

**The Thought of Idealism and the Free Voice in Indian English Literature: A Study of the
Ideal Free Characters in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura***

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Abstract

Unquestionably, the main purpose of this paper is to present a study of the thought of idealism in Indian English Literature with specific focus on the ideal free characters in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. The first novel, *Kanthapura* (1924), is Raja Rao's first pre-independent novel which forms the stable foundations of the next post-colonial novels. Also, the novel is an inevitable part of the sociological, historical and political situation which was conveyed to the reader through literature. It covered mostly all the geographical places and important cities of the subcontinent of India where most of the actions and liberation movements took place from the city of Peshawar in the North to Kanyakumari in the South in the period relevant to the 19th century and before the Partition 1947. This particular novel is mostly expressed as the voice of freedom and idealism with a pervasive historical background. The novel presents an ambient clarification and show about the subjugation period during which characters are shown as real subalterns; however they are presented as the most ideal characters irrespective of the social class, rank, and job. Most of the characters have got one broad goal which conveys the voice of freedom in an excommunicating place. This voice of freedom faced clashes with the voice of subjugation on the part of the tainted people irrespective of the caste to the extent that the free voices were socially excluded. Moreover, high caste characters religiously excommunicated everyone that conveys the thought or voice of liberation. However, all free voices appeared fair and strict in their search for freedom as a national thought.

The paper brings out a full survey about the ideal free characters in the novel as a pre-independence historical novel in all the senses of the word. Also, it brings out a continuous situation of the social, economic and political realities before independence. Furthermore, the paper briefly brings out a short analysis about the characters' feelings, identity and the sense of belonging to the home on one hand and sheds light on the economic, social, historical, and political aspects on the other hand in an attempt to show Raja Rao's opinion regarding the Indian situation in the twentieth century. Accordingly, Raja Rao tries to treat the situation and reform what can be reformed, through his characters' ideal behavior, who appear as real ideal free characters and re-discoverers of the self in his own abstract picture of India as a thought as well as a nation and geography with an ancient civilization.

Key Words: Thought, Ideal, Free, Voice, Raja Rao, Indian, English, Literature

Raja Rao as a novelist shows through the vital role of the female characters his strong stance as an ardent feminist as it appears in

his first novel, *Kanthapura*, as the pre-independent novel among all his other literary works. In this novel, he radically

gives the rein to the feminist stances to take part in the liberation movement irrespective of the male characters' initiatives which carries out an early implication of gender equality and freedom on one hand and seemingly to show that women are, also, key participants in the search for their own freedom and in their search for the country freedom as a goal on the other hand. In this respect, the whole story is narrated by a female character whose comments prevailed over all the happenings and events of the book.

There are some other female characters who radically show their strong stances as ideal feminists such as Rangamma who stands for the ideal free female character to unmask the veil of silence and starts taking part in politics especially after her visit to Karwar where her words prevailed quickly among the people and after Naryan's death she, also, gives lectures on religion as well as on philosophy. Her visit to Karwar is a rediscovery of the self which invokes her with new ideal thoughts of freedom. So, Rao insisted on the thought of idealism either at the level of incarnation in Hinduism as it is narrated in the story of Ramayana as the ideal King, the ideal husband and his ideal wife Sita or at the level of common characters such as Sankar and his ideal wife, Usha, "who would never utter a word loud and never say 'nay' to anything. And when she walked the streets, they always said "what a holy wife she was" (K:101) or the hero Rachana and his simple wife, the ideal Pariahs in the sense that Raja Rao wants to convey a message of idealism which cannot be restricted by a specific people or a particular caste. So, he shows the Swami

and Bhattare as unwelcome persons since their presence is the incarnation of evil.

On the other hand, Raja Rao puts the two ideal Pariah characters face to face with the high caste characters to re-order and re-change the old traditional concepts where the so called 'low' replaces or stands for the 'high' and the 'high' stands for the 'low' to freely incarnate the concept of idealism. The Pariah members are considered ardent supporters of the nation and the leader, Moorthy; however Swami and Bhattare are against Moorthy.

