

RAJA RAO: ESSENTIALIZED INDIAN IDENTITIES AND NATIVIZATIONS IN *THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE* AND *KANTHAPURA*

Because a man is born in a stable, that does not make him a horse.

(Duke of Wellington: an interview, 1915)

If Narayan's nationalist identifications are contradictory, Raja Rao seeks to escape, metaphysically, the condition of contradiction altogether by privatizing and hence essentializing the Indian identity. But this study of Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* will demonstrate that Rao's "nationalism", in the form of "Indianness", is still a discursive function that privatizes what is in fact a South Indian Brahminic (hence socially privileged) identity. This identity is defined by Rao at the unfortunate expense of a consideration of caste and gender and their status in nationalist representations. Also, contrary to most critics' reception of it, Rao's experimentation with English in *Kanthapura* does not allow one to come up against an Other (non-English) space that should be disturbing and resistant to translation. In *Kanthapura*, Rao attempts to imitate the rhythm and cadence of Kannada, his own native language, but he produces a highly literate and stylized English which is meaningful in the Western, not the Kannada, context.

An Indian writer who emigrated from India to France and later to the U.S., Raja Rao has interestingly remained for Indo-English critics the epitome of Indian nationalism. It is remarkable that the act of immigration has not meant a rupture of any sort, both for Rao himself and for his critics. Several reasons for this radical absence do exist, however. Perhaps no other Indian writer has taken to such an extreme the privatizing of an Indian national identity. By privatizing it, Rao creates what is, finally, an essentialist Indian identity because he posits Indianness as essence, as an inner space that has remained untouched by colonial influence by dint of remaining stubbornly and uniquely Indian. It may be said of

Rao that he is a man who, while he has traveled, has never quite left "home". Of the supposed impossibility of ever leaving "home", his narrator, Rama, says in *The Serpent and the Rope*:

India is wheresoever you see, hear, touch, taste, smell;

(389)

Wheresoever I am is my country. (402).

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* presents his manifesto of belief in the Hindu philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*, or non-dualism. As it was elaborated by Sri Sankara, an Indian classical philosopher who lived sometime between the fourth and eighth centuries, non-dualism is the philosophy of the soul's (the *Atman's*) merging with God (*Brahman*), once it has extinguished the dualistic and contradictory separation of experience ("isness") from what is perceived as its object. Rama obligingly explains *Advaita* on a number of occasions in the text. Here he compares it to the concept of zero:

Sri Aurobindo wanted...to improve on the Advaita of Sri Sankara—which was just like trying to improve on the numerical status of zero...The zero, you see, the *sunya*, is impersonal; whereas one, two, three and so on are all dualistic. One always implies many. But zero implies nothing. I am not one, I am not two, I am neither one nor two...I am the 'I'. (205)

Several leading Indo-Anglian critics have appropriately accused Rao of obscurantism and obfuscation in his use of language such as this: "I heard myself say I heard myself. Or I saw my eyes see that I saw." (169). Significantly, it is the Western critic who professes disgust (for instance, Klaus Steinworth's *The Indo-English Novel: The Impact of the West on Literature in a Developing Country*, 30-31) upon reading passage after passage in which the main character, Rama, sobs effeminately and uncontrollably:

I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel rooms
and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed,
for I had no mother...I sobbed, for I knew I would never see
my mother again. (6)

....I weep into my bed...I go to bed reading something, and
some thought comes, I know not what—thoughts have no
names—or have they?—and I lie on my bed and sob. Sometimes
singing some chant of Sankara, I burst into sobs. (402)

But even stranger is the plot of the autobiographical novel, *The Serpent and Rope*. Ramaswamy is a South Indian Brahmin, the oldest son of an orthodox Hindu family, whose ancestry marks the glorious annals of Brahmin history. He comes to Sorbonne, France, sometime in the late forties for a Ph. D. in philosophy. He marries a Frenchwoman, Madeleine, who converts to Buddhism in the course of the novel. In the meantime, Rama makes two trips to India during which he reaffirms both his Brahmin ties and his ties to his family. While in London for his research work, he marries in the Hindu style a North Indian girl named Savithri. On his second trip to India, in Bombay, he falls into a brief sexual relationship with a married woman, Lakshmi. At the end of the novel, Rama completes his dissertation, severs his ties with his now fanatical Buddhist wife, and looks ahead to a teaching job in India.

