



International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies

E-ISSN: 2706-8927

P-ISSN: 2706-8919

www.allstudyjournal.com

IJAAS 2022; 4(2): 135-137

Received: 04-02-2022

Accepted: 07-03-2022

Dr. Seema Rani

Associate Professor,
Department of English,
S.G.H.S P.G. College, Jiwan
Nagar, Haryana, India

Understanding Symbolism and Allegory in Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura'

Dr. Seema Rani

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2022.v4.i2c.1043>

Abstract

Raja Rao's literary legacy is characterized by his unique fusion of Eastern philosophy and Western literary techniques, contributing significantly to the landscape of Indian English literature and earning him a revered place among literary luminaries. This research paper delves into the intricate web of symbolism and allegory woven within Raja Rao's seminal work, 'Kanthapura.' The novel, set against the backdrop of India's struggle for independence, is a rich feast of cultural, political, and spiritual shades. By closely examining specific textual examples, this paper aims to reveal the hidden layers of symbolism and allegory that enhance the novel's depth and meaning. 'Kanthapura' is more than a narrative of a small village's participation in the freedom movement; it is a multi-dimensional allegory that reflects the complexities of Indian society, the essence of Gandhian philosophy, and the broader human conditions. The paper illuminates various symbols and allegorical elements that enrich the novel's thematic tapestry. The intricate symbolism and allegory in 'Kanthapura', offer readers a profound exploration of India's struggle for freedom, communal unity, and spiritual awakening. Each event and object serve as a lens through which readers can contemplate the intricate interplay between political activism, societal change, and mystical transformation. By infusing these elements with symbolic meaning, Raja Rao provides readers with a multidimensional perspective on the struggles and aspirations of the characters and the society at that time. The symbolism imbued in these elements enriches the novel's themes and deepens its impact, making "Kanthapura" a timeless work of literature that speaks to the universal pursuit of justice, freedom, and self-realization. By dissecting specific textual evidence, this paper provides a deeper understanding of how these elements are interwoven, enhancing the readers' appreciation of Raja Rao's masterful storytelling technique.

Keywords: Independence, social, narrative, historical, tradition

Introduction

Raja Rao, a luminary in the realm of Indian English literature, left an indelible mark through his distinctive writing style, deep philosophical insights, and his unique ability to bridge the cultural chasm between the East and the West. Born on November 8, 1908, in the town of Hassan, Karnataka, Raja Rao's literary journey traversed continents and ideologies, resulting in a body of work that continues to resonate with readers seeking profound introspection and a connection to their roots. Raja Rao's early life was steeped in the richness of Indian culture and tradition. Growing up in a Brahmin family, he was immersed in the study of literature and philosophy from a tender age. His education spanned continents, from Aligarh Muslim University to the University of Montpellier in France, where he studied French literature and philosophy. This cross-cultural exposure laid the foundation for his unique literary perspective, which seamlessly blended Indian spirituality with Western modernism. Raja Rao's writing was not limited to mere storytelling; it was a voyage of spiritual exploration. His works delved into complex philosophical questions, mirroring his deep engagement with Indian thought and spirituality. Inspired by Vedanta, Upanishads, and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he sought to distill the essence of Indian wisdom and channel it through the medium of English, making it accessible to a global audience.

Raja Rao's literary contributions earned him recognition both in India and abroad. He held teaching positions at various universities, including the University of Texas at Austin, where he continued to inspire young minds with his wisdom. In 1969, he was honored with the Padma Bhushan, a prestigious civilian award in India, for his remarkable contributions to literature. Raja Rao's legacy extends beyond his written words. His ability to bridge the gap between diverse cultures and philosophies serves as an enduring inspiration.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Seema Rani

Associate Professor,
Department of English,
S.G.H.S P.G. College, Jiwan
Nagar, Haryana, India

His exploration of the human condition, spiritual awakening, and the quest for meaning transcends temporal boundaries, making his work timeless and relevant. His unique ability to blend Eastern philosophy with Western narrative techniques has left an indelible mark on Indian English literature.