Moreover, the concept of idealism particularly in *Kanthapura* has gone through different stages of development all over the book and most of the characters played the roles to the utmost satisfaction of the author as well as the reader. In this respect, the ideal free character is always seen developed from one humble stage of a housewife to another higher stage of a revered saint who is able to read the texts of Vidya and Avidya and to 'discuss philosophy like Ramakrishnaya' and finally to a political leader's assistant who prepares and organizes for the Congress meetings and other important tasks such as defending and pursuing the people's cases in the jails as in the character of Rangamma. Her first outspoken calls regarding freedom and attacking the rulers takes place during the reading of the texts:

"sister, if for the thorny pit the illusioned fall into, you put the foreign government and for the soul that searches for liberation, you put our India, everything is clear". (K: 107)

With regard to this (Jasbir Jain: 2001:91) clarifies the role of women characters'

potential and gradual contribution to the reality as follows:

It is not just the discovery of the self, the exploration of the past, the correction of history, the shaping of epistemological system which are of significance but also the participation in the present, and the acceptance of new definitions of space and freedom, so that the centre and margins do not appear as antagonistic, hostile, mutually exclusive categories but acquired sufficient fluidity to enlarge each other. Feminism is about the self, about rights and about difference; post-feminism is a work towards reciprocal change, and expresses a need to look anew at the harsh political realities.”

In addition, the author shows the reader the female marginalization particularly in the period relevant to 1920s and before which looks like a world phenomenon of the female subjugation. The marginalization of women in *Kanthapura* is treated in absentia in such significant examples of social affairs like ignoring the bride's opinion in choosing her bridegroom in the sense that the parents choose and decide the bridegroom for their daughters even they choose a toothless and a twisted moustache husband as it is noticed with Venkama's daughter. Also, social persecution and marginalization can be seen through the marginalized female characters by discovering the prejudice against the female characters particularly in the pariah quarter as it has been seen with Rachana's wife where this kind of discrimination can be attributed to marginalized caste difference which has been found in the Indian communities since old ages.

To tackle the matter psychologically, the protagonist, Moorthy as a social innovator

as well as a learned free leader could go into Pariahs' quarter and houses, sit with them, taste their food, and teach them how to spin as a profession. His humane stance seems to be more reformative and aims at the freedom of women in the sense that women should express themselves ideally irrespective of caste before their own people and before the foreign rulers and their representatives. The hero appears to take the role of Mahatma Gandhi in his strong search for freedom in a peaceful way of struggle and liberation. Seemingly, the characters' development is gradual according to the ideal actions in the book in the sense that the story commences with the simple life of a village and ends with the ambition of a nation. In the middle, religious foundations of social reformation centralize and ultimately lead to calls of freedom as a human exigency that comes out as an inevitable ideal consequence of liberation.

A point of much importance is the gradual ideal free sense of responsibility which seems to be based on steady discovery of the self in the sense that women who were sacrificing themselves at village life for washing and drying dharmawar saris, khadi, bodice cloth and other clothes on the stones by the Hemavathy, dreaming of golden belts and two-storey houses by Kanchana Hill, with vast veranda, waiting for the harvest season and the blessings, superstitions to bring their daughters even toothless husbands with twisted moustaches and isolating the pariahs to be far from the excommunication of the Swami, now their thinking is mostly changed to a new discovery of rediscovery. They think in a different way in which they relate their readings of the texts to the daily life and the

sinister situation in which they are unafraid of being excommunicated through the church or the temple where both religious symbols stand for two different ideologies. They talk about freedom and fighting the untouchable government. They will to fight the foreign existence and the native tainted villains:

“Nay, nay, we are not men Rangamma” but Rangamma said, “In the city there are groups and groups of young women, girls, married women, and widows, who have joined together and have become volunteers - volunteers they call them and they practice exercises like the police and when meetings are hold they all get together and maintain order”. (K: 108)

Nanjamma ‘Why, I am not a man to fight, sister?’

Rangamma ‘Why, sister, you need not be a man to fight?’

The ideal character, Rangamma narrates to the women of Kanthapura the story of Rani Lakshmi Bai and her female free role in fighting the Britishers and the story works as the catalyst that stimulated the audience to work harder and harder, and join the front. Next, she tells them about the most reliable rule upon which the English could rule over the whole peninsular continent of India ‘Divide and Rule’ and how they mocked at the tainted kings, princes and other native rulers in that time either by supporting some against few or defending few from nothing. After that, she recapitulates how Lakshmi and other untainted people and small kings said

“We shall throw the Red-man into the sea” suddenly the army rose against

the Red-man, for the Red-man wanted the Hindus to eat cow’s flesh and the Mohamedan to eat pig’s flesh and the army rose and fought against the Red-man-that is why they call it the Soldier’s Revolt, in their language”.(K:109).