What is strange about this plot is not only the highly disembodied and disengaged tone in which it is related but also the peculiar lack of any normative judgment on his own actions by Rama. Despite Rao's point, that contradictions in the material world get to be dialectically resolved on a higher metaphysical level, *Advaita* apparently relieves Rama's responsibility of committing, unbeknownst to his wife through the end of the novel, both bigamy and adultery.

Operating as a uniquely Hindu belief in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Advaita immediately introduces the essentializing nationalist agenda of “Indianness”. Indianness of theme has consistently been a hallmark of the nationalist novel, even when the theme in question has been radically apolitical and aesthetic and the tone of its treatment passive and disengaged. This is not surprising. The more aesthetic Indian literature tended to be, the more likely that it should be appropriated by nationalist critics who could point to an inner space that had presumably somehow escaped the effects of colonialism. In this way, in spite of or even because of its passive “Indianness”, Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* becomes a manifesto for nationalist critics. Discussing the first major novelists, Narayan, Rao and Anand, M.K. Naik makes a connection between the nationalist movement of the thirties and the sudden burgeoning of the Indian novel in English:

And then came a sudden flowering when the Gandhian age (1920-1947) had perhaps reached its highest point in glory during the Civil Disobedience Movement of the ‘thirties’. It is possible to see the connection here, if one remembers that by this decade the nationalist upsurge had stirred the whole country to the roots to a degree and on a scale unprecedented earlier; making it acutely conscious of its present and its past and filling it with new hopes for the future...It was...during this period that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such as the....East-West relationships. (Naik, 103)

A dominant part of the East-West confrontation that Naik refers to is, predictably, Rao’s emerging emphasis on the Eastern front, an emphasis that has been acknowledged for its unique “Indianness”. And under the rubric of “Indianness”, the theme of East-meets-West from the perspective of the “East” has been abundantly attributed to Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*. Narasimhaiah copiously praises it, stating its agenda as follows:

The predicament, an Indian would say, is: 'it is just in so far as we do now see only the things as they are in themselves, and only ourselves, that have [sic] killed the metaphysical man and shut ourselves up in the dismal cave of functional and economic determinism.' It is in so far as he frees himself from the operations of such determinism that man's true estate lies. But in Western fiction there is a 'rancour that is contemptuous of immortality and will not let us recognize what is divine in us.'

(Narasimhaiah, 167-168)

So does M.K. Naik:

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is one of the greatest of Indian English novels. As an enactment of east-west confrontation and as a philosophical novel it stands unchallenged yet in the annals of Indian English literature.

(Naik, 109)

Narasimhaiah's tortured syntax may seem to reflect the complexity of Rao's metaphysical thought and Eastern thought in general, but it only fosters the privatizing, the cherishing of what then begins to function as an Indian metaphysical essence. In other words, Narasimhaiah's notion of "Indianness" does not escape the essentializing of "India" and Indian sensibility. This is precisely the reason why critics find Rao appealing for the nationalist agenda of "Otherizing", that is, privileging the Eastern as the Other to the West. Rao's Indian is, and in turn is made to function as, the simply oppositional Other in the East-West relationship. The nature of this opposition is formulated in terms of an Eastern metaphysical essence versus a Western "functional and economic determinism".

Hence, it could be found that if Narayan's India was the translated Malgudi, then Rao's India is an Indian metaphysical essence that serves to disguise what is actually an elitist South Indian Brahminic world view.

Through the text, Rama repeats that India cannot be defined politically or historically:

India has no history, for truth cannot have history. (102)

That for me is India, not a country, not a historical presence among nations, but a hypostatic presence ...India is apart, that is why she has no history. India is everybody's; India is everybody. (193)

India would never be made by our politicians and professors of political science, but by these isolate existences of India, in which India is rememorated, experienced, and communicated ; beyond history, as tradition, as the Truth. Anybody can have the geographical—even the political—India; it matters little. (352)

Coterminous with this essentializing activity and directly contradictory to Rama's amorphous descriptions of India are his periodic allusions to a startlingly non-metaphysical South India with clear geographic and exclusionary demarcations. The text bears out the point that Rama's (and Rao's) South India is Brahminic in the most hegemonic sense of the word. Rama himself is very conscious of the fact that, in the Indian caste system, the Brahmin caste is most powerful in the realm of Hindu culture:

