

Unfolding the Concept of Spirituality through Characterization in the Selected Novels of Indian Writing in English

Naveen Kumar Mehta, M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D. MPSLET, UGC-NET

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Abstract

Spirituality in character leads one to a search of the knowledge of the highest and the absolute by direct experience and manifestation of the search in every mode of living, thinking and acting. The present study unfolds the concept of spirituality through characterization. There are certain characters in the selected novels of Indian – writing in English, who reflect this concept. They transform the spirit of love, truth non-violence, self-sacrifice, self-discipline, penance, self-realization or self-assertion through their various actions. They do not only offer the common reader, the positive aspects of spiritualism but also offer the negative aspect of pseudo-spiritualism.

Keywords: Spirituality, character, swami, religion, self-realization, truth, compassion.

Introduction

India has produced a large number of spiritual figures who have shown the common man the path of realization. Such figures can create illusions of hope and happiness through a skillful manipulation of words, gestures and facial expressions. They talk of spiritual values. Since Bankim's time these wonderful characters often figure in the Indian-English writing. Some of the spiritual figures have been discussed at a great length in Indo-Anglican fiction such as R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Bhabini Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger* and Kipling's *Kim*.

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*

Through the characterization of Raju, in *The Guide*, R.K. Narayan unfolds the concept of spirituality. In the first stage of his career Raju is a tourist guide and a shopkeeper; in the second role he is an entrepreneur and an impresario and manager. He

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Naveen Kumar Mehta, M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D., MPSLET, UGC-NET

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was thrown into the dangerous, passionate relationship with Rosie, the mistress of a rich tourist he calls Marco, Raju's passion for Rosie makes him restless and almost mad. He elopes with her and spends all his hard earned savings to make Rosie a great classical dancer. He becomes her business manager and publicity agent without making and conscious plans about it. It is characteristic of Raju that once cast in a particular part he performs it with gusto, partly for the sake of self-preservation, partly because it suits his temperament wonderfully.



In the third phase of his life he becomes a convict, an ideal prisoner. Obsessed and ultimately ruined by the strange, cold-hearted Rosie, Raju is accused of forgery by Marco. He goes to prison, deserted by his mistress, despised by his family and friends. This act of forgery was the only one done by him deliberately. But Raju could not imagine that his act of forgery should bring him such a disaster. Even this role of the convict in the Jail was performed with joy and inspiration: "I was considered a model prisoner, he says."¹

After the expiry of his term of imprisonment, he takes refuge in an old temple by a river. While sitting on the steps of the temple one evening and reflecting on the future course of his life, he is taken for a holy saint by a peasant known as Velan who seeks his advice on his domestic problems. By uttering a few platitudes, he helps Velan to find a solution.

"I know what your problem is, but I wish to give the matter some thought. We cannot force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time. Do you understand it?"² Raju, then utters such words which reflects his character as a spiritual man - "whatever is written here will happen. How can we ever help it? We may not change it, but we may understand it, Raju replied grandly. And to arrive at a proper understanding time is needed."³ Raju further declared that "what must happen, must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change the course of that river."⁴ Thus, the convict drifts into the role of a saint. People come to him to seek his advice in domestic problems. Raju does not disappoint them. He utters mystifying statements to them with characteristic dignity. He knows: "The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying statements."⁵

It is Raju's habit to perform whatever role is assigned to him by Fate perfectly and nicely. He has a ready-wit that helps him in all walks of life. The same ready wit him in the final role of his life as a spiritual man. He soon learns that the essence of sainthood seems to be one's ability to utter mystifying statements. People come to him to listen to his discourses and storytelling. He delivers big lectures on the necessity of education and instantly establishes an evening school in the temple in order to eradicate illiteracy of the children. He advises the people in his newly acquired self-styled fashion: "Recollect and reflect upon every word you have uttered since day break."⁶ These evening sessions grow in popularity until Raju becomes a public figure. But the idea of school too originates quite by accident. Even the final episode of fasting originates in a similarly insignificant and casual manner.

To the village teacher Raju as a saint converses with an air of authority: "I like to see young boys become literate and intelligent--- it's our duty."⁷

When the villagers talk about a crocodile in the river, Raju replies in the same spirit. "What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled." Thus, he teaches the lessons of high level of spirituality and becomes the saviour of local people.

