
**THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR IN BLENDING MYTH AND HISTORY
A STUDY OF ACHAKKA IN RAJA RAO'S *KANTHAPURA***

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Abstract: *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao is a landmark novel in Indian English literature which combines the myth and the history together. At the heart of this amalgam is an old woman Achakka, the narrator of the novel, whose oral narrative intertwines elements of Hindu myth along with the experiential life of the nationalist struggle in India. This paper emphasizes the important role of Achakka, the village storyteller and narrator of *Kanthapura*, whose viewpoint and narrative choices serve to integrate myth and history. Here, Achakka's narrative voice, the use of epic simile, the invocation of local legend, and the historical events regarded through the lens of myth will be analysed to show how she combines the temporal with the spiritual into a contemporary purana of the Indian independence movement. The study will discuss how this narrative strategy serves to render history accessible and relatable to villagers, while at the same time making the political struggle into a cosmic battle for the villagers, thus conferring on its spiritual significance.

Introduction: Involving the reader's consciousness, the narrator, in literature, is much more than the so-called mouthpiece of the author; rather, the narrator is a predominant architect of meaning. In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the narrator Achakka serves as a crucial link in the intermingling of myth and history, imparting a narrative technique that largely echoes India's oral traditions and cultural consciousness. Through the voice of Achakka, events of historical significance such as that of India's fight for independence become laden with mythological imagery, propelling the narrative beyond a linear tale into a realm of existence where the past and the contemporary, the sacred and the secular, are able to coexist. Thus, it becomes more than a political narrative, aspiring instead to that realm of mythmaking within which the whole national movement in India can be recast in a narrative that reverberates to the rhythms of Hindu epics and folk traditions. This symbiosis of myth and history is achieved by an array of techniques of narration that constitute the aesthetic and ideological underpinning of the novel.

Narrative techniques are the means through which the author presents the story to the listener. These include the various choices made by the author in the matter of narrative point of view, voice, structure, time, foreshadowing, symbolism, and language. Narrative

techniques in themselves serve the dual purpose of both aesthetics and functionality; they affect the reader's engagement with the text, creating layers of meaning that stretch beyond the literal. In *Kanthapura*, narrative technique itself is not merely considered a style but is considered to be central to the very thematic and cultural mission of this novel. Raja Rao's foreword to the novel lays down the difficulty of expressing Indian sensibility in a foreign tongue, that is, in English, and he states thus, "the telling has not been easy," indicating his conscious importation of Indian narrative modes into English prose.

1. Point of View - The angle of narration of the story.
2. Narrative Voice - The peculiar tone and persona of the narrator.
3. Temporal Techniques - The management of time, such as linear, cyclical, and fragmented structures.
4. Symbols And Allegories - The reference of symbols and allegorical references for suggesting deeper meanings.
5. Mythic Allusion-and Intertextuality - The referencing of older texts, especially those of myths, epics, or religious scriptures, to add to narrative resonance.
6. Oral Storytelling Techniques - The applied use of repetition, digression, invocation, and communal memory typically found in oral traditions.
7. Language And Syntax - The styling of language, including sentence structure, rhythm, and use of dialects.

Raja Rao uses all these types to formulate a certain Indian set of storytelling modalities. Such a storytelling technique has been accented by the narrative voice of Achakka, the aged Brahmin widow with a function analogous to that of the traditional Indian sutradhar (storyteller). Through her, the story of *Kanthapura's* awakening to civil disobedience unfolds, but she is more than merely a chronicler. Her voice is colored with that of lived experience, cultural authority, and spiritual insight. Achakka sits deeply within the social and religious fabric of the village. With a worldview forged by myth, ritual, and tradition, she interprets the historical facts through that particular lens.

First-person plural narration by Rao through Achakka is one of its most engaging and affective narrative devices. Achakka perpetually uses we instead of I, propounding a collective consciousness that pertains to the voice of the village. This narrative technique also rests on the oral tradition of India where tales are primarily told not by one person but from a common perspective. This effect could be one of participation and immediacy, the reader feeling drawn towards the communal experiences, beliefs, fears, and hopes of the people. The we voice intertwines narrator and community, thus establishing authenticity and intensity in the narrative.

Another dominant narrative technique is the mythic allusion and allegory. Throughout the novel, Achakka interprets contemporary characters and events in terms of the mythic. Gandhi becomes an Avatara of Vishnu sent to restore dharma; the village leader, Moorthy, is likened to a saint or maybe a rishi; and the British thugs come off as rakshasas or demons. These references, far from being mere embellishments, are, in fact, central to the

villagers' understanding of their own reality. By aligning historical representations with a mythic continuum, Rao positions a rural audience—among whom many were illiterate or semi-literate during those days—to relate with nationalistic ideals through culturally familiar metaphors.