...the fact that I was a Brahmin by birth and a South Indian seemed to have given me a natural superiority. (31)

Narayan's use of translation tended to elide the categories of class and gender. Rao's South Indian Brahminic metaphysical abstractions are founded on the very

exclusion of women and castes other than the Brahmin. (We don't mean to conflate the two categories of Narayan's translations and Rao's metaphysical abstractions here. We connect them in terms of their similar tendency to elide considerations of class, caste and gender.) Sifting through the very real stratifications of a Southern Brahminic culture that Rao betrays, one can arrange these as follows: Rao's India is specifically and hegemonically South India; this South India is Brahminic in nature.

Rao unmistakably favours South India over North India; the niceties of Southern tradition are elaborated at the expense of Northern culture, which is then seen to be uncivilized and uncouth:

I could not understand these Northerners going from strict purdah to this extreme modernism with unholy haste. We in the South were more sober, and very distant. (247)

The hideousness of Bombay hurt me as only an impersonal falsehood can hurt. (248)

Everywhere in the South you meet with this civilized attention, which shows how man has been informed of the sainthood of natural living. (53)

Early in the novel, on his first trip back to Hyderabad, to take charge of his father's funeral, Rama muses:

If there were no barbarian beyond our borders the Hindu would have melted into his nature, grown white as some women in the zenana, and his eyes have seen the splendour of himself everywhere.

(36)

Who is the "barbarian" mentioned here and what are the "borders"? One historical suggestion that offers itself is that the barbarian is the Aryan invader who had

entered the subcontinent from the North and in time intermingled with the native Dravidian. But a few pages later, referring to his stepmother's fears, Rama thinks:

It is good, Little Mother must have told herself, to belong to the far South. No barbarian will ever come to us. (44)

Suddenly, the "barbarian"'s identity collapses with the identity of anyone not belonging to Rao's "far South" and with the identity of the North Indian in particular. One notes the extreme insularity and privilege of the South Indian. This is a view further buttressed by the fact that Rama and Rao revere Sanskrit as the ancient Brahminic language of the religious texts, "that noble, imperial heritage of ours, Sanscrit, the pure, the complete, the unique. He who possesses Sanscrit possesses himself." (35) In the novel, who possesses Sanskrit and who doesn't is quite clear.

Traditionally, it has always been the Brahmin, the priest, who possesses and interprets Sanskrit for the other castes. And the bedrock for this elitist knowledge has always been South India:

The Dravidian South [is] the very land of the supreme dominance of the Brahmin.

(*Caste and Class in India*, 11)

The sense in which Rao's South India is hegemonically Brahminic is that it has systematically suppressed the possible self-representation of other castes.

Textual descriptions of the Brahmin's sacred existence and his deference to the Hindu law of *dharma* (moral duty) proliferate in the pages of *The Serpent and the Rope*, as do explications of passages from Sri Sankara and the *Upanishads*:

Brahmin is he who knows Brahman. (5)

The Brahmin, the Vedantin, has such arrogance... Yes, one is wonderful—when one is not one, but the “I”. (79)

Brahmins don't need words to say anything. (187)

Rama unmistakably prides himself as a Brahmin whose ancestry goes all the way back to an ancient Upanishadic past:

I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything, such is the pride of caste and race... To me difference was inborn—like my being the oldest son of my father, or like my grandfather being the Eight-Pillared House Ramakrishnayya and you just had to mention his name anywhere in Mysore State, even to the Maharaja, and you were offered a seat, a wash and a meal, and a coconut-and-shawl adieu. (20)

Historically, the Brahmin caste has dominated over the other castes that it has controlled since at least 300 BC, when a Greek ambassador to the court of Chandra Gupta Maurya (322-298 BC) named Megasthenes had occasion to remark the social formations of class in Maurya's dominion. These formations undeniably approximate the four varnas or “occupationally-specialized, interdependent castes ranked by purity and pollution customs” (Pauline Kolenda, 5): the Brahmanas (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants) and Sudras (servants). Manu's *Manava-Dharma-Shastra* or *Book of Laws* (300-200 BC?) is the decisive text which explicates the caste system as it is elaborated in the ancient religious texts of the *Vedas*. While the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas vied for centrality from time to time, the servility of the lower castes, the Sudras in particular, went uncontested, even by the Vaishyas and the Sudras themselves. Indian historians note the following facts:

In Gujrat and Southern India, generally speaking a Brahmin never thinks of accepting water, much less any cooked food,

from any caste but that of the Brahmins...a lower caste has no scruples in accepting cooked food from any higher caste. Thus all the castes will take cooked food from the Brahmin.

