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Reflection Of Indianness In the Novel 'Kanthapura' of Raja Rao

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Abstract-

The Focal Point of my Paper is to portray the reflection of Indianness in the novel 'Kanthapura' of Raja Rao written in 1938. He is a philosopher who has gathered in him the traditional wisdom of Indian Rishis (holy seers) and combined it with an intimate knowledge of western religion and philosophy. His vision of various civilizations of the world; has made him competent to focus on a synthetic view of values of various civilizations of the world; has made him competent to focus on a synthetic view of values of various cultures of the world. Apart from the Indian accent in its language, Kanthapura reveals the author's skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and discourse, authentically Indian and convincingly modern. There are three strands of experience in this novel: political, religious and the social; and all the three are woven inextricably into the one complex story of Kanthapura. Apparently a novel of political resurgence, it is intrinsically one of the spiritual integration which raises the individual above the self and turns him into a true servant of the downtrodden and the enslaved. Mahatma's word is accepted as a word of God and the spiritual ideal of dedication to truth and Ahimsa is adopted as a means to achieve the political end of freedom as much as a means of self purification. As a matter of fact Kanthapura is the first effort of Raja Rao which brings forth some apparent seeds of philosophical perspectives to be developed fully in *The serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespear*. The themes of most of his novels are preoccupied with religion, tradition, the intellectual hero and the exploration of spiritual depths by means of symbols. The struggle for freedom is grounded in faith in God and purity of heart. Which are the two essentials of *niskam karmyoga*- advocated in *The Bhagwat Gita*. Raja Rao's vision of national struggle is philosophically

oriented, deriving mainly from. The Gita's teaching that the fight is to be ceaselessly continued as a service to God:

Keywords - Political resurgence, Philosophical Perspectives, Intrinsically .

Introduction:

Kanthapura is the master piece of Indo – Anglian fiction on the theme of Indian struggle for freedom; has been able to recapture the perfect harmony of plot, character, dialogue and narrative on the one hand and fantasy and the realism on the other. Although living in France, he was emotionally attached to what was happening in Indian villages and cities in the 1930's, and that is what he has depicted in the novel. His stay abroad has provided him, the necessary perspective and detachment. The three levels of action in the novel, social, political and religious, are all related to a unified concept of objectivity in a perfect balance. In his forward to *Kanthapura* Raja Rao reveals his awareness of the need to find a creative approximation of the western novel form to the Indian experience. *Kanthapura* reveals the author's skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and discourse, authentically Indian and convincingly modern. There are at least three streams of experience in this novel: the political, religious and the social and all the three are woven inextricably into the one complex story of *Kanthapura*. *Kanthapura* is India in microcosm, what happened there, is what happened everywhere in India during those terrible years of our fight for freedom.

Raja Rao's adumbration of philosophical ideas and his depiction of traditional rites and ceremonies owe a great deal to his spiritual inheritance and the intellectual family background about which Prof. M.K. Naik tells us that "According to family tradition, an illustrious ancestor was Vidyaranya Swami, the greatest teacher of Advaitic Vedanta after Sankara, the mentor of Harihara and Bukka, who founded the southern kingdom of Vijaynagar, which was the last Hindu state to fall to the Muslim onslaught in the sixteenth century." Raja Rao's own grandfather was a learned scholar and the days of his close association with him in his childhood at Hasan became the cradle of the spiritual and philosophical learning that found fuller growth in his later life. His choice of Brahmin protagonists in all the five novels he has written so far is mainly on account of the strengths and weaknesses of the highest and holiest caste of the Hindus. Secondly, it has enabled a novelist of ideas like Raja Rao to present all that is best in Indian tradition through the portrayal of his protagonists.

Theoretical context:

Raja Rao calls his novel a *Sthalpurana*, a legendary history restricted to a specific locality. He observes in his Foreword:

There is no village in India, however that has not a rich *Sthalpurana*, or legendary history of its own. Some God or godlike hero has passed by the village, Rama might have rested under the pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma itself, in one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way, the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the annals of my village I have tried to tell.

Thus, the sense of place dominates the novel; the Kenchamma Hill, the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the temple of Kanthapurishwari, the rivers Himvathy and Cauvery are all topographical signals of a country which is at once landscape, life, history, people, ideas and ideals. Kanthapura is rooted in the deep-seated custom and authority, superstition and ritualism of Indian folk life. Moorthy, the village Mahatma, Bhatta, the pontifical Brahmin, Bade Khan the policeman and Range Gowda the Patel of the village, are all individuals as well as types. Around this bustle of life and concourse of humanity, the action of the novel is adumbrated.

