

Indianness depicted as the sum-total of cultural traditions of India reflecting the deep-seated ideas-political, economical, cultural and spiritual: An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is a humble attempt to depict Indianness as the sum-total of cultural traditions of India reflecting the deep-seated ideas-political, economical, cultural and spiritual that constitute the mind of India and Indians. It neatly projects Raja Rao as a significant novelist picturing rather effectively Indian elements in his novels with a focus on not only the cultural class but also political bias existing and also causing damage to the effective cultural and religious traditions that shaped the Indian societal custom sometimes and disturbing the healthy society and societal tradition at other times.*

Key Words: *Indianness, spiritual value, cultural class, focus, political idealism, custom and tradition*

The Indianness of our regional literatures, according to Dr. C.PaulVerghese, is taken for granted and no one takes the trouble to analyse it or study it in depth. It is assumed that there is “no clash between the culture and the languages which express it” (Verghese 3). Indian writing in English expresses Indian culture and nurtures over the countries by an alien culture. In the words of Professor B.Raja, “The inwardness of Indianness cannot be captured by a language essentially foreign; the subtlest and the most vital nuances are accessible only to a living speech with its roots in the soil and in the organic past” (Mukherjee 3).

Both Pre-Independence and post-Independence streams are compromised in Indian writing in English, writers feel as if they are the part of a great Indian tradition which is amorphous, diverse and undefined. Indian English literature is “one of the voices in which India speaks. It is new voice, no doubt, but it is as much Indian as others” (Iyengar 3). It is an important body of ‘the new Englishes’ which have developed in different parts of the world. In Map of the world fiction, Indian English novel has carved out a remarkable and praiseworthy place, it also projects the thematic and stylistic way of Indian life. “Untouchable” (1935) is probably Mulk Raj Anand’s novel dealing with the Indian theme. As it is considered as a social conscious novel, it focuses on traditions, social evils etc., it exposes class-based society in India. It also projects the caste and class system in Hindu society during 1930s. This novel **Untouchable** was written when India was a colony and untouchability was rife through India. Mahatma Gandhi makes a crusade against this social evil. Indianness is, thus, the sum-total of the cultural traditions of India. It reflects the deep-seated ideas-political, economical, cultural and spiritual that constitute the mind of India.

Today English language is used as a medium for creative expression by large number of educated Indians. Their writings now form part of a substantial body of literature which is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. The major theme used in Indo-Anglian novel was the struggle for freedom, poverty, hunger, disease and the social evils like untouchability, examination of the survival of the past, Indian socio-political and cultural conflicts, religious attitude and impact of Industrialization. Such themes have adapted themselves to the changing Indian environment as ‘Indian element’ in Indo-Anglian fiction.

Raja Rao, following Mulk Raj Anand’s treatment of Indian theme in his fiction, has given fullest expression to treatment of ‘Indianness’ in his novel. His profound knowledge of Indian socio-philosophic life, his passionate involvement with the Indian freedom struggle under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and his creative quest to search a soothing, seductive and creative language for delineating his thoughts and ideas having their roots in Indianness have got reflected beautifully in his **Kanthapura**. The action of the novel is Kanthapura, a typical South Indian village on the slopes of the Western Ghats. The novel describes the Gandhian movement against the established British rule in India and how it reaches the South Indian village namely Kanthapura. Moorthy, an incarnation of Gandhian consciousness, is depicted as one transforming the life of an entire community in the Indian village. He explains the economy of the ‘Khadi’ and the importance of ‘Charka’ to the ignorant and uneducated women of the village and asks them

to take to spinning on Indianness and Indian attitude in all walks of life despite stiff opposition from different corners.

In general, Raja Rao, deals with Indian elements in his novels, in *Kanthapura* he has projected humanism as the soul of Indianness and has waged a war, against the inhuman values eating into the very vitals of humanity. The caste-hatred, the disarrangement of the Hindu widowhood, the current police atrocity, the element of exploitation, the evil of today-drinking and the social prejudices are some of the inhuman factors corroding the very foundation of Indian society. The stream of life is not clean both in cities and the villages for the simple reason that it is caught in the spider's web of inhuman values all around it. **Kanthapura** wages a war against such values which have made human life shabby and pitiable.

