

Nationhood and Nativisation in Raja Rao's "Kanthapura"¹

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao is considered to be as one of the widely acclaimed Indian American international authors and one of the pioneer literary voices in the Indian/English literature. Even though only three of his literary publications were being claimed worldwide yet he delineated the Indian struggle and the political turmoil joined with cultural celebration and broken realities. His role as an active member of the political Indian movement helped in with his higher education to write and analyze the Indian socio political and the colonial oppression in India. His novel *Kanthapura* published in (1938) by Rja Roa is considered as figure in the colonial Indian literary productions and part of the Indian historical revival movement. It tells the story of a small village Kanthapura and its people's struggles under the British colonization, the story address the pre-independence era and just like any other colonial literary text the concepts of nation and identity were being highlighted as the Indian people fight for their freedom and self-liberation. The novel had examined a large number of the problems regarding the culture, political, social, spiritual, education, identity and so on. The novel uses strong tone to revel the intensity and the passion of the Indian people as they fight for their rights and freedom.

The limitation of this study will be textually focused on Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). Furthermore; theoretically, this study employs the notions of nationhood and Nativisation by focusing on post-colonial concepts such as Hybridity, identity, Nationhood, alienation, signals, Survival and expressions to establish the Indian struggle during and after the British colonization.

This study main objective is to examine the Indian colonial and post-colonial social and psychological oppression under the British, furthermore, to investigate the notions of nationhood and nativisation as they Indian people fight for their independence and self-liberation. Finally, this study will exam the colonial and post-colonial confusion as the oppressed individuals suffering to discover and re-create their own sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will be limited to one literary text which is *Kanthapure* published by the Indian American author Raja Rao in (1938). The novel addresses different social and psychological issues facing the Indian community under the British colonization as the Indians struggle for their independence. The theory used will be post-colonial theory highlighting the notions of nationhood and Nativisation and using its main concepts. The focus will be on the main characters and the event of the story as quotes will be used from the text as textual evidence supporting the post-colonial oppression. This paper will be divided to five main sections starting with the introduction, the methodology of the study, the Literature review and followed by the textual analysis and finally the conclusion of the paper.

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LITERATURE REVIEW***Kanthapura* By Raja Rao (1938)**

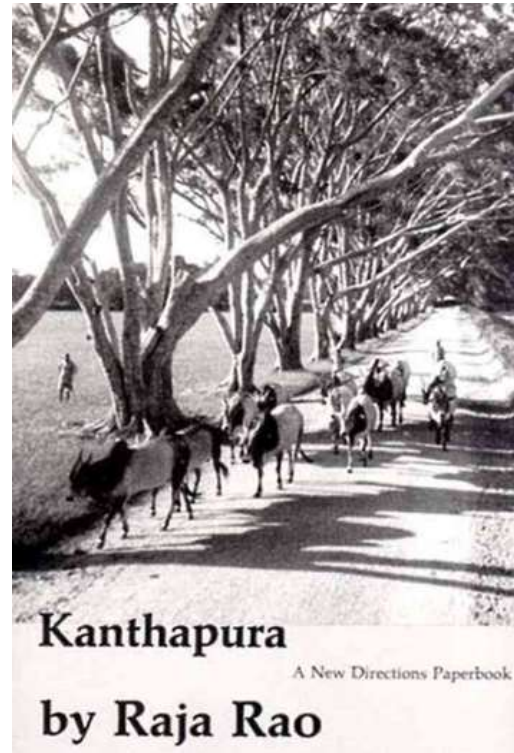
Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* tells the story about a small village located in the southern parts of the Indian sub-continent where the people are still following the cultural traditions and being subjected to class system. Most people believe in the folktales and supernatural elements, they believe that their village is being blessed and possessed by a strong supernatural entity which is known as Kenchamma. The village is very small consisting of 700 individuals and only 120 houses as they are being divided into different social ladder. The highest social group who are known as the Brahmins followed by the Tradesmen as the second group and finally, the Sudras who represent the working class and the Pariahs which are known as the untouchables.