Another distinguishing feature of a traditional Indian style of narrative used by Achakka is that of epic similes and metaphors. The villagers marching in protest are compared to pilgrims on their way to Kashi; the skirmishes with the police are described with the fervor and imagery of mythical battles from the Ramayana or Mahabharata. This simile turns the common into the sacred and the heroic, with much greater emotional and spiritual application. This is a deliberate technique adopted by Rao of mythologizing the nationalist struggle and turning it into a cosmic conflict between the two sides of good and evil.

The narrative of Rao relies on temporal fluidity. The tale-telling of Achakka is not chronologically oriented to any spirit of being, rather it is circular and digressive like the puranas. Time in *Kanthapura* is layered where mythical time intersects with historical time and where present events are constantly analyzed in the light of ancient traditions. This technique reflects the Indian cultural perception of time as a cycle rather than a linear progression. In this process, Rao manages to resist the Western narrative framework and create a narrative pattern that aligns more with indigenous sensibilities.

The Art of oral storytelling is very much in play in Achakka's narration. Her speech is filled with repetition, proverbs, invocations, and exclamations. She digresses often to tell stories of saints, of gods, or of ancestors, all of which serve to place the current events in context and enrich the thematic texture of the novel. These digressions are not distractions - they are integral to the narrative logic of oral storytelling whereby every story is a node in a larger cultural memory.

Finally, Rao's language and syntax imitate the rhythms of Indian speech. By using Indianized English, derivative of Kannada and Sanskrit, he presents the authenticity of Achakka's voice. The lack of punctuation, the long winding sentences, and simply leaving in many untranslated Indian terms make it feel as if the novel is a direct transcription of a spoken gesturing. This decision stylistically helps with the oral and mythical tone of the novel.

The concluding statement is that Achakka as a narrator should play a linking role between myth and history in *Kanthapura*. The best integration is that among the narrative techniques used by Raja Rao—point of view, mythical allusion, communal voice, temporal fluidity, and oral tradition—for very deeply anchoring the narrative in Indian culture. It makes the political struggle for India's independence into his sacred epic, with all the spiritual nuances and cultural continuity attached to it. Thus through the voice of Achakka, Rao constructs a distinctly Indian narrative form, seeking to unsettle the classical literary

conventions of the West while affirming the continuing efficacy of myth-permeated narration as an agent in collective memory, historical consciousness, and national identity. Therefore, the study of Achakka's narrative technique is not just a study of style, and it is not just the technique and the confluence of myth and history in postcolonial literature.

Analysis: In *Kanthapura*, Mahatma Gandhi presents not only as the political leader but also as a form of divine incarnation—an avatara of Vishnu—sent to save India from the colonial spell. This is a characterization that manifests the religious worldview of the villagers in weaving myth with political events. Their austerities, especially fasting, are spoken of in the same breath as the tapasya of the ancient sages without which they become moral purification rather than simple protest. His principle of Satyagraha becomes a holy weapon, arms that cast a spiritual air upon non-violent action, and it will not be used by mere mortals but acts by the prestige of that deity in epic battles. Achakka often balances Gandhi's leadership with that of Rama or Krishna, indicating that what he commands is not merely nationalistic but destined to happen cosmically. The mythic elevation of Gandhi helps the villagers interpret their fight as part of a divine narrative that renders their expended blood sacred and meaningful. Such equivalency lends hope and moral certitude because abstract political ideals must always be diffused in lived religious experience. Through Achakka's voice, Raja Rao fuses myth with history, casting freedom movement into dharmic battle, whereby Gandhi's divine role becomes the moral compass that guides an oppressed people toward liberation and self-realization.

In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao, mainly by means of the fictional narrative voice of Achakka, mythologizes the conflicts between the villagers and the British authorities, transposing them into a cosmic battle between good and evil. Colonial police and British officials do not become just political oppressors; they become embodiments of adharma-like rakshasas or demons in Hinduism. Though the technique allows the villagers, and to an extent the reader, to witness the struggle via spiritual, moral lenses, elevating it above political conflict toward sacred duty.

Achakka often compares the Satyagrahis the non-violent resistors to epic heroes and divine warriors; when the police bring down their brutal fire forwards into lathi charge or mass detention, the violence is typical of what we normally would see when it happens through the Ramayana and Mahabharata-like imagery in which heroes battle divine forces against those created by demons. The suffering of the villagers is portrayed not as victimhood but as a noble sacrificial act equivalent to the trials of righteous warriors defining dharma. Mythic framing elevates and dignifies both opposition and resistance: this makes actions timeless for purposes of historical justice and levies redemption on the act.