The hallmark of Raja Rao's literary career was his pioneering role in shaping Indian English literature. His debut novel, "Kanthapura," published in 1938, stands as a testament to his literary prowess. Set in a fictional village during the Indian independence movement, the novel deftly captures the pulse of India's struggle for freedom while probing into the collective consciousness of a rural community. Through symbolic narrative and allegorical characters, Raja Rao masterfully explores the impact of political upheaval on personal lives.

"Kanthapura" is a pioneering work in Indian English literature that vividly portrays the impact of the Indian independence movement on a rural South Indian village named Kanthapura. The novel is not only a historical narrative but also a powerful exploration of the intertwined relationship between politics, society, and spirituality. The novel begins with an introduction to the village of Kanthapura, its geography, traditions, and the life of its residents. The narrator, an elderly woman, describes the peaceful and harmonious existence of the villagers under the guidance of their beloved leader, Moorthy. Moorthy, a young and educated man from Kanthapura, returns to the village after completing his studies in the city. He brings with him the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence. Moorthy's return marks the beginning of change in Kanthapura. Moorthy starts to share his newfound knowledge and ideals with the villagers. Inspired by Gandhian principles, he advocated for non-violent protest against British colonial rule. He urged the villagers to boycott foreign goods, engage in swadeshi, and participate in civil disobedience.

Gradually, Moorthy's ideas gained traction among the villagers. They started spinning their own cloth, participating in prayer meetings, and boycotting British goods. The village became united in their efforts, and the Gandhian movement became a part of their daily lives. The British colonial authorities were aware of the growing unrest in Kanthapura. They sent police to suppress the movement. The police arrested some of the villagers, leading to tensions and a sense of solidarity among the people of Kanthapura. As the movement intensifies, the villagers face repression from the authorities. The women of Kanthapura took a more active role in the protest, participating in satyagraha. Moorthy and the villagers endure hardships, including arrests and beatings, but their resolve remains strong. Tension escalates between the villagers and the authorities. A confrontation erupts when the police attack the village. In the ensuing violence, a young girl named Rangamma is killed. The tragedy deepens the villagers' resolve to continue the struggle for independence. The novel climaxes with a final confrontation between the villagers and the police. The villagers stand united, facing the police with courage and determination. The movement reaches a critical juncture as the villagers confront the brutal realities of their resistance. The novel concludes with an account of the aftermath of the confrontation. The villagers' struggle continues, but they are undeterred by the sacrifices they have made. The narrator

reflects on the timeless nature of their fight for freedom and the enduring spirit. In "Kanthapura," Raja Rao masterfully weaves together the personal stories of the villagers with the broader canvas of the Indian independence movement. Through rich symbolism and allegory, he captures the spirit of resistance, unity, and sacrifice that characterized this tumultuous period in India's history. The novel stands as a poignant reminder of the power of collective action and the transformative potential of nonviolent resistance in the pursuit of justice and freedom.

Raja Rao's "Kanthapura" is not only a narrative of a village's involvement in the Indian independence movement but also a deeply symbolic and allegorical work that encapsulates the broader struggles and aspirations of the Indian nation. Through its characters and their experiences, the novel carries layers of meaning that reflect the socio-political and spiritual dynamics of the time. Gandhi is symbolically referred to as the Mahatma, emphasizing his role as a revered spiritual leader and symbol of nonviolent resistance. The villagers' admiration and faith in the Mahatma reflect the wider sentiment of the time and the idea of following a higher moral path in the fight against oppression. Moorthy, a young and educated man, is the catalyst for change in Kanthapura. His return from the city with Gandhian ideals symbolizes the awakening of the villagers' consciousness. Moorthy represents the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, self-sufficiency, and resistance against British colonialism. His character embodies hope, leadership, and the transformative power of ideas. Achhakka, an old woman and the narrator of the story serves as the voice of the village's collective memory and traditions. She symbolizes the ancient wisdom and enduring spirit of the Indian people. Her perspective bridges the past and the present, providing context for the reader and underscoring the continuity of Indian culture despite external influences. Bhatta, the village priest, embodies traditionalism and the old order. He represents the conservative forces resistant to change. His reluctance to embrace Moorthy's ideas and his eventual conversion symbolize the transformation that the village undergoes as it transitions from tradition to modernity.

