

'Kanthapura'

An authentic Indian flavour in
'Kanthapura' or Indianness of 'Kanthapura'

:- A survey of Raja Rao's work reveals a continuous strain of experiment and deep knowledge of Indian tradition. His short stories and his first novel, 'Kanthapura' which pertains to 1930s, are completely Indian. Their setting, atmosphere, the legends, myths and beliefs that influence the life of the characters are rooted in the Indian tradition. They are both a passage to India and a passage in India as much as they depict the various aspects of Indian life and culture on the one hand, and uphold the highest truths of life which enliven the culture on the other.

In 'Kanthapura', Raja Rao introduces the philosophy of selfless action. Indian struggle for freedom is rightly chosen as a repeat performance of the great war of the Mahabharata and 'Kanthapura' becomes a veritable Kurukshetra where the 'battle royal' between the forces of good

and evil is waged. It is a war between the forces of freedom and slavery, love and hatred, truth and untruth, and thus, it is fought both in the inner world of the spirit and in the outer world between the British Raj and the nationalists. It is a novel of action though the action is not an ordinary action motivated by pure individualistic interests. It is an action of selfless mind inspired by the spiritual ideal of Satyagraha, a typical Indian way of experiment to wage crusade against the British Rule.

The narrative technique of Kanthapura is like that of the ancient Indian writings. Raja Rao employs the narrative technique of the Puranas where one episode is followed by another in quick succession and the story rolls on with the help of various extraneous material. Raja Rao employs a curious, fragmented and breathless style deliberately adapted from the traditional Indian practice of story-telling.

As he says in his Foreward to Kanthapura, the novel is a Sthalapurana: There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich Sthalapurana or legendary history of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village — and the gods mingle with men to make the repertoire of your grandmother always bright. That is why, Raja Rao makes a grandmother tell the story. The style is suited to both Indian Sthalapurana. Indian atmosphere and habits are evoked by constant references to Indian social customs, such as the shaven head of a widow, the sari fringe pulled on the face, adornment of threshold and worship of cow etc.

In his Foreword to 'Kanthapura' Raja Rao discusses the question as to why English is his chosen medium. . . . 'It is the language of our intellectual make-up - like Sanskrit or Persian was before - but not of our emotional make up. Raja Rao takes enough linguistic liberty of expression in his effort to develop Indian English (to be continued . . .)