They add dimension to the events and capture the reader's sympathies for the oppressed while demonizing the colonizers. Most importantly, it legitimizes this struggle in the field of heavenly order, duly assuring the villagers that none of their struggles are futile. Myths, such as these ones, construct for Achakka a collective moral perception, converting

contemporary realities into sacred tales of resistance, courage, and ultimate triumph of righteousness against contradiction.

Kenchamma, the village deity and part of the myriad demons on the fame of these old mythologies performed in and through the fight for freedom, is invoked by Achakka within *Kanthapura* in the elaborate weaving of village stories and myths into her tale. This legend is not only a catchy folklore but one deeply embedded in the fabric of the everyday lives of villagers, enabling it in shaping their perspectives on the freedom struggle. Kenchamma repeatedly prays and cultivates in times of calamity-in police attack and communal distress-for having saved the village at a point from the demons. Its mythic presence keeps a safe distance from getting instilled with divine protection and assurance, thereby engendering increased courage and extreme resolve among the villagers. Achakka thus receives one's one breath narrating the legends till the lines blur between myth and actual history, faith and fact.

For the villagers, historical occurrences-the protest, the arrest, and so on-are not just a political act. They are part of a spiritual drama involving Kenchamma and her blessings on the act, which would influence the outcome of events. The interesting part is that the spirituality redefines the fight of the village, which becomes a single duty blessedly involved by divine forces. Mythically embedding the historical realities preserves more than cultural identity; actually, Achakka is reinterpreting the nationalistic struggle as another battle of innumerable ages-always one of good against evil thereby sacralizing the present through the lens of the past.

Achakka's narration in *Kanthapura* abounds in epic similes, establishing a bridge between the ordinary and extraordinary, which transforms the mundane acts of the villagers into the mythic. Through overt comparisons of trivial happenings with exalted mythological narratives, the freedom struggle is presented in an atmosphere of heroism and sanctity. For example, from the political perspective, the peaceful procession is said to have been a pilgrimage to Varanasi, the holiest city in Hinduism. Thus, this really sanctifies the act, suggesting also deep spiritual meanings that being in the movement for freedom was akin to a sacred act.

The other side of the coin-Achakka describes the spirits of the villagers in comparison to the mythical determination of heroes like Bhishma and Harishchandra from the *Puranas* if and when they show resilience or unity. Thus, Achakka elevates their suffering, sacrifice, and determination to the level of divine destiny. This way, Achakka has endowed upon their struggle cosmic significance and converted local resistance into a global moral crusade. This stylistic choice is not only poetic but also deeply ideological. It is indicative of how myth shapes cultural consciousness and offers a setting for rural Indians to relate to, comprehend, and find significance in the larger movement to free themselves from the British Empire.

Using we frequently achieves that power of a communal voice, like in *Kanthapura*, imitating the collective or communal memory and shared consciousness of that village. Rather than narrating the story from an outside or individual point of view, it represents the entire community and brings it together as a personal experience with the collective tradition. This yoking together takes away from the storyteller and the story's subjects, thus bringing into being a united voice that echoes in the rhythms of orality.

It is that cyclical time in which this community voice is rooted, not the linear, chronological time, as in the temporal form in which Puranic narratives are set. Events are not merely dated or sequenced; each is endowed with spiritual and cultural significance, linking present struggles over independence with the mythic past. Just as Puranic tales repeat motifs of good triumphing over evil, sacrifice bringing redemption, and dharma being upheld, Achakka's recounting puts historical events into a pattern of timeless renewal and resistance. This cyclical framework will allow the villagers to visualize the current sufferings, not as fleeting incidents but part of a recurrent cosmic struggle. And this takes place within a larger frame of continuity, purpose, and spiritual resonance within the nationalistic discourse.

The very pertinacity of Achakka's narrative strategies in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, very much central to the objective that the novel achieves in the fusion of myth with history. Her narration becomes, not mere reiteration of events but intricate, meaningful, culturally rooted storytelling that transmutes the political discourse into a spiritual epic. Such transformation occurs through a series of conscious choices in narration which mirror and reaffirm the traditional worldview of the village community. Accordingly, by putting the freedom struggle within mythical purview, Achakka undergoes several significant roles in the novel.

In the first place, Achakka makes history understandable and emotionally touchable for predominantly rural and illiterate masses. The villagers of *Kanthapura* can be said to have an understanding of religious epics, folk tales, and the symbols in Puranic myths. Such people probably do not understand the complications of colonial economics or abstract political theories but, since there are stories of dharma and divine intervention, they cannot resist them. When Achakka says such things as that Mahatma Gandhi is an 'avatara' of Vishnu, or takes the police as rakshasas, she talks in a language understood and trusted by her people. This mode does not only attract villagers; it also gives to the nationalistic movement a framework in which participation acquires moral and spiritual sanctity.

