerging Narrative Techniques in Indian English Fiction' beautifully conveys the qualities of a narrator as "a narrator detains the past, holds the present and prepares the reader for future" (Bhandari 47)

In conventional stories, narrative techniques are discussed by means of point of view in the novel. Generally there are three points of view which denotes to the outlook that the narrator holds in connection to the events of the story. In the first person narration, the narrator is one among the characters, performs in the happenings and also give comments in the events. In the second person, the narrator tells a story about the readers or

viewers. This kind of narration is very rare in literature as most of the stories are written in either first or third person narration. In the third person narration, the narrator narrates the plot in impersonal manner and omniscient view point where the narrator is God like and can also craft his presence through vivid images and descriptions. Some significant narratological techniques that are commonly employed are Internal and External point of view, the flashback technique, multiple point of view and the method of employing symbols and myths.

The method of multiple point of view portrays the glimpses of kinds of human attitudes. It is mostly appropriate for depicting the convoluted character and the kinds of experiences and shades of life. In modern literature, the method of using symbols and myths in the story is very popular. Through the diverse symbols and distinctive myths the writers are exhibiting their profound perspectives of life in their narrative. This has become an inevitable part of technique in Narratology.

In the method of external viewpoint, the narrator is like omniscient who knows the past, the present and the future. On the other hand the method of internal point of view is like autobiographical narration where the narrator happens to be the central character of the novel. The novelist Raja Rao beautifully employs this method of internal point of view narration in all his novels. His first novel followed this technique of Internal point of view narration i.e. witness – narrator. The flashback technique reveals the past to the present situation. This method is substantiated as a reverie, memory or a confession by one of the characters.

Most of Raja Rao's novels discuss Indian ideology, the metaphysical and man's spiritual quest for emancipation. *Kanthapura* was his first stupendous novel, it revolves around the story of the influence of Gandhiji and Satyagraha movement on the little village of Kanthapura which is the miniature of rural India. The narrative of the novel revolves around Moorthy, the protagonist and the Brahmin disciple of Gandhiji and the rebellion that yields a catharsis of violence. The whole novel vividly pictures the socio and political milieu of the Indian freedom struggle from 1919 to 1930. In this novel, he narrates the story in oral tradition of storytelling without any pause. While depicting the geographical features of the village, it seems as if the novelist is talking to the readers.

Our village – I do not think that you have ever been heard about Kanthapura. It is one of the province of Kara. It has High Ghat and mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a center of cardamom and coffee, rise and sugarcane. (*Kanthapura* 7)

The tiny village Kanthapura which was snoozed for centuries all of a sudden comes alive because of

Gandhi's non-violence movement in the nineteen-thirties. The plot of the novel seems to delineate on the base of Rao's own village which is Harihalli. The village looks isolated, there is no proper road facility and there are uncomfortable natural elements. The revolt in the village was not just for political emancipation but also to unfetter humanity for their fundamental rights to lead their life.

In this novel, Raja Rao distinctively employed religious metaphor as a narrative technique by keeping in tone and content of the novel. The character Jayaramacharya who is called as Hari-katha-man shrewdly blends religion with politics when he talks to the illiterate villagers. "Hari-katha-man, he talks of Damyanthi and Sankuntala and Yashoda, he must say something about India and something about Swaraj. The subtlety of the Gandhian thought and the complex political situation of pre-independence could be explained to the illiterate villagers only through legends and religious stories of Gods" (*Kanthapura* 104). The novelist is laudable in choosing the narrator and his narrators are commonly astute and shrewd. In this novel, the narrator Achakka is the epitome of faiths and aspirations of all the women in the village. Her blending of poetry and politics enhances the level of reality.

As we comprehend, the different stages of the story seeks different modes of narrative technique. However the novelist adopts both the ways of puranic art of story-telling and modern experiments. On this M.K. Naik aptly comments as "The Puranas abound in digressions, in episodes and passages connected by only a tenuous thread with the main stream of the narrative" (Naik 67). The novel seems to rely on Puranic strain of ideology and comprises numerous characteristics of Puranic Style. When the novel opens, the novelist lucidly describes the village in the vein of sthala-purana. Raja Rao deems that the puranas are a confluence of narration, description, ideological replication and religious teaching.