(Ghurye, 8-9)

[Brahmins] will not perform even their ablutions within the precincts of a Sudra's habitation. (Ghurye, 9)

A Sudra had no right to earn money and he was forbidden even to possess any kind of property. (Sunder Lal Sagar, 13)

The Sudra had no rights to religious rites...His marriage was not a sacrament but it should be understood as a means only for satisfying sexual desire. (Sunder Lal Sagar, 14)

It is no mistake, then, that Rama's sense of "touch" is so refined:

It was the Brahmin in me...the sense that touch and untouch are so important. (13)

Next, the status of women in the hegemony of Brahminism also deserves some attention, for it is at the expense of the female sex that Brahminic masculinity comes into its own. The woman's inability to attain fair representation in Rao's religious order parallels the Sudra's. Rama himself draws attention to the exclusion of the female sex from the patriarchy of Brahminic lineage:

[The sacred Brahmins of Benares] knew my grandfather and his great-grandfather again, and thus for seven generations—Ramakrishnayya and Ranganna, Madhavaswamy and Somasundarayya, Manjappa and Gangadharayya—and for each of them they knew the sons and grandsons (the daughters, of course, they did not quite know).... (10)

This epic listing of long sonorous names that luxuriously roll along one's tongue comes to an abrupt stop with the ambivalently voiced parenthetical aside.

On the occasion of her arranged marriage to a government official, Rama's step-sister Saroja appeals to Rama to save her from this forced ceremony:

We girls are thrown to other families as the most intimate,
the most private of our clothes are thrown to the dhobi
[washerman] on Saturday morning. Like cotton, we women
must have grown on trees... (257)

To this, Rama has "no answer to give." (257) But when she repeats her need to be saved from marriage, Rama rejects her:

It was no moment for cowardice. I, the head of the family,
could not be a coward; I could not, should not, let anyone
down in the world. That was my *dharma* (263)

In the text, two pictures of feminine sexuality emerge. They are structurally related in the service of Rao's position on "woman". First, there is the threatening female figure who takes the lead in her relationship with a man; but for Rama,

I'm a Brahmin, and for me touch and knowledge go with
the holiness of surrender, of woman not taking me there,
but I revealing to her that. (66)

In the text, Madeleine grows attached to a common friend, Georges, and when she chooses to show her regard for him, Rama feels that "the respect she showed [to Georges] was not altogether happy for a Brahmin husband to bear." (73) And when Madeleine grows demanding in bed with her husband, Rama not only withdraws from her invitation but also feels an irresistible drive to physically and sadistically torture her:

A woman hates a male when he withdraws. She cannot accept his defeat—his defeat is the defeat of her womanhoodshe must give him again and again that which he asks for, till his asking itself becomes a disgust. Then the woman has contempt for him....Then you want to take a cactus branch and beat her and scratch her all over. You want to bite her lip and pull the breast away from her chest, and taste the good blood of her wounds. (163)

But in the same scene in which Madeleine is perceived as a threat to Rama's Brahmin masculinity, a passage from her active threat to her passive submission is suggested:

You want her to be young and new and never named. You want her to be your first love, your first woman, you want her to be the whole of the earth. She knows it—for every woman is a concubine, a mistress of passion, a dompter of man's condition—and she becomes virginal and simple and, Lord, so new, so perfumed, that the ichor rises in the elephant and you are at it again...The world will become purified. The world is pure. For the mistress has become the mother. (164-165)

For Rama, the knowledge that every woman is an aggressive "concubine" at heart makes it imperative that she be transformed into "mother", the supposedly asexual object of man's veneration. Hence, the obverse of the active, threatening female figure is the pure, virginal woman who can be an object worthy of man's adoration, since "[T]he object", says Rama to himself, "is woman" (172):

You should know a woman and not understand her—for if you understand her, then you can never be a pilgrim to knowledge. (219)