The story is taking a place during 1930s as it was the time that Mahatma Gandhi tried to facilitate freedom and independence through politics. The story is being narrated by an old widower named Achakka and she is famous of being Brahmin which is the largest and highest social group. She starts to tell the story of the main characters such as Moorthy who shares the same social group; he left his studies to be an activist for the Indian congress party. As the story moves forward Moorthy tries to promote the lessons and Gandhi through the entire nation by using the education system, he believes that each person such have their own self-peace and promoting the no-cruelty ideologies. Although he fights to spread his message yet he sometimes feels hopeless as he is surrounded by negative individuals and factors in the village.

Another character named Bade Khan who works as policeman as his role is to stand against Moorthy since they don't share the same message. Bade believes that Gandhi's ideologies and Moorthy are helping in destroying the religious values and the social order in India and the world.

The story moves into chapter three where Moorthy progress with spreading his message and slowly starts to have his own followers especially the lower class people. He also calls for power and courage to stand against authority and starts to question about his message of peace. Moorthy mother died, hence the Brahmin leader invite Moorthy to stay with them and spread his message of awareness. When Moorthy reaches the household Bada Khan shows up and tried to kill him but ended up just injuring him. Moorthy was unhappy by the action as he wishes for murder, hatred and violence to end, thus he goes on three days of fasting to be happy and grateful. After he finished the authority approached him and told him that they are not happy with his actions as they promote violence and hatred in the village and for that the police decided to arrest him.

He was send to prison for 3 months only, as he left he is still filled with hope and happiness when he reached his house there were many people cheering for him and believes in his message. The people were being arrested as they believed to be encouraging social injustices and brutality against women, yet the police who are chasing and abusing the women and they beat the men for their beliefs. The village was being destroyed and the people ran away to seek help. After their departure they still believe in residence and faith to being their village back.²



An article by Sudipta Datta in 2017 in *The Hindu Journal* as she examined the post-colonial Hindu literary narrative, mentioning that the style and the method of writing used by Raja Rao to express the reality of the Hindu people and to give voice for the voiceless

“We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. Our method of expression ...has to be dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish and the American. Time alone will justify it and my words”

In 2017 a study by Vijay More titled “Delineation of Indian Nationalism and Spiritualism in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*,” This study had examined the epic struggle for freedom in the novel and how the text was being used as a mirror to reflect the reality of the Indian nationalist spirituality:

“*Kanthapura* is being narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener... Raja Rao’s choice to this narrator serves several purposes at once. Making this old woman the narrator enable Raja Rao to mingle facts and myths and in an effective manner. For the old woman Jawaharlal is a Bharatha to the Mahatma who she believes will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her Gandhi has attained the status of God and Moorthy is regarded as Avatar in *Kanthapura*. He characteristically concrete imagination of the uneducated mind pictures the Mahatma as a large and blue creature like the Sahyadrimountain” (Rao, Kan, 141)

Unlike Rao’s novels this novel is truly Indian represented by Indian characters, history, setting, themes, laws, life, customs, manner and traditions which make the novel completely native and national.

Dr. Rohidas Nitonde published a paper in 2017 under the name “The Foretaste of Indian Nationalism: A study of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*”. This study had highlighted the notion of Gandhianism which had returned to the village, this notion was presented by Moorthy’s attempts to spread the message of Gandhi to the people:

“There are several things Moorthy does for the villagers for example his attempts to popularize the use of the charkha among the villagers. He became Gandhian instrument to promote the use of Khadi. The other thing about Moorthy is that he opposes the old age caste system which is predominating in the village”

The kind of nationalism presented by Moorthy is a spiritual nationalism which moves a united and opposite the colonial authority by destroying the class system and the patriarchal segregation.

Nationhood & Nativisation

“Literature does not see the individuals as something apart from the society, but considers him as a social unit, because his existence is dependent on the society as a whole. Taken a part from society he is mere cipher and non-entity” (Premchand, qtd in Ahmed2)

The notion of nationalism which is a factor in creating the laws of the political system from the 18th century, it was the cause of different wars and struggles and responsible for the death of millions just to keep the name of “fatherland” as their own (Ozkirimli, 2000, p.1). Nationalism is being regarded as a powerful and emotional yet sometimes irrational ideology which plays an important role in the people lives and their attempt to belong and relate.

