

**Mythic Time vs. Historical Time: Chronotopes in Raja Rao's
*Kanthapura***

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Abstract

Kanthapura by Raja Rao is a remarkable contribution to the literature in English from India, which, by its very narration, has successfully blended the political with the spiritual and the historical with the mythical. The crux of this melding is the tension between mythic time and historical time, presenting the unique texture and narrative resonance for the novel. The current research is patterned around the concept of the chronotope as propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin-a relationship by which an intrinsic connection is established in its essence between time and space within literature-and propounds how *Kanthapura* orchestrates its spatiotemporal configurations to view the Indian independence movement not simply as a political upheaval but as something spiritual and mythical renewal.

In *Kanthapura*, the village itself emerges as a central chronotype, a space where the past and present coalesce and historical time unfolds within a framework of cyclical, sacred temporality. Rao's narrator, the elderly Brahmin woman Achakka, filters the unfolding of Gandhian nationalism through a lens steeped in myth and oral tradition. Gandhi thus assumes the stature of Rama, Krishna, or even Shiva, and his satyagraha movement brings to mind an imagery of cosmic battle between dharma and adharma. This mythologization transforms the political narrative into a grand epic, thereby relocating the freedom struggle within a significantly wider metaphysical order that resonates deeply with Indian cultural consciousness.

The spatial dimension of the chronotope in *Kanthapura* possesses equal significance. The village is not merely a geographical ennui but a microcosm of India itself, embodying its caste hierarchies, its religious practices, and its social dynamics. Here, mythic and historical archetypes play upon the stage; Gandhian doctrine permeates the village and disrupts the tempo of rural life while re-scripting the sacred space of *Kanthapura* through revolutionary praxis. But this disruption is not a rupture from the past; rather, it is positioned as a return to a purer dharmic order. Rao, thus, embeds the nationalist movement into this mythic framework to contest the idea of Western linearity of historical progressions. *Kanthapura*, in contrast, suggests a cyclical

perception of time whereby historical happenings are an expression of eternal truths. With Bakhtin's chronotope, we see time in the novel as neither a neutral background nor as an ever-present outside force; it is subjugated by the cultural narratives and collective memory. Ultimately, the layered time structure of this novel serves to sacralize the political, thus elevating India's struggle for independence from a mere historical moment to an everlasting one for righteous purpose and self-actualization.

Keywords: Chronotope, Mythic Temporality, Gandhian Nationalism, Spatiotemporal Narrative, Postcolonial Indian Fiction.

Introduction

Age-old sweet scents of history winds itself round with the folk into New South Indian voices shouting out a sweet warm tale that promises to be the most poignant yet ambiguous and mystic telling of the broad political canvas stretching itself from a small, secluded South Indian village in Achakha's mouth, the typical Brahmin woman who finds herself at the center of events. Her form of narration is entirely steeped in the art of oral storytelling, and this is where the synthesis of historical door and the consciousness of the mythologies and cultures of rural India. The plot thickens with respect to the fictional temporal surface in which linear political unfoldings-including Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns, local protests, arrests, and escalations into more aggressive confrontations with colonial authority-inform a cyclical, timeless rhythm in which myth and religious tradition habiting humanity coalesce. It paints the way Achakka narrows her story: into references and mythic narratives where she weaves in other contemporary figures-the Mahabharata and Ramayana-while being a representative of the Khilafat movement meeting Gandhi as no other than an incarnation of divinities such as Rama or Krishna. This mythologizing builds the national movement into a grand-scale universal phenomena and tells how change is understood among villagers in a spiritual interpretation of socio-political transformations.

Kanthapura is the space, where historical time does not advance barrenly but rather is consonantly molded using got memories collected of its people, their rituals, and sacred narratives. The cyclical nature of Hindu cosmology characterized by recurring ages (yugas), destruction, and renewal infuses the villagers' understanding of the freedom struggle, casting it as a battle between dharma and adharma, good and evil. Thus acquire sacred dimensions those historical happenings, and the political then

becomes indistinguishable from the spiritual. Rao's temporal amalgamation explicitly contests the assumption of a linear progression of history in the Western, secular sense. Instead, it offers a native model of temporality-organic-in-character, recursive, and deeply internalized within Indian cultural experience. Thus, *Kanthapura* has stepped out into history as an historical novel; rather, it has become like a religious and philosophical meditation on India's journey searching toward self-rule.

This paper intends to investigate the intricate interrelationship between mythic time and historical time in *Kanthapura* via the theoretical lens of the chronotope, as conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin. According to him, the chronotope is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84). Hence, rather than simply providing a background to the narrative, the chronotope is a dynamic and formative element that will shape the experience, configuration, and understanding of time and space occurring within a text. In this aspect, the chronotope serves as a tool to interrogate how Raja Rao manages to fuse the historical with the mythical, one in which the Indian independence movement is anchored both in political action and spiritual transformation.