The shadow of famine stalks the countryside, the earth was fast drying up and cattle begin to die. People come to their saviour but the saviour himself is now in a helpless state of mind. Apparently he looks untroubled and reserved and tells them:

"Be peaceful; everything will be all right; I will fix it with the Gods."⁸ But inwardly he has become restless.

The severe draught disturbs the peace in the village leading to fracas and violence. Raju, the ex-convict afraid that the police might arrive and expose him. But Raju still plays the role of a saint and sends a message to the villagers through Moron; "unless they are good I'll never eat."⁹ But the villagers interpreted it as the Swami won't eat because it won't rain. It is at this stage of the matter that Raju has been compelled to begin the fast. He realized that he had worked himself into a position from which he could not get out. This transformation of his character as a fake saint to a spiritual saint discovering his own self is convincing one.

As a Swami Raju had to undergo an act of vicarious suffering to purify the sins of others. It was a destructive risk. But he did it well. During the early days of his role as a saint, he assumed and feigned that role due to the needs of his stomach. During the last days, however, it was the faith of the people that forced him to perform as a saint.

"He felt moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet. He felt moved by the thought of their gratitude."¹⁰ The unquestioning faith of the people elated his mind and personality. It transforms Raju from "what he really is, into a worthy object of its devotion. Towards the end Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act becomes the reality, the mask becomes the man."¹¹

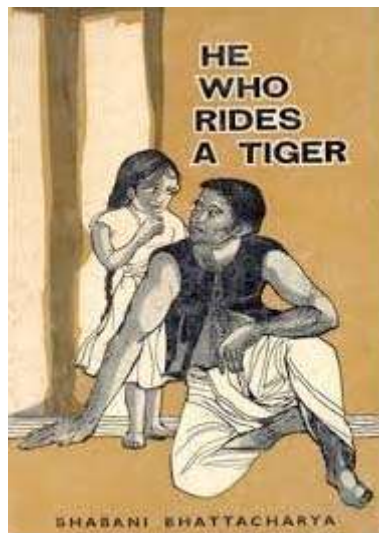
This is a moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the power to go beyond his self and Raju's act of sacrifice transcends his self.

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love: for the

first time he was doing something in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal.¹²

The transformation of Raju's life is indeed the spiritual triumph of Narayan's art of characterization. At the end of the novel, Raju dies in the true spirit of a saint. Raju's reply to Malone is characteristic of a saint: "I am only doing what I might have to do; that's all my likes and dislikes do not count."¹³ Thus, Raju's death of the end is for the *Dharma* that holds up the suffering humanity. Raju is thoroughly human in his desires and passions. And yet he is capable of a remarkable capacity for detachment which enables him to go through even Jail life, not only without embarrassment, and pain, but with positive pleasure. Thus when the crisis prevails, the absence of a strong ego and the lack of attachment prove to be powerful assets for affecting a recovery. Hence the character of Raju reflects the elements of a "*Karma Yogi*".

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides a Tiger*



Kalo in Bhabani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger represents the concept of freedom and untouchability. Bhattacharya's characterization of Kalo, the hero of the novel is entirely different from that of the wandering minstrel in A Goodness Named Gola. The character of Kalo is not that of *Yogi* concerned with mystic experiences. His is the adventurous story of deception of an imposter. He is a blacksmith by profession. In the words of Kalo himself: "The blacksmith's story is a legend of freedom, a legend

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to inspire and awaken."¹⁴ But acute poverty leads him to an act of theft of food and he is sent to Jail.

