Ambivalence: A Reader’s Perspective of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*

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**Abstract:**
Jacques Derrida uses two terms in this discourse of deconstruction to define literature and non-literature, or art and non-art forms that “defer” & “differ”. To put it in simple term, the meaning of the text gets postponed and no one can get complete meaning by reading a literary text. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is a classic example. The theme cannot be found under one umbrella. There are multiple meanings, too many references from ancient mythical characters to Mahatma Gandhi. Time and again when we talk of Indian Writing in English and the selection of language for creative writing, the novel *Kanthapura* as well as novelist Raja Rao is particularly either referred or quoted because of his ever debated and inspiring FOREWORD—fact, his foreword is much more popular than the novel. Raja Rao was born as Kannadiga, but grown up universally by learning many world languages, studying different discourses—for example, Vedanta, myths, Mahatma Gandhi’s principles, Indian freedom movement and Indian Nationalism. Reading Rao is more necessary as we are living without proper “roots of life” today. My paper will discuss some of themes which are significantly paramount in the novel.


*Aesthetics does not develop in a social vacuum. The aesthetic conception of life is a product of life itself which it then reflects. A flower, so beautiful, is the product of the entire tree. But a flower is also an important marker of the identity of a particular group of plants or even of a particular individual plant. The flower, so delicate, also contains the seeds for the continuation of that plant. A product of the past of that plant, it also becomes the future of the same plant*. (Ngui’s Interview with Michael Pozo)

Raja Rao, was born Indian, but lived and served many years in foreign land considered as *jnana yogi*, Passed away a few years ago. He was born in a Brahman family in Mysore district, got educated at India and European Universities. He has taken cudgels to write novels based on Indian epics and independent movement and post-independent situations of India prominently.

*Kanthapura* is a novel of anticipated society after the turmoil of freedom movement led by Moorothy, who amalgamates mythical characters, Gandhian ideology of *Truth & non-violence*, and Nehru’s philosophy of politics. The essence of Indian philosophy is its epics, purans, sacred books, which always talk of fighting between good and evil and ultimately after continues struggle, good wins against the evil. The message is for us to follow the good.

The novel is introduced to us with the descriptions of spectacular nature, village Kara, Kanthapura and the Goddess Kenchamma. It is small village of 20 houses and Moorothy happens to be a prominent person in the village. Moorothy though a Brahman, he wants to come out the orthodox traditions of his caste by visiting lower caste families to mobilize the people for freedom movement.

*Kanthapura* portrays the microcosmic world in the beginning of the novel and gradually it opens up macrocosmic world of Indian Independence movement and the world of Gandhi and Nehru, during freedom movement of India. The novelist connects mythical stories, characters with modern-Indian nationalist characters. Moorothy better be called a narrator (though the listener and narrator are there throughout the novel) rather than a protagonist-or a hero. The story of *Shiva, Paravathi* and the nation is finally amalgamated. A critic laments that III world literature is a national allegory (Jameson). Moorothy’s intention of organizing untouchables projected as noble at surface level but it is not. For example when he meets lower caste people, they offer him ‘milk to drink’, he drinks but once he comes home takes sacred bath and Ganga water to purify himself. It shows that his conscious and social commitment work contradictory. We are given the picture of Brahmnic traditions at every stage of the novel: arthi, puja, conches, bells, Vedanta, bhajan, etc. Surprisingly, no lower castes cultural practices are found in the novel. That is why it is called ‘hegemonic Indian nationalism’ and ‘brahminical culture is a legitimate national culture’.

We notice the two strong opposing views about the ancient society, a)it is said that it was well balanced and advanced in every sense of the word, and b) it is argued that the society was barbaric/uncivilized so on and so forth. With reference to the novel *Kanthapura* one can study the two opinions and analyze which one is acceptable.

Every argument seems to be meaningful in one way or the other. There might be more than one truth in this regard. *Kanthapura* is based on the fictional world of Raja Rao which is universal, philosophical, ideological and we believe what art including literature provides and talks of humans values and talks of change of society at all times.
The essence of Indian tradition is Jnana (Wisdom), which symbolizes transcendental truth. The truth is to find the eternal solace of happiness i.e moksha. Confluence of jnana and karma (works), exposes values and sacred beliefs without which human life is barren. The two terms seem to suggest as antonyms but at the very deeper level they work as synonyms. Wisdom comes out of the work and work is the outcome of wisdom. It needs dedication, sacrifice and commitment.

Transcendental features are used in literature to define the eternal truth which very much internal and beyond physical in nature. It is explained and made a case for Transcendentalism in America by Emerson where he talks of oneself. The one-self is interwoven. The relationship between cosmic world and our physical world appears to be different but they have a close relationship. Here this term is applied to read how Rao tries to associate different themes along with this particular concept of heavenly concepts to understand the plight of the common man. Whether man is responsible for the ills and evils which occur time and again or immortal fate which invisible is sole cause for the pathetic living conditions of man. Rao is a yogi who sees internal world and tries to guide the suffering soul. This is the reason Rao happens to be pioneer in every attempt he makes.

This vision is not far from ambivalent. This particular jargon is very popular in this modern multidimensional intercultural world (or as Ngugi coins the word corporealism) where duality or the plurality or hybridity is the hall mark. It can be used to see how every argument has another view called OTHER. In logic or philosophy or in literature or in any field there might more than one opinion, even in science too. Rao’s ideology too has a divergent or opposing view which is yet another foregrounding feature. Rao uses fiction as a story of narrative with a plot and with number of incidents and characters. This genre of novel is becoming very powerful nowadays because it is flexible and any unexplainable emotion/feeling can be dealt with. I would like to conclude with the words of Vinay Bahl as:

“The need to understand the non-western cultures has arisen because a large number of people have migrated to the west from non-western countries since World War II in search of better life chances. These working-class immigrants have become confused about their social and cultural identities in the face of massive consumerism in the west and now, increasingly, in non-western countries”. (Vinay Bahl-web)

II. REFERENCES:


Author’s Introduction:

Dr. C. Channappa (1964-) was born in the lap of Sahyadri Mountain Ranges, known as Malnadu in Karnataka State. In 2010, he received his doctorate in comparative literature from Kuvempu University, Shimoga (on Ngugi Kenya and K. Chinnappa Bharathi, a Tamil writer) and did his PGDTE at EFLU (Hyderabad). He has been teaching at SMR College, Shankaraghatta, for past twenty two years. He has a genuine concern for the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the exploited and suppressed sections of society. He has presented research papers, especially on subaltern writings, at various regional, national, international seminars and contributed significantly to reputed literary journals. He has also done research work with UGC financial assistance and delivered a number of scholarly lectures including one at Nairobi, Kenya. He has contributed an article to the book Dalit woman writing: Bama, published by (Prestige) entitled, Bama’s Sangati: The Chronicles of Exploitation and Suppression of Dalit Women. He has been an Indian examiner for a few reputed Universities in India. He has published three scholarly international books which are available online entitled, Voices of Protest (Prestige New Delhi), Global Challenges in the Fiction of Ngugi (Vedanta New Delhi), and Indian and African Literature (Prestige-New Delhi) Ed “Global Fiction & the New Challenges: Dalit, Diaspora & Diversity”, Ed “Feminist Theory and Literature”, Ed “Rise of the New Writing: Folk, Culture and Cinema”, and also conducted an international conference at Shimoga in association with ISCS, New Delhi during 2017.