From an analysis of some pertinent chronotopes in the novel- most particularly those concerned with *Kanthapura*-located-the temple-and the journey to the city-it may be possible to see how Rao artistically transforms the temporal and spatial dimensions of colonial India within the novel. Rivera, *Kanthapura* itself serves as a major chronotope wherein the people have preserved cultural memory and mythic cosmology. The *Kanthapura* village is depicted as a self-sufficient universe, where time is circular and integrates tightly with religious rituals, festivals, and oral traditions. Events are not perceived as a series of discrete historical occurrences but part of a much larger, cosmic continuum. For example, Mahatma Gandhi is no longer only a political leader but is viewed as a reincarnation of mythic heroes such as Rama or Krishna, and his fight against British rule is taken as a contemporary representation of the age-old conflict between dharma and adharma.

Kanthapura has another important chronotopos-the temple which assumes a sacred space where times mythical and historical come together. It is inside this temple space that villagers not only come to worship but also discuss news about the freedom movement. Thus, this temple happens to play host to coalescing religious rites and political talk, reflecting how spirituality and activism are inevitably tied into the villagers' worldview. In the same way, the journey to the city undertaken by some characters is a movement all through chronotopic space because it positions the rural, myth-soaked world of the village against modern linear time of urban colonial

governance. This, therefore, signifies a movement in space and consciousness-something the villagers have, so to say, a different experience, exposure, and ideologies, tensions, and hard realities of state repression.

This is what Rao builds in the name of chronotopes that resist any such understanding of time as merely secular and linear. He, instead, constructs history as enshrined in the very rhythms and cycles of mythic time. The structural and narrative voice of the novel-through Achakka, the aged narrator steeped in religious traditions-will be an indication of this double temporality. The reader should then take India's nationalist movement as a political revolution and spiritual rebirth. This study argues that precisely this merging of historical and mythic time makes *Kanthapura* a timeless and relevant novel. Such a merger yields beyond political reportage into cultural and spiritual witness. It presents a deeply rooted, indigenous articulation of the Indian quest for self-rule.

ANALYSIS

Kanthapura is not just a physical location; it's also a space of symbolism and narration, and here time operates in two different states: mythic and historical. Thus, in space, it is a very traditional Indian village: a very entrenched caste system and rituals echoing cultural memories from centuries ago. Its geography, i.e., temple, Brahmin Street, Pariah quarter, is so much social identity-bound and cosmic order. The village lives in a state of cyclical, sacred time. Festivals, religious observances, and oral storytelling tie present and eternal mythic past. The stories of gods, Master Epics such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the will of local deities like Kenchamma form the backdrop of the villagers' lives. In this myth-laden atmosphere, events become said to be not an isolated event but, repetitions of archetypal struggles between dharma and adharma. However, entering Gandhism does make time linear and historical. Hard-kept myth of *Kanthapura*-the mystery and equilibrium of *Kanthapura*-is disrupted as Gandhi's non-violent resistance is taken into the village through Moorthy. At this moment in time, the villagers begin to conceive of the current socio-political struggles in which they find themselves as not locally specific but as part of a national movement with a historical trajectory. Thus evolves the tension between cyclical and linear time-the eternal patterns of myth and the irreversible momentum of historical change.

Through the site dedicated to Kenchamma, the goddess of the village, the time most profoundly mythic in the novel is expressed. The temple serves as an arena for communal activities where oral traditions, prayers, and rituals have conferred a spiritual unity over time. The temple is more than an object of reverence; it is also the

halter of cultural memory. Legends of Kenchamma—who is said to have rescued the village from demons—are said to be passed on orally from generation to generation. These legends create the mythic framework by which all events are perceived. At the onset of the Gandhian resistance, the temple acquires yet other symbolic meanings including that of a battleground. Political meetings are called in the very courtyard of the temple, wherein villagers begin to see their resistance as a sacred act, akin to the ancient struggles of Kenchamma. Therefore, the sacred and the secular intertwine, making the temple a chronotope wherein political action is sanctified by spiritual authority.

This Himavathy river is none but permanence and change. It is that liminal space—neither inside the village nor outside. Mythically, in Indian terms, rivers are considered sacred, fertility bringing, purifying, and literally connected to the cycle of life. The Himavathy too is steeped in religious meanings. Villagers bathe in it, perform rituals on its banks, and associate it with stories out of ancient lore. Change does witness the river. It listens to the public processions that happen, the pilgrimage and the protests. It observes characters like Moorthy experiencing an ideological change and going back to the village with strange ideas. So, it becomes a witness to historical time even while remaining within the mythic fold. It stands between the past and the present, between the village and the world beyond, forming that threshold between tradition and modernity.