Anthony D. Smith in his book *Nationalism* (2001) have gave a modern insight on the notion as Smith examined the notion of nationalism which is something relatively contemporary which means the “meaning of something” (p.6) yet the meaning of nationalism is in a constant change depending on the development of the nation, the consciousness of the individuals about their nation, the language and the heritage of the individuals which give meaning and symbolism for the nation, the socio-political movement which speaks on behalf the nationalists and the ideologies the general and particular which define the nation.

“A nation is a historically constituted stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (1994, p.20)

Yet a more subjective definition of the notion of nationalism its according to Heywood in his 2003 study which is mentioned that its merely a “psycho-political statue” furthermore, its signified the self-awareness, loyalty and connection towards the land.

The concept of nationhood and national identity is something that was the center of the postcolonial studies where the individuals such as the African and the Indian community were the victims of the territorial oppression by the British forcing the people to re-locate. Many individuals living in another country can be traced back to a different country because of the vases immigration hence the concept of what is nation and nationality?, became a little bit dark.

To understand what is the national identity according to David Miller in his (1995) Nationality study where he argue that in order to understand the national identity, there must be a clear understanding of the nation itself. He mentioned that:

“The nations do not exist independently of the people’s beliefs, but criteria which are much more complex than other things. In classing a group of people in a notion you are not only commenting on their physical characteristics or behaviors but also on how they view themselves” (p. 164)

A study by M.A.K Sukmar and G.Philemon Prasanna Raju titled “Nationalism and Identity in the early Indian Novelist’s Novels” which focused on the concepts of nationalism and national identity in the Indian literature.

The notion of the nationhood in the Indian literature offers the people with the hope of being united as one during the struggle of the colonization since the British treat the Indians as inferior to them and denied them any form of freedom. As a response Gandhi and the nationalist movement which developed their sense of nationhood and the national identity during 1930s

“In the 1930s nationalist Indian literature focused on shaping the Indian identity. To recreate an Indian identity there had to be a separation from the colonial, power, culture and ideologies. This separation is fundamental because it allowed people to define themselves outside the British Constructions of India. The novels written during this period deals with almost Gandhian literature with the idea of ‘one nation and one identity’ even if they used English language to achieve the first goal of erasing the internal differences”

One of the Indian nationalist authors is Raja Rao which addresses the freedom movement in and for the people in south Indian villages. Such as young men spreading the Gandhidan ideologies and the religious beliefs among the people to establish their sense of selfhood and their own national identity.

The postcolonial studies address the people confusion and their search for one united ideneitiy, in a study by Homi Bhabha 1994 which address the postcolonial individual struggles to create their own identity.

Hybridity that will be utilized as a part of the investigation of the novel and the main theoretical analysis, these key ideas are selected as a result of their importance to the investigation of the novel. The meanings of the key ideas are taken from a few researchers including Homi K. Bhabha the father of post-colonial studies and identity alongside Hybridity. Different meanings of key ideas are essential in giving distinctive contentions with respect to the ideas. It is additionally critical to take other researchers' perspective with a specific end goal to make the clarification more concrete and solid. The first Main concept which is:

The **Mimicry** which is defined as the “The assimilation between the Western culture and the colonized culture which is almost close the gap of the binary opposition of Selfhood and Other” (Siti Masitah Md Zin, Low Chan Mee, 2014:p184), furthermore, in his article Homi Bhabha (1994:122) “*Mimicry and Men*” which he define the concept of the Mimetic process

“Colonial mimicry is the desire to be reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of the difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Homi Bhabha,1994: p129).

This concept is all about how the colonized or the individual is almost there but not quite there, the desire to be superior and the permission to be such required the selective choice of identity and culture and cutting the roots for the traditional being.