The action of the novel starts as a narration of how life in a remote Kannada village, protected in its static existence by the timeless figure of Goddess Kenchamma, the *Gram Devi*. She is so much embedded in the consciousness of the inhabitants that it is difficult to conceive the village without her benign presence. It symbolizes the Feminine principle worshipped in the pre-Aryan matriarchal societies. It is the guardian spirit of the entire village, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, while Shiva, the male deity, is worshipped in the Main street temple, located in a Brahmin neighbourhood. Moorthy takes a prominent part in the religious activities which seem to constitute the very life of the village. He is a "Gandhi man", that is, a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, who organizes "Gandhi Business" in the form of teaching the untouchables and popularizing spinning as a means of economic independence. The opposition to the new ideology comes from the foreign authority represented by the policeman Bade Khan and also from the Hindu orthodoxy embodied in Bhatta, the rich money-lender and premier Brahman of the village, from the fear that "the confusion of castes" will lead to the "pollution of progeny" and bring Brahminism to an end. Moorthy, however does not waver in his idealism and carries on his work with the missionary zeal among the coolies of the neighbouring Skeffington coffee estate, establishes the congress committee of Kanthapura and courts imprisonment for seditious activities. On his release, he leads the people of Kanthapura to join the mainstream of the Indian national movement,

which at this stage, takes the form of Civil Disobedience. The rest of the action follows closely the directives of the Indian National congress, as the people rally for the enforcement of prohibition, refuse to pay taxes and attempt to establish a parallel government. In penal retaliation, the village is subjected to violence and humiliation. Ultimately the very identity of the village is destroyed as the land belonging to most of the inhabitants is sold in auction to complete strangers. The uprooted inhabitants find shelter in the neighbouring villages where the middle aged and barren widows go on living almost the same kind of life as at the beginning of the action, believing in the Mahatma as the saviour. Moorthy, along with many young people of Kanthapura, however joins the socialist camp.

Gandhi's impact on the freedom movement is the main thrust of the novel, yet never does Gandhi need to appear in person in Kanthapura. His influence is as pervasive as that of the incarnations who come to the earth again and again in person in order to destroy sin and the sinners and to re-establish religion on a firm footing. The epigraph on the inner title page of the original edition of Kanthapura reads "When-so-ever there is misery and ignorance I come." It is only a variant of the sloka of The Bhagwada Gita in which Lord Krishna reveals the principle of his incarnation on this earth:

Yada Yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati Bharata!

Abhytitthanam adharmasya tadatmanam srijamy ahatn!!

(When-so-ever there is a decline of righteousness and unrighteousness is on the ascendant, then I body myself forth.)

Gandhi thus becomes an incarnation in Kanthapura. His is an oblique but ubiquitous 'avataric' presence in the novel. Consequently, the whole novel moves on a plane much higher than its material level of plot and character would suggest. Religious feelings get proper exposition in the context of the revolution that was the chief concern of all Indian people during the fateful years of the freedom struggle. The quest of the novelist is thus essentially religious and the central burden of the novel is to rediscover the lost, cultural, religious and metaphysical glory through the current political theme. The novel by its very nature of composition aims at transforming the national self of the countrymen and, in the process, virtually rediscovers the Indian soul through Gandhi; 'a pilgrim on his quest of truth, quiet, peaceful, determined and fearless who would continue that quiet pilgrimage regardless of consequences.' A deep religious core permeates the novel and makes it a devotional lyric-a hymn to Gandhi.

Literary Frame Work:

Truly, Raja Rao's entire fiction is soaked with the Indian-ness. He is Indian mainly in sensibility and values, and not in subject matter alone. He thoroughly examines the mystery, complexity, philosophy and magnitude of India, bringing out fully the Indian sensibility and values.