Thus objectified and not understood, a woman's threat may be neutralized, controlled, so that the passage from threat to submission may take place. Madeleine herself submits:

You worship woman even if you torture them. But I like
to be tortured and to be your slave. (98)

For Rama, the ideal woman functions as an object; she is hardly her own subject of action or thought. As such, Rama venerates her as the suffering victim of fate:

To be a woman is to suffer, to bear the yoke of man. (133)

For women possession is knowledge. To hold is to be:
to love is to submit. Bondage is her destiny. (187)

Rama's adulterous affair with Lakshmi in Bombay is curiously marked by his fear of her:

Once or twice she came near me, but I moved away,
almost afraid of her physical importance. One felt she
had the power to pluck the manhood out of anyone and
throw it into the sea... (295)

The affair, however, is sanctioned by his controlling, highly objectified image of her:

She was indeed not particularly clean in her habits, but
she was a good Hindu wife. (294)

Not only are Rao's nationalist identifications deeply essentialist, elaborated at the expense of a consideration of caste and gender; his experimentation with the English language is also suspect. Unlike Narayan, who attempted a neutral and monolithic use of the English language, Rao actively infuses his English with

what critics like S.N. Sridhar have called a “nativization” of English (“Non-Native English Literatures: Context and Relevance”, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 291-306). In the Author’s Foreword, Rao professes:

Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect
which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful
as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

(*Kanthapura* , vii)

In *Kanthapura*, this kind of linguistic experimentation, and its failure, is both quite discernible.

Kanthapura tells the story of a South Indian village that is thrown into upheaval over Gandhi’s Freedom Movement; the villagers rise up against bondage and attempt to overthrow their rulers. It is narrated by a pious old woman whose “distinctive and colorful” dialect is imbued with the rhythm and cadence of Indian (specifically Kannada) speech. Rao’s forays into experimentation with English are evident in passage after passage:

We shall offer you [Kenchamma, the village goddess]
our first rice and our first fruit and we shall offer you
saris and bodice cloth for every birth and marriage, we
shall wake thinking of you, sleep prostrating before you,
Kenchamma, and *through the harvest night shall we dance*
before you, the fire in the middle and the horns about us,
we shall sing and sing and sing, clap our hands and sing... (3)

Three days later, when we were just beginning to say *Ram*
Ram after the rice had been thrown back into the rice granary,
the cradle hung back to the roof, and the cauldron put back
on the bath fire, and the gods put back in their sanctum, and
all the houses washed and swept and adorned and sanctified,
and when one by one our men were slipping in and then hurrying
back to their *jungle retreats*, what should we see on that Saturday

...but *one, two, three cars going up the Bebbur mound, one, two, three crawling cars going up the Bebbur mound like a marriage procession*, and we all said, "*why, whose marriage now, when we are beating our mouths and crying?*" (157)

[Emphasis mine]

These sentences seem endless. Linguistically, they are fairly sophisticated, containing inversions ("Through the harvest night shall we dance"), repetition ("We shall offer you our first rice...we shall offer you saris...we shall wake thinking of you..."; "one, two, three cars going up the Bebbur mound...one, two, three crawling cars going up the Bebbur mound..."), and a generous scattering of what Bakhtin would call socioideological heteroglossia ("first rice", "first fruit", ceremonies performed for Kenchamma, the chanting of "Ram-Ram", "the gods put in their sanctum", "beating our mouths", etc.). Rao intends them to be understood as translations from the Kannada both rhythmically and literally. In the linguistic context of the academic study of English in non-English cultures, they are considered powerfully successful nativizations.

Larger theoretical questions, of course, crowd into this kind of experimentation by a writer who is himself enormously distanced from the rural characters he is attempting to speak for: who is the "native" and what is being nativized? Who recognizes this nativization? and so on. Klaus Steinworth points out that Indianizations are perhaps meaningful only in an Indian, not a Western, context. The narrator, who in an empirically situated understanding would not even speak English, is made to speak startlingly refined poetic prose, with stylized, Westernized alliteration ("crunch—cough—cane"; "paste—pickles", "pit—plant"), assonance ("side"—"sign"—"maistri"—"lime"; "much"—"crunch"—"touch"), symmetry of phrases ("telling story after story"—"looking to this side and that"; "lime their betel leaves"—"twist the tobacco leaves"), and so on (*The Indo-English Novel*, 118). Hence, Steinworth suggests, with the use of a "literary" or poetical language, Rao is targeting a Western audience for whom his Indianizations will work.