Colonization effects the colonized in many ways whether it's the physicality or the psychology of the individuals as they are treated like second class citizens. The colonized individuals starts to developed their own sense of 'Alienation' and 'homelessness' as they are being taken from the homes or that their home was taken from them by the colorizer. The colonized starts to develop their own fear and struggle to find a land to belong and an identity which they lost. Alienation is the basic structure of ones roots; it comes because of the natural colonial consequences.

The concept of Alienation first appeared as part of existentialism theory as the feeling of the dispossession and the feeling alienated from the world. The literary definition of Alienation:

“Alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or someone, it is a condition of the mind”

The world Alienation origins comes from the Latin word 'Alienato' which comes from the verb 'Alienare'. Feur Lewis mentioned that the world Alienation:

“It's used to convey the emotional tone which accompanies any behavior in which the person is compelled to act self destructively” (P.4)

According to McClosky the meaning of the word Alienation is meant by the “feeling of loneliness and the yearning for supportive primary relationship or searching for a connection” (p.15). He mentioned that the meaning and the feeling of separation and loneliness is the same as losing the significant other in the relationship and this kind of loss create a source of Alienation whether mentally or emotionally leading to physicality.

Abdul Saleem in 2014 published a paper titled “Theme of Alienation in Modern Literature” which address the postcolonial literature and its psychological effects on the emotional and personality of the individuals creating the feeling of Alienation.

“Alienation is the result of loss of identity or ones nation. The dispossessed personality's search for identity and a home is a common place them in the postcolonial modern fiction literature. Man fails to perceive today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in the hostile world” (P. 67)

Nativisation is part of the linguistics elements which deals with the literary language and linguistics tools used to convey the message such. Every literary text created by language and the language is being used by the author in a particular method throughout different tools to negotiate the meaning of the story. as mentioned by Brumfit and Carter in (1986) it's not what is being mentioned or said but the method it which it was mentioned by. Nativisation uses different tools such as signals which act like literary symbols, Survival which establish the language connection to the land and its nationhood and finally, Expression which is the employment of the folk takes and supernatural element to convey a certain message within (Ebi Yeibo, 2011)

ANALYSIS

The story *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao can be summaries in four main words “Gandhi and our Village”. The history of Indian colonization which tells the history of oppression of the natives and the superiority of the colonizers, the ambivalent role which is set both loving and hating the Englishness set within the nation. Addressing the Indian colonial history means addressing the literary texts of Indian literature in English, since the diaspora authors are the ones which started to address such themes and they won a place in the English and Indian literary history.

The pre-independence village of Kanthapura which expose the struggle of the 1930s against the British colonization where the conflict was at the highest point, the overall of the novel is addressing the Gandhian freedom movement while spreading all over India. The village represents a micro image of India itself to represent the cultural and political struggle against the colonial authorization; moreover, the story also highlight the internal struggle of the characters resulted from the blind faith for independence.

NATIONHOOD

a. “There on the blue waters, they say our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring and so they say they do across the seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live” (P.7)

The author in this quotes describe their village or their country as blue and clear but then the water get blacken because of the coffee brought by the ships of the British east company. This image of the colonial invasion and corruption of the nation with its ideologies that destroys the beauty of the nation. Raja Rao celebrate the Indianness of his nationhood and challenges the westernized version of existence. He wanted to establish the fact that the Indian love their nation as it is Indian without the western style or their products which destroy their national identity just like their coffee destroy the clear water.

b. “Kenamma is our goddess. great and bounteous is she. She killed a demon ages, ages ago. A demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives” (P. 8)

The narrator describes the British colonial subjects as an old Demon which had comeback to destroy and take away their nation. A demon which they fought before and won but now they are back again to kill the young people and rape the women.

2. HYBRIDITY:

a. “So Moorthy goes from house to house and from younger brother to elder brother and from elder brother to the grandfather himself, and –what do you think? He even goes to the potters’ quarter and the Weavers’ quarter and the Sudra quarter and I closed my ears when I heard he went to the Pariah quarter. We said to ourselves, he is one of the these Gandhi-men” (P. 19)

Raja Rao’s character Moorthy which is the same as the author is the product of the Gandhian era, it represent the hybridity in the story. The Gandhianism represent the exchange of the two different cultures the Indian and the British in order to keep the national identity and the cultural identity.