The focal point of Raja Rao's Indian-ness is the ancient Indian philosophy which forms the core of his fictional works. To him, philosophy is a passion and literature is only an expression of it. From *Kanthapura* to *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, his basic concern is with philosophy, specially religious-philosophical doctrine. This is the reason why *Kanthapura* deals, in detail, with the Karma philosophy, which is the common place of Indian thought. In its abstract form it finds its most lucid and authentic expression in the *Gita*, while in its concrete form and practical form it is best embodied in the life, ideas and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus it is not surprising that *Gandhiji* is at the center of the book, and it is rightly described as *Gandhi-purana*. A Gandhian out and out, Moorthy, the hero of the novel is completely given to the life of action based on the doctrine of the nonviolence and truth. The novelist gives vent to his faith in Indian ideal that it is through well-thought out and well-directed action that man can make the best of his potentialities - material, moral and spiritual. Moorthy is really a man of action, and whatever convictions he has, he realises them through actions at all costs. Thus, he does not stop going to pariahs to improve their lots, no matter he loses his mother Narsamma on this account. The simple belief in the power of combined action is underlined by the following words of Moorthy addressed to the village folk.

Now : we are out for action. A cock does not make a morning, nor a single man a revolution, but we'll build a thousand pillared temple, a temple more firm than any that hath yet been builded, and each one of you be ye pillars in it, and when the temple is built, stone by stone, and man by man, and the bell hung to the roof and the Eagle — tower shaped and planted, we shall invoke the Mother to reside with us in dream and in life. India then will be a temple of our making.

The Indian philosophical idea that man's karma determines his fate — good and bad — and he has to bear it inevitably is also lucidly presented in the novel. This metaphysical determinism which is at times condemned as ignoble passivity is fully brought out by Moorthy's following words: "And Moorthy said, 'That is how you should be. Bear all as though your karma willed it and everything will be borne.'" As we have seen in our discussion that along with Karma, the Indian religious traditions and ideals, emanating from the popular philosophical ideas, have also been portrayed in the novel. Not the philosophic innovations alone but it too exhibits a sensibility for combating the colonial complex and winning respect for the Indian. It also brings into being the Indian theme and traditional expressive form with a creative use of English for the expression of a truly Indian sensibility.

The deep rooted philosophy of the novel can also be explained by the structure of the novel. The structure is neither linear nor open, nor episodic as it appears on the surface, but circular or enclosed, like that of a wheel - a circular rim connected by spokes to a hub, designed to turn around an axle. Or to use another image, the structure of the novel is radial with the action and its meaning and significance radiating, like rays or radii, from a common center. These rays or spokes of a wheel join both the center of a circle or the hub of the wheel, on one side, and several points on the circumference, on the other.

In a wheel-like structure, Moorthy forms the hub or the center of actions. What transmits the movement of the hub to the rim are the spokes — thick ones and thin ones — linking the hub and the rim, or Moorthy and the main action of the novel. The country-made, broad spokes and radiating from the hub are the Brahmin quarter, the Pariah quarter, the potter's quarter, the weaver's quarter and the Sudra quarter together which consists of ninety or hundred houses. In essence, they represent the four Hindu castes: the Brahmin or the intellectual or the manthinking, the Kshatriya or the warrior or the man-acting, the Vaishya or the man of business and finally the Sudra or the man doing lowly or menial jobs. Thus various quarters in Kanthapura by metaphorical extension mean the whole of human race. But it is only Moorthy who provides a common link between them. Remove him and all the four castes are separate and the humanity is dinteragrated in the same way as various spokes dangle in the air in the absence of the hub.

Conclusion:

Nevertheless, the novel deals with both action and the preparation for it as if they were two sides of the same coin — the preparation involving the act of selfpurification and practical realization of love and non-violence. It is seen in maturing of Moorthy into a true disciple of Mahatma as also in the training of his followers as true Satyagrahis. After his return from jail Moorthy admonished his people: “Prepare yourself for action” “ an act which he himself performs in all sincerity for becoming a true Satyagrahi. Closing his eyes tighter in meditation, very often, he slips back into the foldless sheath of the soul, and sends out rays of love to the east, rays of love to the west, rays of love to the north, rays of love to the south and love to the earth below and to the sky above, and he feels such exaltation creeping into his limbs and head that his heart begins to beat out a song, and the song of Kabir comes into his mind. The road to the city of love is hard, brother it is hard take care, as you walk along it.

Obviously, there can be no greater penance and no better preparation for action. The preparation itself is the highest act of wisdom and attainment of the deepest reality. It is a yoga that brings the devotee closer to the truth. Least connected with the apparent goal of political freedom it aims at self-realization .

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