Jussawalla's criticism of Rao's experimentation with English is slightly different from Steinworth's. She makes a distinction between Indianization and Indianness, valuing the latter over the former. A distinction needs to be made here between Jussawalla's definition of Indianness and the essentialist definition of Indianness by other Indo-Anglian critics. By Indianness, Jussawalla means the actual situation of India's heterogeneous multiculturalism and multilingualism. (However, Jussawalla's own theorizing about Indian writing in English is inadequate). According to her, Rao's Indianization of English fails because Rao does not take into account India's actual multicultural and multilingual situation of spoken English and the fact that his English can never be Kannada itself. She relates an interesting experimental study in which Professor K. S. Narayana Rao of the University of Wisconsin made an American and an Indian to read out sections of *Kanthapura*. The American reading registered a loss in the meaning of the passage, due to the American reader's unfamiliarity with the rhythm of Kannada; the Indian reading flowed more smoothly but was flat in its inflection and could put off a Western listener. Jussawalla shows that Rao's Indianizations are not only geared towards a Western audience, but are also problematic for that very audience. (Jussawalla, 95-97)

More specifically, Rao's experimentation with English must be questioned on two grounds. First, there is the contradictory enterprise of preserving Indianizations within the text even while providing a fifty-nine page glossary at the back of it. Rao's extensive translations from Kannada back to English defeat his very purpose, for his nativizations prove, after all, to be de-nativizations put to the service of Western readers. In this sense, *Kanthapura* addresses and continues a pernicious anthropological curiosity about "alien" cultures that had been initiated many years ago in the West and that reappears in such anthropological Orientalized studies as Dorothy Spencer's bibliography, *Indian Fiction in English: An Annotated Bibliography*. Therefore, unlike Salman Rushdie's inclusion of Indian heteroglossia in his novels, Rao's inclusion of them in

Kanthapura serves to domesticate what should in fact be a space resistant to easy appropriation, so that it might be recognized as radically Other (because rural and illiterate) by the Western reader.

Second, what Rao and his critics fail to consider is the way in which an unthinking preservation of India's mythical past is detrimental to an enterprise which intends to produce a new language in which Indians who bear both English and "native" influences can express themselves. Rao's return to Indian myth suggests the sort of impasse that, in his study of colonialism and national culture, Frantz Fanon warns against:

The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the castoffs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all.

(*The Wretched of the Earth*, 225)

Granted, the "truths of the nation" that Fanon speaks of are to be located as themselves embedded in discursive practices. Even so, it cannot be possible that one has access to a colonized country's pre-colonial past without colonialism itself presenting a radical rupture in this imagined continuum. As a novel about the Quit India movement against British domination published in 1938 (nine years before India's formal independence), *Kanthapura* strangely turns away from "actual events" and promotes a return to myth, folklore, and ignorance. Even the periodic acts of physical violence that the police inflict on the villagers are related remotely and detachedly; it is as if the sentence is so committed to Indian cadence and rhythm that it rushes through and past the violence being described:

...and the police, seeing the crowd out of their hands, kick and twist the limbs and bang more fiercely, and Seethamma is thrown upon the cactuses and Vedamma and Kanakamma after her, and we could hear their wailings, and we run to them

and pull them up, and we run down the lane and the field-bunds
and we come to the canal, and the women cry out, "We cannot
go! We cannot go!" and the men drag them and the police
push them in, and the pebbles slip under our feet, and saying,
"Ganga, Jumna, Saraswathi!" we look up into the wide starry
sky, and there is something in the air resonant like the temple
bell..... (167-168)

Fanon suggests that the colonized artist needs to break new ground:

...the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic
work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the
first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the
seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.

(The Wretched of the Earth, 225)

But in both *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Kanthapura*, Rao tends to insulate
(rather than open up) an Indian identity, arresting creative change by deadening
and fossilizing its possibilities. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Rama typically
raises crucial issues only to freeze them on the basis of an apolitical subjective
belief in Indian metaphysics:

Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Hitlerism, the
British Commonwealth, the Republic of the United States
of America, all are so many names for some unknown
principle, which we feel but cannot name. For all the roads,
as the Gita says, lead but to the Absolute. (90)