One main element which can be noticed as well is the use of the English language as the language of the text. He wanted to represent the hybrid identity using the western language to express the eastern identity.

The author had explained his intension in writing in English and using English as a tool to express the Indian culture

“By using the English language as an Alien language and an expressive medium; hence, the literary formation marks the cultural challenge as it intends to adopt and adapt a foreign medium of expression to voice the self” (P.C. Bhattachary,1983 , p.375)

The hybrid culture is also one of the main themes in the story. The Indian culture represents the motherland traditions and history yet, few characters adopted the western culture and the new Western traditions

b. “Then came Pandit Venkateshia and Front-house Sami’s sons Srinivas and Kitu, and so Kitu and Srinivas and Puttu and Ramu and Chandru and Seenu, threw away their foreign clothes and became Ghandhi’s men” (P. 13)

As mentioned in the example although the characters divided to throw away the English clothes and the colonial identity to embrace their own, yet the author mentioned that few people actually accepted the colonial identity. They struggle between their own identity as Indian men and between Western identity, as Gandhi calls his people to attaché and remember the mother heritage as a way to revival and glorify the national identity and history.

The search for Identity

In the story is also presented in the author celebration of the traditions and myths to bring the Indian folk traditions and heritage.

- a. **“In the great Heavens Brahma the self-created One was lying on his serpent, when the sage Valmiki entered announced by the two doorkeepers. ‘Oh, Learned sire what brings you into this distant world? Asked Brahma and offering the sage a seat beside him”** (P. 21)

Moorthy also created for him a new identity and new persona he is now consider himself as the messenger of Gandhi. The author uses the myths and the spirits structure from the Indian history and traditions to highlight the Indian heritage as its own identity. The temple is being used as a setting many times in the story to symbolize the Hindusim culture and its difference from the foreign colonization. The materialistic object presented in the temple gave a voice for the Indian culture and nationhood

- b. **“We are here in a temple and the temple is the temple of One, and we are one with everything that is One, and who shall say he is at the head of the One and another of the four?”** (P. 123)

In this quote Moorthy express the sense of the temple and what it represents for them as a symbol of unity and fathering. Moorthy express the importance of the temple since it states the national Indian/ Hindu identity.

ALIENATION

There were few characters who are living in the Skffington coffee land which is a place for the colonial masters to live in it. That place is being inhabited by Kanthapurians from an English/Indian heritage yet they don't know their history and their culture. The place itself present the land Alienation as men, women and children are being abused and oppressed by the masters who live there and the Indian that mimic the foreigner culture. The owners of the lands represent the colonial Alienation as they reject to learn about the Indian culture the country in which they colonized.

- a. **“there's neither man nor mosquito in the Skffington Kanthanpura for the men from Bombay have built their houses on Bebbur Mound houses like in the city, for coolies and they own this lands”** (P. 190)

Moorthy when he came to Kanthapura he wanted to extend the massage of Gandhi to the people and spread peace among them yet no one accepted him. Moorthy in the story represent the alienated individual where he is the only one who believe in the Dandhian massage and peace for the land yet his own neighbors and his family mock him. He even came to the conclusion that he is the only one carrying the higher beliefs and the people around him as just small minded to think or to belief in his massage.

- b. **“And he said he would go to the city for higher studies and went to a university. Of course he never got through the inter even he had city-ways, read city-books and even called himself a Gandhi man”** (P.12)

NATIVISATION

Kanthapura is a story about history, culture, language and heritage. The author expressed the Indian spirituality by choosing to write in a very distinguish linguistic discourse. Many linguistic elements can be noticed within the text to perceive the authorial intensions and to convey the literary massage. For sociolinguistic the literary language is considered as a phenomenon for the nativisation which had positioned the linguistics elements such as Signals, Survivalist and Expressionism as tools to understand the contexts of the text

SIGNALS

“If you want me to be a slave, I shall be your salve. All I know that what you told me about the Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma's word be the word of God” (P. 79-80)

In these lines it was when Moorthy had a great epiphany about his life and his earthly work, he is the young student of Gandhi and these lines shows how Moorthy worship Gandhi and his lessons. Although Gandhi had not physically appeared in the novel the author only used Gandhi as a symbol for peace and united nation. Since Gandhi always focused on the importance of the national heritage and history same as Moorthy and Raja Rao, hence Gandhi in the novel represents a religious symbol of peace and liberation.