Raja Rao, while writing Indian novels, has made use of Indian locale and narrative style as in **Kanthapura** or typically Indian sensibility as in **The Serpent and the Rope**. Though his intellectual make-up is not purely Indian, his attitude towards life is Indian and he tries to realise from Indian point of view the Western attitude towards life. His novels are steeped in the ideal Indian Brahmanic quality. A good number of references in his novels to this characteristic make it clear that he considers this quality as a typically Indian quality. In his **The Serpent and the Rope**, what has been stated is:

“What is that separated us?” asked Madeleine India”

“India, But I am a Buddhist”

“That is why Buddhists left India: India is implacable”.

“But one can become a Buddhist”

“Yes, and a Christian and a Muslim as well”

“You mean one can only be born a Brahmin”.

“That is an Indian”

He projected all central characters in the novel as Brahmins and they are also considered as symbols of Indian philosophy. The novelist cannot wash his mind off the fact that he is a Vedantin (followers of the Vedas). Through his work *Kanthapura*, he projects the problems of Indian life. The theme is Indian to the core and its style is thoroughly Indian. Rhymes of speech are very often from Kannada rather than from English. In short, this novel is nothing but an embodiment of Indian sensibility in English creative writing and illiterate Indians are richly presented in Indian style. In this novel, there are descriptions of India habits and manners of the people of *Kanthapura* village. He projects the life style of people as very simple life in village. The various ceremonies and rituals performed by the villagers are graphically described to show that all are purely Indian in theme and spirit. Raja Rao skillfully brings the environment of Indian life. For instance, the description of coming of monsoons is really appreciable and amazing:

“Trees begin sudden to tremble and hiss...there is a gurgle and a ground from behind the bamboo cluster- and the gurgle and grunt soar up and swallow in the whole sky. The darkness grows thick as sugar in a cauldron, while the bamboos creak and sway and whine, and the crows begin to wheel round and flutter...and then, the wind comes so swift and dashing that it takes the autumn leaves with it, and they rise into the juggling air, while the trees beat and blubber. The drops fall, as big as a thumb, and as the thunder goes clashing like a temple cymbal through the heavens, the earth itself seems to heave up and cheep in the monsoon rains. It churns and splashes, beats against the tree-tops, reckless and willful, and suddenly floating forwards it bucks back and spits forwards...” (*Kanthapura*).

Raja Rao has used Indian imagery, simple and meaningful style. Many ready-made devices like Indian myth at the centre of the novel, which make his novel typically Indian. The SavitriSatyavan myth is used in **The Serpent and the Rope** and Rama Sita and Ravan myth is used in **Kanthapura**. The narrative technique is like that of the ancient Indian writings. The Indians are garrulous (talkative) by nature; he 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 materials.

Indian legends, folk-tales and mythological stories are interspersed throughout his novels. Indian phrases are directly translated into English, some of which may be cited as examples of images and expressions from Indian life used in *Kanthapura*.

- i) God has not given me a tongue for nothing
- ii) Narasamma was growing like a bamboo and shriveled like a banner bar.
- iii) The sky becomes blue as the marriage shawl.
- iv) Lean as an areca-nut tree.

Like Mulk Raj Anand, Rao uses swear words with the purpose of creating the effect of local colour, like “the son of my woman”, “those sons of concubine” etc which have been used to impart Indian touch to the English expression, as the “Gandhi-man”, “Red-man” “milkless” “salt-givers” “crow and sparrow story”, “leap cups” and “sparrow voice”.

Raja Rao does not stop with the art of narrating events purely as an Indian artist in treatment of theme but he has indianised the English language successfully to suit his needs. Many Indian expressions are literally translated into English. In many places, forms of addresses are used from Indian language. The language is saturated with Indian idiom and Indian imagery. Some words like **ahimsa**, **dhoti**, **mandap** are Indian words used without any translation. Some proverbs commonly used by Indian peasants in their day-to-day speech are used by Raja Rao in his **Kanthapura**. For instance, 1) **Saw you like a rat on your mother’s lap**, 2) **there is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura**. Many Indian idioms literally translated into English and some of the various devices employed by Raja Rao make generally his novels typically Indian. As one modern critic has put it rather rightly,

“Kanthapura portrays the whole drama of Gandhian revolution as enacted in a village in all frenzy and fury. The typical Indian features of real life-its mixture of politics and mythology, its seraphic freedom from the taint of science and technology, its ruggedness and even its vulgarity- all faithfully reproduced in terms of art. Even the language has been creatively moulded by the novelist to distil the raciness, and the poetic non-stop narration creates at once a sense of dramatic immediacy and personal intimacy. Kanthapura represents not an isolated village in Mysore but the whole country. The characters are convincingly drawn from all castes of an ordinary Indian village to reflect Indianness in all walks of life” (Kumar 148).