In the Jail, Kalo meets a revolutionary young man from Calcutta who is known in the prison, only by his number B-10. It is B10 who transmits, revolutionary fervour to Kalo and convinces him that a right answer to a society full of exploitation and inhuman callousness is to hit back:

"We are the scum of the earth. They hit us where it hurts badly - in the belly. We have got to hit back."¹⁵ Out of Jail Kalo lives a life full of frustration completely embittered with society. He thinks of taking revenge on the society dominated by the privileged Brahmins. Soon Kalo becomes a revered priest of a temple wherein he has made a *Shivalinga* sprung out of the soil by his clever trick. He wears the plain dress of a Brahmin with a sacred thread on his body. When people gather around the temple with great reverence he pretends completely to be lost in worship: "He had closed his eyes. He had held his breath. Clutching the sacred thread in his hands he had passed it lightly over his shoulder and across his bare chest --- putting on the sacred thread he had made him rootless."¹⁶

Thus, the terror of act was followed by a deep sense of peace. He had transcended the station that birth and blood had assigned him. Exhilaration and new courage filled him. Kalo masquerades as a Brahmin priest and encompasses a miracle - raising of a stone of God Shiva out of the earth. He builds up a temple on this adroitly contrived fact. Kalo the blacksmith is metamorphosed into a Brahmin as Mangal Adhikari, just as Raju, the railway guide, is transformed into a spiritual guru. Kalo becomes extremely conscious of his new role of self-styled Brahmin. He takes his place in the new order of living. It is seen when a merchant has raised his finger towards the establishment of the temple, Kalo converses with him in a convincing manner:

This is truly the age of sin. Man does not give to man out of kindness, even when hunger prowls and tens of thousands die. What wonder that man will not give to the gods out of love? Have you no fear? Do you not shake at the thought of Shiva's thunderous wrath? Kalo twisted the sacred thread on his thumb,

invoking the deity. Terror sprang to the merchant's face. Was the *pujari* going to curse him? His tongue stumbled as he blurted.¹⁷

Even Kalo soon learned the art of tempting others. He tempted the merchant to do good deeds through his spiritual speech: "You will be rewarded. I shall see to that. In the temple yard a marble slab will be set at our expense with your name as the donor of the land. For so small a price you will live forever and ever, my friend!" Kalo watched and his thick forefinger stabbed the air, "understand".

Even after transforming himself as a Brahmin. Kalo does not know the rituals related with Brahminism. He knew neither ways of ritual nor words of mantra, invocation. That knowledge was restricted to Brahmins. He finds a *pujari* to perform the rituals of the temple. He is so sure of his newly acquire Brahmin identity that he plans to marry his daughter to a Brahmin. Kalo's daughter Lekha also joins the same venture of her father. She is transformed into 'the mother of sevenfold bliss', a living Goddess. But it is also a forced transformation.

Men of wealth with no time or heart for prayer and penance give willingly for ritual, the easier way for them. The philosophy of the Indian soil "*Karma Bhoomi*" is etched in all its essence here. Vishwanath asked Kalo one day. "In this land of thousand and one gods, why is there is such deviltry and such misery?" Then the master of the temple speaks out his wisdom:

There is no faith in our hearts. The fire of punishment is our own making. It is the fire-bath of our purification. Sins committed in one life may have to be expiated in another through suffering. The real evil-doers seem untouched by '*Karma*'. They eat well and utter the name of Shiva and name of Rama and sleep in beds of peace and comfort. All that you do in this life goes to make the writing on your brow in the lives to come.¹⁸

Kalo looks deep into the face of his superiors, inhabitants of a higher world whose very shadow used to strike him into object humility. He seems to awaken from his half sleep. He begins to confess about himself and his past ordinary life. He sums

up: "Nothing is as true as falseness. The more false you are to yourself and to others, the more true you become."¹⁹

The role of a Brahmin does not suit the nature and habit of Kalo. He wants to live a 'real' life rather than a transmigrated.

The Brahminic role, it appeared, was not to be as easy as it had seemed. How was he to pass the endless idle hours? A real problem for one who had always work hard. As he sat across legged on the *divan* with nothing to do, his hand ached for the touch of the good tools of his trade.²⁰

Kalo creates a storm in the temple by one of his characteristic deeds. According to the usage, the milk that has been used for the ritual bath given to the image everyday is collected and thrown into the sacred Ganga. Viswanath begins to steal the milk and distribute it after boiling, to destitute children. Kalo as a spiritual Mangal Adhikari is touched by the humanity of the gestures and supports Viswanath. The trustees and the worshippers who pay for the milk through endowments create to a furor but Kalo rides the storms and finally establishes the customs of using the sanctified milk for feeding hungry children. But Kalo confesses ultimately to the people his fraud when he finds it difficult to undo the enormous lie. He and his daughter leave the temple and go away. Thus, the story of Kalo is the characterization of man who in order to fulfill his submerged wishes to rise to the status of Brahmin deceives society by passing for a spiritual man.