In addition, the mythical framework takes the historical struggle for freedom to a much loftier almost religious plane--a plane where national movement is no longer purely about political or social upheaval; it becomes a reenactment of the age-old battle between right and wrong, that is, between the forces of dharma and adharma. The brawls, imprisonments, and protests gain the same weight as that of the great battles of the Mahabharata or Ramayana. In this way, individual suffering is no longer rendered pointless

or marginal, but valorized as part of a grand cosmic narrative, offering an account that transforms personal pain into an epic-bearing set of burdens. Therefore, even the villagers' sacrifices become sacred offerings, seminal in their efforts at spiritual rebellion. This religious valorization bequeaths on them a sense of courage and endurance in addition to giving life absolutely meaning in the context of

It may also strengthen this unity through the inherent merit of describing their local myths, legends, and rituals, which tie the community together in shared belief and cultural continuity. In such a way, a narrative form is formed through which Achakka's storytelling becomes a way of collective affirmation and empowerment. So much so that the defenses of the village are not mere cases-in-not-document but in the determined historical and spiritual underpinnings of the commonwealth.

Lastly, through Achakka's voice, Raja Rao besides all this challenges very principles of Western prose realism and linear progress typical of a conventional European novel. He offers, rather, that liquid, cyclical and deeply rooted storytelling truly in the oral tradition of India. Therefore *Kanthapura* becomes one of the earliest postcolonial works, demanding the acknowledgement of validity of native narrative structures. Achakka, thus, goes beyond the role of being mere narrator; she becomes a keeper of culture keeping and nurturing India's mythic imagination. She ensures that the story of resistance resonates not as mere history but as sacred memory for future generations.

Conclusion: In the past, Achakka served not just as a mere narrator but as a kalakar, the stereotypical traditional Indian figure of a storyteller and ultimately a griot from the oral culture. The griots, therefore, instituted oral traditions, within whose frame events are supposed not only to be recounted but to be rendered meaningful in terms of myth, religion, and collective memory. Rao is very deliberate in having the telling of the story come from the point of view of an aged Brahmin widow. With Achakka, he has been able to give a voice to the narrative, endowing it with the echo of puranic tones, thus allowing for an unbroken flow of transition between the past and present, fact and myth.

The narrative style in Achakka is that of an oral tradition holding sway over life in Indian villages. The narrator does not speak as an individual chronicler but rather as a community voice, utilizing a collective "we" in order to encompass the shared consciousness of the residents of *Kanthapura*. This manner of storytelling is marked with the usage of repetition, digressions, and metaphorical references to mythology. Achakka narrates the unfolding of the independence movement with her village home as a backdrop, melding present-day events with timeless moral struggles offered in Hindu mythology. There, Gandhi stands as more than just a political leader. He is an incarnation of Vishnu, whose purpose here is to eradicate adharma from the world. His punishing renunciation and peaceful defiance become the tapasya of sages and holy boys and bear testament to the divine legitimation of the political cause.

Casting British oppression as the endeavor of the rakshasas (demons) and likening the satyagrahis to the kshatriyas or divine warriors, Achakka turns the nationalist movement into an epic. This creates a greater urgency in the struggle, and its moral dimension becomes unmistakable to a rural audience for whom myth and religion constitute daily life. By reconstructing the mythic-political interface, her narrative implies that to fight for independence is not merely a civic duty, but a sacred dharma. This sacralization of history makes the very notion of political resistance accessible to the villagers and affects them emotionally. For the villagers, many of whom might otherwise find the whole idea of nationalist abstraction strange or incomprehensible, Achakka thus transforms the sacred into the everyday by creating notions of political resistance being blessed by divine will.

Intertwined with local myths and deities, Achakka's telling of the story becomes increasingly fascinating. The goddess Kenchamma is frequently invoked, especially in crises, to assure the villagers that divine protection over the village is on their side in the struggle. Such invocations strengthen the villagers' impression that they are part of a divinely sanctioned struggle, grounded in their local environment and in a larger cosmic order. In this way, local geography becomes sacralized, and political resistance is framed as extending divine will.

In the end, the role of Achakka in *Kanthapura* is a metaphor for how storytelling can become an instrument for cultural memory and political mobilization. Through her voice, Rao reclaims indigenous narrative forms to articulate an experience of resistance to colonialism in a distinctly Indian way. Her narrative transforms history into sacred memory, a memory that is to be passed on not only as fact, but also as myth—eternal and meaningful and deeply ingrained in the consciousness of her people. In doing this, she shows how the myth not only interprets but also animates and shapes reality.

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