In the previous passage, it seems that there is a new form of encounter between Indians and Britishers’ agents which is fighting and war between masters equipped with all kinds of military weapons and ruled people or subalterns obsessed by do-not-touch the government. This means that corruption had reached its climax and people had not to be silent anymore. For the villagers fighting was only men’s responsibility in the way of freedom and the women’s participation in the war was incredible because fighting was beyond their ken so that they were shocked by Rangamma’s voice of freedom in her speech to the villagers.

Raja Rao intentionally offers an ideal free feminist stance through the story of Rani Lakshmi which psychologically brings out the heroine’s attitude towards the country and her captured India; how she rode to the battle and had never returned; a story that tells the women of Kanthapura that they are by hock or crock the next target which gives them a remarkably strong impetus to take the matter seriously after the gradual dialogues and debates with the leader Rangamma. Rani Lakshmi is a symbol of freedom in Indian culture. Of course, Gandhi’s thoughts of struggle appears clearly in the gradualness of the national struggle when people starts spinning, moves slowly to the boycott phase of the foreign products and strengthens salt manufacturing, participating in demonstrations but on do-

not-touch the government campaign. Then, the villagers were attacked by the police and the native conspirators but they willingly went to jails. Finally, they took the decision of fighting the English through fighting their tainted people. The previous story seems to disclose Raja Rao's own ideal revolution of his ardent feminist stance towards the Indian women and their relative roles in their social liberation movement.

“All the heroic daughters who fight for the Mother and “we say, too, our Kanthapura shall fight for the Mother” (K: 11)

The term ‘Mother’ symbolically stands for India and this metaphorical expression seems to be pervasive all over the book and convey the same meaning. The women of India are the daughters and their mother is India. The previous idea is transformed to the children who felt happy to imitate Rani Lakshmi whose role metaphorically seems to be one heroic and repetitive to a great many unknown heroes and heroines who sacrificed themselves for the sake of truth and freedom and grew up in their hearts that ‘the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul’ which implies the concept of patience and the unprecedented concept of sacrifice and idealism.

Metaphorically, Kanthapura is used as a soul and a body to the villagers geographically and thoughtfully to fight for the Mother. The previous verse which has been taken from Bhagavad Gita sheds light on idealism of the spiritual values and how they can be integrated into the common man's ordinary life in the sense that a man can fight for an ideal and challenge the death in a way to prove an ideal sacrifice. The religious stories

of being on the right path are mentioned in the Islamic Holy Books which means that religion is the most important factor which evokes the fervent feelings towards saying truth or sacrificing for equality, justice and freedom in order to convey a spiritually ideal world in which martyrs altruistically love, spiritually defend and eternally perpetuate and aroma of their perpetuity inspires the hearts and souls of the following generations.

Rao is too much influenced by the national leaders and their hope of revolution and the expected changes, but this sense of co-existence either with forces of nature or the aggressive man seems to be similar to Ernest Hemingway's hope and sense of being victorious or self-assertive even though the attacking force is destructive ‘make a dream that you defeated a man’ for ‘a man can be destroyed, but not defeated’, Santiago shouts.

Also, Rao seems to convey a message through which he wants to say that fighting the foreign rulers and their native agents was a necessity to live and to struggle for the sake of an ideal sublime aim called freedom. With regard to this, Rangamma says,

“..... and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma” and “we are fighting so that the rents may be lowered and the foreign rule vanish, and you will all live happily”.(K:112)

Accordingly, Raja Rao as a Feminist wants to convey through the voice of freedom the idea that the liberation movement of women and making them undertake a pioneering

ideal role of freedom in the national movement is essential.

The Kanthapurian women's revolt against the untouchable foreign government and the local police implies an ideal revolt of

freedom in expressing the self in the sense that their revolt put an end to their long silence of suffering and oppression and to some extent gave them a positive role in rejecting the exotic reality and the tainted local sympathy and support.

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