The Serpent and the Rope, a major novel of Raja Rao, is out and out an Indian novel, being Indian both in theme and technique. Its central theme is Advaita doctrine of non-dualism or “oneness of all”, a number of Indian myths and legends are woven into the texture, and Raja Rao’s technique of narration is typically Indian. In the words of K.K.Sharma, “It is an artistic exposition of the highest school of Indian philosophy, the **Advaita** of Sri Sankara. The central theme of the novel is the Indian idea of the Absolute, the Truth, the Ultimate Reality or substance of the Universe, which is distinguishable from the relative, the illusion or the shadow. This is explained, in detail, through the well-known analogy of the Serpent and the Rope, thoroughly treated by Sri Sankaracharya in his enunciation of the Advaita philosophy” (Sharma 49). The India as presented by Raja Rao in **The Serpent and the Rope** is more a metaphysical concept, ‘an idea’ than a geographical entity. This novel is nothing but “an intellectual feast of Indian philosophy and religious” (Sarangi 47) The wisdom of the Indian scriptures-the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita-has been presented neatly in the pages of the novel. The characters are taken from different races and nations and are intellectual and more loaded with philosophy than the simple villagers of Kanthapura. Ramaswami, the hero-narrator professes an objective approach:

“I am not telling a story here; I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life with the “objectivity”, the discipline of the “historical sciences” for by taste and tradition I am only a historian” (231)

In practice, he follows a historical approach as he declares his subject to be neither ‘real’ nor ‘unreal’. The narrator revolves round the theme of East-West encounter against a setting that is partly Europe; partly Indian. Ramaswami’s vision of India is ageless like the sages. It is ageless like the sages. It is always beautiful and sacred to live and to be rooted as an Indian in India. “The Guru of the World” (332).

Indianness cannot be cut apart from Indian philosophical tradition. The Indian’s glowing faith in the ‘Karma’ and ‘Dharma’ has given him cultural unity and certainty. Ramaswami, the hero-narrator, represents the philosophy of a nation. He has strong regards for the Rig vedic dictum- **Ekamsad Vipraah Bahuda Vadantic** (Truth is one, the wise call it by many names). Raja Rao’s Indianness is “a binding force, the result of many other forces- sense of tradition, culture, heritage, history, geography, life-altitude, habits, deep-rooted philosophy, and social life: Indianness is an internal and abstract value. It is that mental unity where difference melts” (Sarangi 49). Ramasamy declares ‘Jnanam is India’, thereby meaning that India is the metaphysics of Sankara’s **Shuddadwaita**, pure non-dualism. To Ramaswamy, India exists wherever **Jnanam** is expressed and communicated beyond history.

Another aspect of the novel which makes it essentially Indian is “Raja Rao’s affirmation of the principle of womanhood in the Indian women characters in the novel **The Serpent and the Rope**. In his delineation of **Little Mother**, **Saroja** and **Savithri**, Raja Rao uses the traditional conception of Indian

womanhood in varying degrees” (Verghese 150). His novel **Comrade Kirillov** is an attempt to prove that an Indian, whatever be his political leanings, will always have his Indianness uppermost. Though Raja Rao has depicted both the best and the worst in Indian life, his main concern has been to bring to focus on the highest truths that India can still revitalize for her own renaissance and also impart to the West for its spiritual regeneration. “Truth is the only substance India can offer and that truth is metaphysical and not moral”, says Ramasamy in **The Serpent and the Rope** (P 350). Raja Rao’s purpose in his novel **The Cat and Shakespeare** is to create an interesting fantasy for the philosophical doctrine of the cat-hold theory as a way of deliverance from the mysterious and complex world of Shakespeare.

Raja Rao has become an authentic voice of India, who paints the present and enlivening the past for revealing both the outer and the inner India. In a word, this novel **The Cat and Shakespeare** may be described as “a tale of India” (Verghese 154). Raja Rao calls it ‘a metaphysical comedy’ and advises the reader ‘to weep at every page not for what he sees, but for what he sees, he sees’. In over all terms, the novelist has used his technical skill to present the Indian world as something real to all, making a genuine picture of the essential Indianness get projected in his fiction.

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