



The Concept of ‘Indianness’ in Raja Rao’s ‘Kanthapura’

Meenu Aryaa

Assitt. Prof. (English)

S.D. Mahila Mahavidyalya, Narwana

Abstract:-

India is Known for her liberal philosophy, culture, values and ‘unity in diversity’. What is called ‘Indianness’? “Perception or feeling of ‘being an Indian’ socially, culturally and spiritually.” (definition according to Collins Dictionary)

Mark Twain wrote about India that “India is the cradle of the human race, the birth place of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great-grandmother of tradition.”

Indianness is about embedding values and history in a literary work that has originated, evolved and transformed on the Indian soil. There are a lot of Indian English writers who are talented and illustrious enrich the literature with their creative and innovative style of writing so that they can fulfil their own cultural purposes. However, in order to do so, it had to pass across diverse philosophical and intellectual terrains for awarding it a distinctiveness of its own.

English is no longer the language of the English people alone. India’s long association with English language has benefited the people in many ways. It has enriched the Indian language and culture and has broadened our outlook

on life. One praiseworthy feature of these English Indian writers is that they have not only natives the British mother tongue in terms of stylistic features, but they have also acculturated English in terms of the Indianite contest. India has produced many great writers who have influenced a whole coming generations by their writings. From R.K. Narayan to V.S. Naipaul all depict the daily life of a common man, his simplicity, culture and values always remain a favourite theme for their writings. Their works vividly portray the picture of Indian society and always spread the fragrance of our rich culture and traditions.

Keywords: Indianness, Diversity, Unity, Literature, Intellect

Introduction:-

What strikes in mind after pronouncing the word 'Indianness' is Indian's vast culture values and traditions etc. Due to its adaptability and comprehensiveness, Indian culture has survived through the ages. 'unity in diversity' is one of the major characteristics of Indian culture which makes it unique. India is considered the birth place of some of the world's major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism. Today Muslim and Christianity have worked their way into the population as well. The greatest thing about Indian culture is its ability of synthesis. Indians are great in assimilating different cultures and values almost effortlessly. We can find all the cultures of world present in India. India has great ethnic and linguistic diversity, so we can see English Language as an important 'bridge' language.

Since the age of colonialism, the English language has travelled to many countries across the globe, adopting countless linguistic and cultural traits along the way. It is widely accepted that the English language is the most important international language in the world. The interaction between the British and the Indian created a new variety of English called Indian English. Inevitably, the growth of English in India had more to do with political events than with the linguistic properties of the language. The growth of English was so exponential that it became the language of the government, the social elite and the national press. Infact, English today is one of the most powerful languages not only in India but in Asia. English has approximately 350 million speakers that use the language for different purposes in that continent, which is not too far of the total population of Great Britain and the United States combined,

where they speak English as their first language. The growth of English has been so big that Asians do not consider the language as a colonial import. There is a feeling that English is part of their own culture. Gemino Abad, a Filipino poet, sums it up perfectly with this quote: “The English language is now ours. We have colonized it, too.”(Honna, 2005:77)

India has produced many great writers who have influenced a whole coming generations by their writings. From R.K. Narayan to V.S. Naipaul all depict the daily life of a common man, has simplicity, culture and values always remain a favourite theme for their writings. Their works vividly portray the picture of Indian society. It is presupposed here that the English language has so much diffused to the various level of the Indian society that it can be termed Indian English like other varieties of English, Such as Australian English, American English, African English etc. Rajo Rao, a famous Indian writer of English language novels and short stories, was born in Hassan, Karnataka. Though Raja Rao studied abroad, he was a nationalist at heart. Apart from being a nationalist he was a social activist also. He ranks among the three most noted India English novelists. Mulk Raj Anand and R.K Narayan are the two other prominent writers. They are known as “The Big Three”, in an epithet coined by the noted English critic William Walse. In the book

“ Indian Literature in English” talking about these writers, Walse says: “ It is these three writers who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumptions; they sketched its main themes, freed the first models of its characters and elaborated its peculiar logic. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred of to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light.(Page.62)

Rajo Rao’s wide ranging body of work spanning a number of genres is seen as a varied and significant contribution to Indian English literature, as well as world literature as a whole. He could be considered a bridge between the East and the West. He was enormously influenced by the Western and Indian epics. He was greatly influenced by William Shakespeare. Raja Rao won many awards for his works. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964 for “The Serpent and the Rope”(1960), a semi-autobiographical novel. Apart from this, he was also

awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 1969 and Padma Vibhushan in 2007. His literary works are:

Kanthapura, The serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India, Comrade Kirillov, The Chessmaster and His Moves, On the Ganga Ghat etc.

Kanthapura is Raja Rao's first novel published in 1938. It is set during the early days of Indian freedom struggle. The Village Kanthapura is the picture of the India of the British days. Durrell said about this novel: "Hurrah for you. You not only do India's great honour, but you have honoured English literature by writing it in our language....truly magnificent."