The river that flows through Kanthapura, serves as a central symbol in the novel. It symbolizes the life force of the village, connecting its people and sustaining them. The river's flow mirrors the progression of events in the village, from the arrival of Moorthy's ideas to the culmination of the resistance movement. The police and British colonial authority symbolize the oppressive forces that the villagers are up against. They represent the colonial power that seeks to suppress the villagers' aspirations for freedom. The clash between the police and the villagers symbolizes the larger struggle between the colonizers and the colonized. The cobra that appears in the village is a potent symbol of danger and disruption. It allegorically represents the threat posed by colonial rule. The cobra's presence reflects the tension and unease that permeate the village as the struggle for independence intensifies.

The peepal tree serves as a gathering place for the villagers and becomes a symbol of unity and collective action. It represents the meeting point of tradition and modernity, as well as the place where the villagers come together to discuss the movement, reflecting the broader concept of unity in diversity. Through these characters and symbols, "Kanthapura" becomes more than a historical account; it becomes a layered exploration of the socio-political,

cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the Indian independence movement. The novel's allegorical elements invite readers to delve deeper into the complexities of the struggle for freedom and the broader human condition. As we decipher the allegory, the timeless truths and ideals that continue to resonate in contemporary contexts are uncovered. In "Kanthapura," Raja Rao employs a masterful blend of events and objects to symbolically represent larger political, social, and spiritual themes. Through these narrative elements, the novel transcends its immediate setting to convey profound insights about the Indian independence movement, societal dynamics, and spiritual transformation. The introduction of the spinning wheel and the promotion of khadi symbolize the broader Swadeshi movement. This event represents the call for self-reliance and economic independence from British goods. The act of spinning becomes a unifying activity that transforms the villagers' daily lives and emphasizes their role in the movement. The regular prayer meetings held under the peepal tree symbolize collective action and unity. These meetings serve as a platform for discussing political developments and planning resistance. The tree becomes a gathering place where villagers from diverse backgrounds come together, embodying the idea of unity in diversity. The procession that culminates in a confrontation with the police represents the villagers' resolve and commitment to the cause. The clash becomes a symbol of the larger struggle against colonial authority. This event emphasizes the power of nonviolent resistance and the villagers' willingness to endure suffering for the sake of their convictions. Rangamma's tragic death during the police confrontation embodies the idea of sacrifice for a greater cause. Her death symbolizes the ultimate price paid in the struggle for freedom. Rangamma became a symbol of the countless individuals who sacrificed their lives for India's independence. The liberation of Narsamma, a widow, from societal constraints symbolizes the broader emancipation of women in Indian society. Narsamma's transformation reflects the larger shift from traditional gender roles to a more inclusive and empowering vision of women's roles in the movement.

Through these events and objects, Raja Rao creates a multi-layered narrative that resonates with readers on multiple levels. He effectively connects the microcosm of the village to the macrocosm of the Indian freedom struggle. The symbolism and allegory in "Kanthapura" continue to hold relevance even today, as they touch upon universal themes and issues that vibrate across cultures and time periods. The novel depicts the villagers' unity in the face of adversity, symbolizing the strength of collective action against injustice. This theme is still pertinent today, as communities globally engage in social activism to address issues like discrimination, inequality, and environmental concerns. The novel subtly addresses the role of women in the village's resistance movement, suggesting that women play a crucial, albeit often overlooked, part in social change. This resonates with ongoing discussions about gender equality and women's empowerment. Overall, "Kanthapura" transcends its specific historical context through its symbolic and allegorical elements, touching on themes that continue to be relevant in today's globalized and interconnected world. The novel's exploration of resistance, cultural identity, social justice, human connection, symbolism, and allegory play a significant role in conveying deeper meanings and themes.

References

1. Dayal P. Raja Rao: A study of His Novels. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi; c1991.
2. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Myth as Technique in Twice Born Fiction", Heinemann, New Delhi; c1974.
3. Rao Raja. Kanthapura. Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi; c2001.
4. Reddy Bapaya P. Aspects of Contemporary World Literature. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors New Delhi; c2008.
5. Srinivasa Iyengar KR. Indian Writing in English. Sterling Publisher Private Limited; c1989.