It is true that Kalo reminds us of Raju who transforms himself into a "Swami" in Narayan's 'The Guide'. In both, holiness is only a convenient disguise. While in Raju the identification last for a short period in Kalo it is cast off in the end.²¹

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*



In portraying the character of Moorthy, in the Kanthapura, Raja Rao is operating within the Indian philosophical tradition. He is aware that for the Indians, the highest goal in life is *Moksha* or self-realization. And to achieve this, three ways are open to the individual - those of *Karma* (action), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *Bhakti* (devotion). In the *Kanthapura*, Moorthy chooses all these paths. He is regarded as the village-Gandhi. The Gandhian myth is experienced in living terms through the character of Moorthy. The word 'Moorthy' in Kannada means the image and he is the image of Gandhi in *Kanthapura*. Moorthy is introduced to us at the very beginning as: "Corner-House Moorthy, who had gone through life like a noble, cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic, a very prince, I tell you."²²

After the first brush with the authority at the Skeffington estate that Moorthy decides on his fast, an act of self-purification, before beginning the Don't-touch-the-Government campaign. Moorthy believes in the principles of love. Moorthy, after the three day fast, is convinced that he "would send out love where there was hatred and compassion, where there was misery."²³

After his fast, Moorthy has realized that he should love all fellow men despite the difference in caste, creed etc. Moorthy true to the basic Gandhian ideology, avoiding any direct confrontation with unbelief or criticism. He tries to win the favour of his enemies as:

I shall love even my enemies. The Mahatma says we should love even our enemies and closing his eyes tighter, he slips back into the foldless sheath of the soul, and sends out rays of love to the east, rays of love to the west, rays of love to the north, rays of love to the south and love to the earth below and to the sky above, and he feels such exaltation, creeping into his limbs and head that his heart begins to beat out a song, and the song of *Kabir* comes into his mind:

The road to the city of love is hard, brother,

It's hard,

*Take care, take care, as you walk along it.*²⁴

In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy, is a devotee of the Mahatma conceived as in incarnation, a veritable avatar of the divine, born in this earth to end the suffering of Indian people under British rule. His life and actions, as characterized by the village bard, near to those of the Lord Krishna.

Moorthy is a *Satyagrahi* and the leader of the non-violent movement in *Kanthapura*. He teaches the lessons of bravery and courage against the British rule. Bade Khan who is the symbol of the oppressive soulless bureaucracy, made visible repulsive. But the villagers are not afraid of the policeman because- "what is a policeman before a Gandhi's man? Tell me, does a boar stand before a lion or Jackal before an elephant?"²⁵

It is Moorthy who creates the Satyagrahis out of the sons of the soil. Women also participate in the movement. Moorthy in the novel, recognizes the virtues of discipline. He inculcates in the fighters for freedom proper discipline whenever they go out of control. A Satyagrahi must recognize the value of discipline. It is a force, a power and a potent instrument to spell the word non-violence. He shows the importance of non-violence to the villagers:

"Brothers, in the name of Mahatma, let there be peace and love and order.

As long as there is a God in Heaven and purity in our hearts evil can not touch us. We hide nothing, we hurt none."²⁶

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Even the force of arms, gets subdued when faced with the *Satyagrahis* armed with non-violence and love force. It is reflected in the character of Moorthy. It is Moorthy who throws himself heart and soul into the work of the upliftment of the down-trodden people.

Moorthy is the first Brahmin of the village to enter the so-called Untouchable's hut to sip the milk offered to him. Moorthy has seen Gandhi just once in a vision when he stands near the Mahatma and fans him for a while. The stirring vice of the Mahatma makes a deep impact on his character, even though it is a 'vision'. Moorthy hears the Mahatma's message intently and takes a vow to spread it in the country side. He preaches the view of Mahatma Gandhi. Truth, spinning of the wheel, and the equality of worship is recited by him to the villagers. He also encourages them to abjure the drink.