“And what shall we call Moorthy? Said Radhamma . why, the small mountain, said Rangamma and we all said. That is it and so from that we knew. There are small mountains and the Big Mountain to protect us.” (P. 150)

This quotes is being said by a minor characters after Moorthy was released from the prison, Moorthy was named as the small mountain as he represent the image of the student and the protector of Shiva according to the Hindu folk tale, Shiva represent Gandhi himself as the holy Goddess. The images of religion and spirituality are being used as a tool to express the political confusion and social turmoil.

SURVIVAL

“Kartik has come to Kanthapura with the Glow of lights and unpresed footsteps of the Wandering gods; white lights from clay-trays and red light from the copper stands, and diamonds lights that glow from the bowers of entrance-leaves; Lights that grow from Banana Trunks and Mango Twigs, yellow Lights behind white leaves and Green lights behind yellow leaves and white Lights behind green leaves” (P. 10)

This quote is describing the village Kanthapura during the light festival in India, the language and the names used by the author even the event to establish for the readers the author and the characters strong link to the nation and the motherland. The author used a fictional setting which was located south of India to create a strong foothold in the land itself, and the names for the place and the characters they all carry a traditional Hindu names to create the sense of belonging and using language to establish a strong relationship to the land and the history.

Kenchamma came from the heavens it was the sage Tripura who had made penances to being her down and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth and that is why the Kenchamma Hill is all red” (P. 12)

These lines were being told by the narrator to the reader. It’s the story of how the Indian famous hills had become red and it’s all because of an ancient battle between the Goddess and their blood formed the color red on earth. Such stories which are an important part of the Hindu traditions give us images and stories of a place and history to create a link between supernatural elements and reality which helps the readers to establish a bond between the land and the history.

EXPRESSIONISM

“O Brahma you who have sent us the Prince Incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery” (P. 15)

In this quote the author delineates the people understand and perception of Gandhiansim and how it had affected the Indians. These lines mentioned by the old widower the narrator who represent the old generation in these lines Gandhi is being portrayed as Krishna, Shiva, and Rama the famous Hindu Gods and Goddess that were born by a divine gifts and powers. They represent an important part of the Hindu heritage and history and its famous folk tales. Gandhi is considered as one of them a person with a divine powers and Nobel birth.

“Sometimes people say to themselves the Goddess of the River plays through the night with the Goddess of the hill. Kenchamma is the mother of the Himavathy. May the Goddess bless us all” (P.8)

The history and traditions even the old folk tales of the Goddess and the heroes it’s an important part of the national identity and the land. These lines were being narrated by the narrator to the readers to highlight the author images of

the Goddess and their history to create a sense of national heritage and part of the motherland which only belongs of the Indian and it is something that the British colonization could never control or segregated from the Indians

CONCLUSION

The literary Indian/ English text which give a perfect image of the Indian colonial and postcolonial demonstration, which expressed the whole embodiment of the national identity and its heritage to create their own sense of nationhood and their own selfhood voice.

Kanthapura by the Indian English author presents the social and political turmoil of its people during and after the British occupation. The author's fiction painted the images of its settings and characters to establish the Indian context and his own post-colonial perspective of the Indian colorful manifestation in the small village of Kanthapura. In this small village where the people fight for its cultural and struggle for its native identity also searching for the representation of self and peace, the hidden line between realism and fiction where being highlighted to establish the postcolonial descriptions of the suffering society and history of oppression also to re-write the Indian domination of the story which expose the authorial intension of creating a new history and revival their heritage of the Indians and re-tell history. The language used to present the Nativisation linguistic element to the story in order to convey the authorial intensions in delivering the intended message of a history and a land throughout collaborating supernatural elements to imagine reality.

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