The novel keeps all the native ingredients of expression. The writer presents the whole story of the novel in such a way that we can connect it to our daily life directly. In other words, the novel have inherent Indianness. The theme of Kanthapura is the unification of different Indian castes under a Gandhian system of social justice during the fight against British rule of India. Freedom movement was a long battle which was fought by the masses at grass root level involving people of all castes. What happens across the country is represented through the happenings in a small village, Kanthapura, in South Indian. The picture of the village is a microcosmic picture of macrocosm. In other words, a similar picture of rural life can be seen in any village of India.

Raja Rao accurately translate Indian sensibilities into English. "The telling has not been easy", he writes in the preface of the novel, "one has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language." Raja Rao regarded literature as Sadhana, or spiritual discipline; for him, writing was a consequence of his metaphysical life. Kanthapura is, for him, "a rich sthala Purana, legendary history." Because he has granted religious significance to the place. The detailed description of the village at the opening of the novel is written in the manner of a sthalapurana wherein the divine origin or association of a place is established. There is a local goddess Kenchamma who protects the villagers. She is responsible for rains, harvests and the well-being of the villagers. Like Kenchamma, the river Himavathy also has a special significance in the novel and recalls passages

describing famous rivers in the Puranas such as the description of the river Narmada in Matsya Purana and the Agni Purana. Similarly, Kanthapura shares certain narrative techniques with the puranas. Kanthapura, Like the puranas, has digressions and episodic structure. By the effective use of the mythical technique, the past is connected with the present. Because the past helps us to understand the origin of our traditions and their relevance or irrelevance in the present context. The narrator gives the references of Rama, Ravana and Sita through the story told by Jaya ramachar. According to her, Mahatma Gandhi is Rama and Nehru is Bharat. He compares India to Sita and British government to Ravana. To liberate India from the clutches of British government, Mahatma Gandhi will finish off the British rule.

The western style of writing novel has been successfully mingled with the Indian style of story telling. Some scholars have criticised Raja Rao for employing the technique of story telling in the novel. But the novelist refuted the criticism and defended his style saying, “We in India think quickly, we walk quickly and when we move, we move quickly.” Its style is uniquely experimental. The story is told by an old Brahman widow Achakka. The sentence structure is manipulated for syntactic and rhythmic effect. Repetition is another favourite device, used to enhance the colloquial flavor of the narrative. In addition to these techniques, translation from Kannada is repeatedly used. Nicknames such as “Wasterfal Venkamma”, “Nose scratching Nanjamma,” “cornerhouse Moorthy” are translated; more important, Kannada idioms and expressions are rendered in English: “you are a traitor to your salt-givers”,. “The Don’t touch the Government Campaign”etc. Kanthapura is presented in its ‘Kannadized’ English. Raja Rao used direct, literal translation of Indian proverbs, idioms and phrases. There is a proverb in Hindi in which ‘cat’ is used to denote the hypocritical behaviour of a person. Venkamma condemns Moorthy when he observes three-day fast saying that ‘cat has taken to asceticism only to commit more sins’. These proverbs are appropriate and don’t sound artificial or contrived. Some words from Indian language, such as kumkum, aarthi, bhajans etc. are used in the novel without translating them into English. These words are used for the sake of clarity or some special effect. Raja Rao’s use of imagery is equally effective and functional, not decorative only. His similes and metaphors are based upon typical Indian flavour. For example: Moorthy’s good

life is compared to that of a noble cow. For narrator, the moon is like a pumpkin. Moorthy is as honest as the elephant. Such comparisons with ordinary things make the narration very interesting and easy to understand for an Indian who very well understand the basic concept of all these things. In the novel, his form of address, Bhattare from Bhatta, Moorthapa from Moorthy derived from original rhythm of Kannada speech. These apart, the novel also uses some Indian phrase to evoke native ethos e.g. “To tell the truth,” ‘he said this and that’, ‘Going this way or that way’, ‘for this reason and that reason, (k:57) ‘if this government’s people were really sons of their father (K:99) etc. These are conscious expression of the novelist to enrich his Indian English language Meenakshi Mukherjee says: “ The novel in the sense we understand it today is concerned with circumstantial reality with the concrete and particular that are influenced very largely by time and place. In this sense Kanthapura is a modern novel and its oral tradition of mythicizing etc. is a well-chosen technique.”

All the characters: Moorthy, Range Gowda, Bhatta, Ratna, Subha Chetty, Rangamma, Venkamma and many other characters seem to pick from the very soil of that area so naturally.

Conclusion:-

So with the publication of Raja Rao’s Kanthapura in 1938, Indian English fiction took a different and distinct turn. Kanthapura was a significant shift not only for what is said but also for the way it said. Only after mastering modernism and giving it local significance could the new literatures have joined the modern world (Encyclopadia 1114). Therefore, Raja Rao in his Kanthapura, created a form of modernism, ironic skeptical and innovative technique. Such as puranic texture and recurrent use of Hindu myths and legends which is Indian in subject- matter local language usage, local history, racial or national pride, political independence and demands for social justice are among the characteristics of the novel, as are concern with national mythology, with documenting local ways, usually in a realistic literary style. As the magnum opus of Raja Rao, Kanthapura totally reflects Indian idea and air as its very topic spins around India. All in all, Raja Rao’s anecdotal world is simply packed with Indianness.

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