While the plot progresses, Achakka conveys the readers about the annihilation caused by a demon who had young boys as food and young girls as wives. So as to prevent the situation of the village the sage Tripura undergone a long atonement. Furthermore the narrator Achakka informs the readers why the Kennchamma hill is in red colour as "she (Tripura) wade such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma hill is red" (*Kanthapura* 8)

Yet another in puranic style of narration, he employed Ganga purana as a narrative technique in the novel. Goddess Kenchamma's staying permanently on village can be compared with mythical parallel to the advent of the Ganga with endless endeavours of Bhagirath. As other

Goddesses in India Kenchamma also rescue the people of Kanthapura. Apart from Goddess

Kenchamma there are some deities like Ankamma who takes care of Cholera, Mariamma takes care of small pox and some other cattle diseases. River Himavathy who is regarded as the daughter of goddess Kenchamma is also a deity in the novel.

The entire novel contains plethora of characters and they have given emphatic names such as Corner-House Moorthy, Front-house Akamma, left handed Madamma, Shopkeeper Chetti, Postmaster Surya Narayan, Jack Tree Tippa, Snuf-Shashtri, Gap-toothed Siddayya and Barber Venkat etc. The houses and fields have similar names like the above such as Nine Beamed House of Patel Gowda, Babbur Fields and Fig Tree House People. This kind of description proven that Raja Rao has a distinctive style of narration when comparing with other writers of his age. Despite he employed diverse narrative techniques in this novel, the Puranic style of narration resides the best. This kind of narration involves the stories of myths, legends and symbols. His writings got more eminence as India people are very fond of their puranas and myths. Thus he became the foremost exponent of the puranic way of story-telling. In *Kanthapura*, readers can find stories with stories as found in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

The narrator of the novel, shrewdly mingles the past with the present and by means of the religious metaphor she explains the subtleties of freedom movement. Few readers flabbergasted and hailed the novel *Kanthapura* as a Gandhi Purana, a Gandhi-epic or a veritable grammar of Gandhi myth and his principles of Ahimsa, Love and Loyalty. In order to give importance and highlight a particular person or place, the device of repetition has been literally employed, keeping in the view of rambling and talkative nature of Achakka. A novel facet of Raja Rao's narrative art is his literal translation of Indian phrases and idioms in English. Raja Rao's Narratology is amazingly unique. He used to have abundance characters in his novels and they express diverse ideology too. He employed different kinds of narrators such as protagonist narrator, protagonist cum witness narrator and witness narrator. In *Kanthapura*, he depicted witness narrator vividly. His contemporary writer Kamala Markandaya in her eminent novel *Some Inner Fury* used witness narrator to convey the story. Thus the novel *Kanthapura* encompasses some unique nuances of narratology. Further this novel is a spectacle of narrative art, a confluence of Puranic style, myths, symbols, religious metaphors and linguistic experimentations.

Like Raja Rao, Chetan Bhagat's novels also filled with narrative elements and in most his novels he employed third person narrative technique and also used multiculturalism as a multi-narrative technique. He portrayed characters belonging to diverse cultural groups and the situation revealing national as well as international issues at religious, political and social

levels. He employed innovative narrative technique which has not been used before. Such as news, diary entries, scrapbook, transcripts, telephonic conversation, speech sessions, SMS, e-mails, epilogues and prologues etc. He does not restrict subject matters of his novels to a particular group of people, besides the characters belonging to the arena of technology, film industry, politics, underworld, slum area etc. Chetan Bhagat's chief characters generally belong to teenage. They are modern and concerned with the burning issues in India.

His stories comprise of unreal and unacceptable situations, those contexts are similar to Bollywood scenes. He employs the narrative technique epilogue to add the story of a girl that met him on his train sojourn in the novel *One Night @ the Call Center*. Later she disappears from the train, despite it was not acceptable in this modern era, and it creates curiosity among the readers. Suspension of disbelief is another narrative technique that he used in the novel meticulously. In the novel, *Five Point Someone*, he employed the narrative techniques such as prologue, conversation, description, monologue, letter, foreshadowing and epilogue. Further he applied shifting point of view of narration. In the novel, *The Three Mistakes of My Life*, the novelist uses the narrative techniques such as prologue, e-mail, SMS, telephonic conversation, public speech and epilogue etc. These techniques make his novel an appropriate vehicle of revealing the complex contemporary world. As Raja Rao used Puranic way of story-telling, Chetan Bhagat employs technological devices and methods in his story-telling which attracts numerous readers.

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