What contrast would be more evident than this vale and habitual space of *Kanthapura* and the on-going urban world which is reached travelling to the city? This movement is very much a Bakhtinian "road chronotope"; travel really opens characters to new belief systems, new spaces, and new social realities. As Moorthy and others travel to the city, he discovers a different world governed no longer by the mythic time but that of historical and political consciousness. Cities are, within the colonial construct, the nerve centre of bureaucracy, activism, and change. They expose one to modern institutions: courts, jails, newspapers, and political organizations. While in the village, time is cyclical, contemplative, in the city it is linear, rationalized, and urgent. Yet, the villagers cannot be entirely absorbed into this historical temporality; they carry with them into the city a myth-informed consciousness that interprets their urban experiences in terms of the same spiritual lens that governs life in *Kanthapura* rather than that of time: This creates a dialogic space between myth and history. Moorthy's entrance into the political arena is not viewed merely as civic responsibility but as *Tapasya* (spiritual penance); his non-violence is seen, in fact not as a strategy but rather as dharma; and while entering while entering historically loaded spaces, it re-imposes those spaces again by myth-making.

Raja Rao demonstrates, through these chronotopes, how rural India's consciousness refracts historicity through mythic interpretation. While the movement for independence has linear time at its basis, it is treated by the villagers as a retelling of epic narratives. Thus, Moorthy is regarded as a spiritual leader, British oppression is seen as demonic, and political action is treated as dharmic struggle. Thus, the fusion of myth and history becomes not just aesthetic; it reveals a uniquely Indian worldview in which political awakening and spiritual consciousness cannot be separated. In *Kanthapura*, time is never linear. It spirals, folds and loops, depicting the knotty coexistence of tradition, memory, and historical change in the lived reality of colonial India. It will be here that Rao not only narrates a national movement through these chronotopes but also retrieves the cultural logic by which such movements are understood and remembered.

In *Kanthapura*, space and time are more than mere narrative backdrops for Raja Rao; rather, a chronotope-in Bakhtin's term, the intrinsic connection between temporal and spatial elements- becomes the dynamic narrative force that shapes their experiences and consciousness. Each chronotope in the novel contributes to a nexus between myth and history so that Rao may articulate an Indian mode of storytelling. It is at once traditional and amenable to political transformation. Space in the village is not simply a physical place; it is also a temporal world ruled by religious rituals, agricultural cycles, and oral tradition. The cyclical time is torn apart by the intrusions of historical time-the Gandhian movement, police repression, and social reform-shock waves that shake one into a whole new perspective of temporal existence. But instead of displacing, the traditional framework contains and reinterprets historical events through mythic symbolization. Moorthy becomes an archetype-the avatar of epic in politics-and colonial oppression is cast as a dharmic-adharmic battle.

The temple of Kenchamma and the Himavathy River create places of charge where the sacred and the political meet, where they are both arenas of collective memory and sites of resistance. Space and time are reconfigured for the villager, now on a larger journey towards the city; access to another mode of structuring experience is provided by linear time and secularistic. But even this trending modernity will be given a mythical take by villagers. Thus, the chronotope in *Kanthapura* does not merely set the story into the backdrop; it also creates meaning, structures how it is viewed, and mediates between contending ideologies. With these spatio-temporal constructs, Rao effectively dissolves the binary myth-historical, thus crafting a narrative with cultural memory inextricably linked with political agency. That form is wholly within the Indian epistemologies, rewinding it into a decolonial narrative.

In *Kanthapura*, myth and history figure as not merely devices of narration, but among the potent instruments of cultural assertion by Rao. The Indian Freedom Struggle is now mythographically contained within the stars of a traditional understanding whose content applies not only to history, but also to modern life. Myth in *Kanthapura*, then, does not fly away to be utopia or regressive; instead, it defines a dynamic cultural force that conditions how current events are understood by the villagers. Eliciting Gandhi like *Rama* or *Krishna* and analogizing the British to demonic figures in the form of Ravana or Kamsa places the freedom struggle in the moral universe pertaining to dharma (righteous duty). Thus, the entire moral coding gives the nationalist movement an ethical, spiritual resonance that a mere political rhetoric cannot conjure, making it intelligible and compellingly emotional in a largely illiterate rural population.

History is not being recounted in a linear, Eurocentric manner; rather, it is refracted through myth, whereby history becomes indigenized. The narrative reclaims agency for Indian subjects by telling their story in the voice of their own cultural idioms: through the oral, communal storytelling of Achakka, not the distanced documentation of colonial historians. With this fusion of myth and history, Rao takes direct aim at the Western antinomies of modernity versus tradition, rationality versus spirituality, and fact versus fiction. Indian modernity is decolonial in his vision; it does not reject tradition but reinterprets tradition as politically relevant today. Therefore, *Kanthapura* is more than a historical novel—it becomes a cultural text that resists colonialism, celebrates Indian identity, and retakes the narrative from the gaze of colonialism.