Moorthy was a Brahmin but he and his followers went to the houses of *Harijans* and even took food there. The gates of temple were opened. Therefore, Bhatta persuaded the Swami to ex-communicate Moorthy from Brahmin community, and Moorthy says-

Let the Swami do what he likes. I will go and do more and more *pariah* work. I will go and eat with them if necessary. Why not? Are they not men like us. And the Swami, who is he? A self-chose fool. He may be learned in the Vedas and all that. But he has no heart. He has no thinking power.²⁷

Moorthy is perched at the top in ascetic strength. He is idealized as a Gandhian who has taught brotherhood, and equality and castelessness.

Thus, the character of Moorthy unfolds the concepts of truth, love, non-violence, freedom and self-discipline etc. The people hail the Mahatma as the '*Sahyadri Mountain*' and Moorthy as the 'small mountain'. His character stands for moral courage and self-discipline. So Moorthy as a Satyagrahi follows the line of Mahatma Gandhi, who preached the highest moral is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind without the sense of egoism.

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*



In Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, the character of Lama unfolds the concept of Buddhistic spirituality. He is the embodiment of Buddhistic spirit. He was an Abbott of the Buddhist monastery at Such-zon in Tibet on a pilgrimage to visit the four Holy places of Buddhism in India. The Lama performs all the rules of Buddhistic religion. Lama followed the middle path. The Lama told the curator that Lord Buddha had once taken up a vow and released an arrow which passed beyond site. At the last it fell and where it touched earth there broke out a stream which became a river. The Lama said that this river was the river of wisdom which could wash away all the sins of a man and he wanted to find out where the river was. "He freed himself, is that who so bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin."²⁸

The Lama and Kim proceed on their journey as a Chela, Kim looks after the bodily needs of the Lama and also receives instructions regarding the wheel of life:

When the shadows shortened and the Lama leaned more heavily upon Kim, there was always the wheel of life to draw forth, to hold flat under wiped stones, and with a long straw to expound cycle by cycle --- obediently, then with bowed head and brown finger alert to follow the pointer, did the chela study; but when they came to the Human world, busy and profitless, that is just above the Hells, his mind was distracted; for by the road side trundled the very wheel itself, eating, drinking, trading, marrying and quarreling - all warmly alive.²⁹

Throughout the journey the Lama was in quest of the holy river. He talked to everybody about his aim of finding the river. He was prepared to spend the remaining years of his life in his quest. Even while walking on the Grand Trunk Road, the Lama never raised his eye. He did not watch many things and people on the road. He looked steadily on the ground and walked meditatively hour after hour. His soul was elsewhere. Lama's chief work with Kim was the drawing forth of his better qualities and paying for his schooling at St. Xavier's. But the Lama was a bit surprised that Kim had not become a Sahib. He had acquired oriental skills and attitudes. Then the Lama took Kim to his cell. And there he talked to him about Kim's progress. Kim told him that he was a sahib but when he came to him he was his Chela and that he had finished three years education at the convent.

Then Kim and Lama again decided to go on the road. They wanted to go from hills to the sea and from the sea to hills. On the way Lama told Kim many *Jatak* stories. The Lama explained Kim the teachings and principles of Buddhism. Every detail on the wheel of life was explained by the Lama to Kim. He told Kim:

Friend of all the world' - the Lama looked directly at Kim, - I am an old man - pleased with shows as are children. To those who follow the way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking escape. No matter what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs, when we come to my River thou wilt be freed from all illusion - at my side. Hai! my bones ache for that River, as they ached in the te-rain; but my spirit sits above my bones, waiting The Search is sure!³⁰

Thus, Lama was determined to find the Holy river. The Lama told Kim the stories of Tibbet and various monasteries; he spoke of Lhassa and the Dalailama whom he had seen and adored.

The old man's mind turned more and more to his monasteries as his eyes turned to the steadfast snows. His river troubled him nothing. Now and again, indeed, he would gaze long and long at a tuft or a twig expecting, he said, the earth to cleave and deliver

its blessing; but he was content to be with his disciple, at ease in the temperate wind that comes down from the *Deen*.