It characterizes what can be deemed the chronotopic layering of resistance in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao—a narrative technique intermingling spatial and temporal dimensions to express a culturally literate vision of political struggle. Mikhail Bakhtin drew from this concept of the chronotope to develop such a narrative through the creation of multiple spatio-temporal frameworks, which could then map an Indian-national independence movement, not just as a linear event of politics but as profound moral and spiritual awakening in rooted Indian tradition. In itself, the village *Kanthapura* demarcates a major chronotope with time-grandness that feeds life through agricultural cycles, religious festivals, and the oral tradition of myth and legend, giant systems through which sacred time and secular time collide. This is the event that signified Gandhian politics, where linear historical time in progress, struggle, and eventual independence had come into being. But Rao does not allow this linear historical time to displace the mythic. Instead, he layers the two: historical events are interpreted in terms of mythic archetypes; Gandhi appears as a modern-

day avatar, the colonizers as asuras (demons), and the freedom movement as dharmic war.

The temple of Kenchamma symbolizes the most important chronotope, where sacred space exists at the highest level in mythic time. Traditionally it is the site where one communes spiritually, and now, politically, becomes the site where political gatherings take place, creating an amalgam of religious ritual and nationalistic discourse. The Himavathy River, symbolizing continuity as well as transformation, becomes a liminal chronotope because the witness both the dripping flow of tradition and the rupture of historical change. Moorthy's journey into the city is interpreted by the villagers as a shift into a chronotope of modernity, an urban-secular yet historically enriched space. But then, in such spaces too, the villagers have myth-influenced consciousness that interprets their urban experience on the terms of the same symbolic and ethical frames of meaning that define life in *Kanthapura*. Through this layering, Rao creates a form of both political and cultural resistance: the villagers do not see themselves merely as participants in a political movement but rather as reinterpreting it on their terms-myth, memory, and lived ritual. In that context, *Kanthapura* becomes a chronotopic site of resistance, where independence struggle is not merely political emancipation but a reclamation of cultural time, space, and voice from colonial domination.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates through the sophisticated deployment of the articular of chronotopes within his writing the intricate linking of myth and historical time that Raj Rao has achieved in his *Kanthapura* study. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, it has been revealed in this analysis that certain key locales in the novel-the village of *Kanthapura*, the temple of Kenchamma, the Himavathy River, and the journeys to the cities are not mere physical locations, but rather active narrative occasions where time and space converge to make meaning; which overlays a dialectic engagement between the mythic past and the historical present, rendering an Indian way of perceiving and participating in the nationalist struggle.

Here, the village serves as the central chronotope, a spatial and cultural microcosm in which cyclical time-dominated by agricultural rhythms and by caste customs and religious practices-prevailed. Then, Gandhian ideology entered as linear, historical, and revolutionary time. This is not to say that such temporal frame casts traditional temporality away; rather, this historical time is brought to meaning through villagers' mythic consciousness. Gandhi, for them, is not just a political leader; rather, he is an avatar-like figure, such as Rama or Krishna; British are set likened to *Rakshasa*

(demons); freedom struggle becomes the modern reenactment of ancient dharmic wars. This pattern of layering in a chronotopic fashion allows for mutual reinforcement instead of disjunction between myth and history.

The temple of Kenchamma is a communal site of collaborative memory and myth that serves as a stage for political mobilization by the amalgamation of religious devotion and anti-colonialism. The Himavathy River, eternal yet ever-flowing, functions as a liminal chronotope at the intersection of tradition and auto-mobilization. It bears witness to the constancy of the ways of village life and changing tides of political consciousness. Similarly, journeys to cities mark the distancing from the village's collective memory into the modern world, a space of historical time. However, even inside urban environments, the villagers carry with them a whole series of mythological frames with which they interpret modern political realities, setting the symbols, metaphors, and spiritual worldviews rooted in their native culture. This shows how mythic time continues to shape understanding of history and overwhelm the totalizing thrust of Western historicism.

Through such chronotopes, *Kanthapura* not only recounts the events of the Mahatma movement, but it also reimagines history through indigenous forms of understanding. Rao offers us a narrative whereby resistance is seen not only as political but also as epistemological. The novel posits oral tradition, collective memory, and myth as equally valid modes of historical representation and thus critiques colonial historiography. The intertwining of these chronotopes is where we find the cultural spirit of the independence movement. There are possibilities for future research to take the chronotopic lens to other postcolonial texts so as to examine how indigenous spatio-temporal logics contest the linearity of colonial narratives. This, in turn, gives us a finer understanding of how storytelling becomes an act of cultural resistance that asserts identity, continuity, and sovereignty over both time and space.

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