The Lama's search constitutes the final movement of the story. The Lama tells Kim as after the incident with Russian:

The blow was but a shadow upon a shadow. Evil in itself - my legs weary apace there letter days! - it met evil in me - anger, rage, and a lust to return to evil --- Had I been less passionless, the evil blow would have done only bodily evil - a scar, a bruise - which is illusion. But my mind was not abstracted, for rushed in straightaway a lust to let spiti men kill. In fighting that lust, my soul was torn and wrenched beyond a thousand blows. Not till I had repeated the blessings' did I achieve calm--³¹

Thus, this blow awakens the Lama to the presence of evil in himself. But this also brings him nearer to his search. He now realizes that his visit to the Hills made him physically stronger letting him forget his search. The Lama has a great regard for Kim as his Chela: "Never such a Chela. Temperate, kinally, wise, of ungrudging, disposition, a merry heart upon the road, never forgetting, learned, truthful, courteous-----"³²

Lama gives a very beautiful description of the release of his soul from the body; the description is impressionistic. He felt that his soul was merging with the universal soul: "Yes my soul went free and wheeling like an eagle, saw indeed that there was no Teshoo Lama nor any other soul. As a drop draws to water, so my soul drew near to the Great Soul which is beyond all things. At that point, exalted in contemplation, I saw all Hind, from Ceylon in the sea to the Hills, and my own Painted Rocks at Such-zen; ----- By this I knew that I was free."³³In this frenzy mood the Lama jumped into the river thinking that there was the holy river into which he must throw himself to get liberation. Tashoo Lama was drowned and his search for the holy river ended.

The character of Lama reflects the concepts of non-attachment, self-sacrifice, self-realization etc. He completely lacks interest in worldly affairs since his whole being is concentrated on the object of his search. Lama also believes in Ahimsa. The incident on the Road to Benares when the Lama plays with the child or again his refusal to allow

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the Hillman to revenge to his person also reflected this thing. Thus, all the great qualities of a Buddhist are found in the Lama. His outlook is other worldly; his devotion to Buddha is supreme and unbelievable.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that the concept of spirituality has been elaborated through characterization at great length by the selected novelists. In the selected Indian-Writing fiction, spiritual figures have been found to influence other people. They bring peace and stability to a troubled situation. They love all people, good and bad alike, and pray for their well-being. Some of them are pseudo-spiritual. They only offer their 'personality' not their spirituality. They take undue advantages of their asceticism. They exploit the gullible and the knowledgeable alike. They directly or indirectly present the significance of spirituality in moulding and shaping of the character of an individual. Whether the character is benevolent or malevolent it unfolds the concepts of spirituality like - self-realization, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, renunciation, love, beauty, freedom, truth, *ahimsa* etc. in 'real-life' like manner. Thus, it is noticed that these concepts are the main force behind the destruction or creation of a good character.

End Notes

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³Ibid, p.20

⁴Ibid, p.20

⁵Ibid, p.46

⁶Ibid, p.41

⁷Ibid, p.41

⁸Ibid, p.57

⁹Ibid, p.83

¹⁰Ibid, p.97

¹¹Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English. (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1974), p.128

¹²Ibid, p.213

¹³ Ibid, p.218

¹⁴Bhabani Bhattacharya, He Who Rides A Tiger. (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1977), p.4.

¹⁵Ibid, p.53

¹⁶Ibid, p.82

¹⁷Ibid, p.89

¹⁸Ibid, pp.119-120

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²⁰ Ibid, p.98

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²²Raja Rao, Kanthapura. (London: Oxford University Press, 1909), p.6

²³Ibid, p.79

²⁴Ibid, p.89

²⁵Ibid, p.78

²⁶Ibid, p.120

²⁷Ibid, p.59

²⁸ Rudyard Kipling, Kim. (New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 1999), p.16

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Dr. Naveen K. Mehta
Associate Professor & Head
Communication Skills Department
Mahakal Institute of Technology
Ujjain-456010
Madhya Pradesh
India
drnknmehta73@gmail.com

Correspondence/Postal Address:

Sr. MIG-103, "ISHAN", Vyas Nagar
Rishi Nagar Extension, Ujjain 456010
Madhya Pradesh
India
drnknmehta73@gmail.com

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