

The Literary Art of Raja Rao

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Abstract

Raja Rao is the founding author of modern literature. His creative vision was to discover his self through literary pursuits. He superbly made the fusion of Indian and western people, culture, and philosophy. If his contemporaries R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand exposed social realities and advocated against the social injustice, Raja Rao exposed the metaphysical aspects of human-life. He opened the knot of Indian Philosophy to the world through his literary art. He emphasized on JnanaYoga, karma Yoga and Bhakti yoga of philosophy along with Samkhya philosophy and Vedanta philosophy. According to him, "Unless a the author becomes an upasak and enjoys himself in himself (which is rasa) the eternity of the sound (sabda) will not manifest itself."

Key Words: Philosophical insight, Sankhya and Vedanta Philosophy, Metaphysical speculations, Philosophical consciousness, Puranic Conception.

Introduction

Raja Rao is one of the stalwarts of Indian literary trio-figure (R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao). The stormy tides of national consciousness emerged under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, and it had a tremendous effect on the attitude and aptitude of the common mass. No one was untouched of its impressionable effect. Then, how could these literary giants be unaffected of its ripple effect. This national consciousness shaped the intellectual taste of these literary genius.

It has been said by Raja Rao himself, "Mulk Raj Anand talks of the poor disinherited; Narayan talks of the middle classes; Raja Rao talks of the metaphysical." ('An Interview with Raja Rao': 65). He explored the spiritual aspects of human life through his literary vision and approach. It has been said by some critics that while Swami Vivekanand directly interpreted Indian philosophy, specially the vedanta, Raja Rao did it creatively and artistically.

Raja Rao has been singularly acclaimed as a classical writer, not only for creating world-class writings but also amalgamating the essentials of western culture and philosophy in his literary creation. He had unparalleled intellectual affinity with some western philosophers, scholars and writers like Malraux, Valery, Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Rolland, Silone, and many others.

Almost all the critics have assessed him as an enormously complex author who dealt with psychology, mysticism, spiritualism and philosophy in depth. The cosmopolitan nature of his life gave him stimulated intellectual experiences transforming him into a great author. His writings vary from socio-cultural writing to the writing based on selfhood of human life and destiny.

According to R. Parthasarathy, poet, translator, critic, editor, and Director of the Program in Asian Studies at Skidmore College in New York, "Rao is one of the most innovative novelists now writing. Departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel, he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He has put the novel to uses to which it had not perhaps been put before by exploring the metaphysical basis of writing itself; of, in fact, the word. As a writer, Rao's concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or ethnic group.... The house of fiction that Rao has built is founded on the metaphysical and linguistic speculations of the Indians. It is to the masters of fiction in our time, such as Proust and Joyce, that we must ultimately turn for a writer of comparable stature."

Literature for him, was a Sadhana, so is a sadhana for his reader too. The readers can't comprehend the underlying facts of the writings of Rao unless they meditate upon his writings and their supra intellectuality go beyond the textuality, at times. The philosophy of Advaita Vedanta is well knitted in the plots and sub-plots of the story but due to its duality of theme and nature, it becomes complex for the common reader.

Early writings of Rao exhibit his social and political commitment but not being the prolific writer, he gradually evolved enormously as a complex philosophical writer. The same philosophical consciousness with artistic bent of mind helped him to get the honour of Sahitya Akademi Award (1964) after his magnum opus, *The Serpent and the Rope*, Neustadt International Prize (1988) for *The ChessMaster and his Moves* and Padma Bhushan award (1969)

Raja Rao indigenized the writing in English. He found neither Kannada (his mother tongue) nor French (the language of his karmabhumi) to be handled in his native style. He found his multiple ideas with wide experiences to be accommodated in English language only. He felt there was enough space in English to sketch his multifold ideas. But the colonial rule deterred him to use it in its original hue so, to give vent to his creative urge with philosophical sensibilities, Rao colored the language in Indian style superbly. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, and Kamala Markandey also tried to give local flavour in the language but there is no match to the style of Raja Rao. He not only brought the local flavour but also added the mythological and symbolic places, characters and stories within the plot and sub

plots of his novels. Even short stories were painted with the beauty of Indian myth. Raja Rao has enriched the Indian writing in English as an epic breadth of vision, a metaphysical regour and philosophical depth, a symbolic richness, a lyrical fervour and essential Indianness of style. We observe interdisciplinary pluralistic approach his writing style. His philosophy drawn from lifelong experiences after living accross the world shaped his literary journey. He gave philosophical insight through the fictional characters of his novels. He mastered to give vent to his social, patriotic, philosophic and spiritual experiences through his fictions. Participation in the national freedom movement and writing of *Kanthapura* was the outcome of his long stay in France. The revolutionary ideals of France – liberty, equality and fraternity deeply affected the thought process of Raja Rao. At the same time, his sensibility to India and its culture remained till his last breath. His evolution as a philosophically complex novelist was the outcome of the multifarious influences on him of Indian metaphysical tradition and his susceptibility to western culture. Raja Rao writes in the style of Indian Puranas.

Raja Rao deeply believed in the philosophical reflection and religious teaching of the ancient Indian Puranas, known as encyclopaedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism. *Kanthapura* is the best example of the English language used in Harikatha Style for depicting the political upheaval of pre-independent India. He made his choice to write in Puranic form of writing, a traditional Indian narrative technique of the Puranas.

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move, we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The *Mahabharata* has 214, 778 verses and the *Ramayana* 48, 000. The *Puranas* are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us--we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story. It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls, and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village." - excerpted from Raja Rao's introduction to his first novel, *Kanthapura*, 1937

If *Kanthapura* is sthala-purana, *The Serpent and the Rope* is mahapurana. M.K Naik calls it modern Indian mahapurana. The *Serpent and the Rope* according to, Raja Rao is 'an attempt at a puranic recreation of Indian story-telling. It has acquired the dignity of modern Indian Mahapurana. Rao has experimented to build on this novel as the traditional puranic form of writing. It contains story within story, fables and legends, philosophical reflections on christianity, Buddhism, Vedanta and Tantra, mystical experiences. *The Cat and Shakespeare* is a metaphysical comedy which presents the metaphysical proposition of the preceding work with enormous zeal. Raja Rao has integrated cat-kitten metaphysics, the bhakti-yoga this novel. Though there is no conceptual

meaning of Shakespeare but the cat is symbolic of the devine goddess. The novel is highly classical as a work of art. According to the bhakti yoga the way to happiness lies in self-surrender and devotion to the mother goddess. The devine symbol mother cat drawn from the upanisadic concept makes the novel a puranic tale or parable.

The chessmaster and His Moves has a unified plot with diversified area like- politics, religion, history. It covers the central theme, the search for absolute with vast range of locale and characters. The story goes from France to London and Himalayas to Bengal engaging cross-cultural characters. The narrative pattern of the novel is completely idigeneous revealing the great upanishadic truth of 'tat twam asi' from the metaphysical position of Advaita Vedanta.

Thus Raja Rao was the writer of rhythmic and sparkling style. He single-mindedly focused on the journey of spiritual quest through his creative pursuits. Prior to him, traditional western form of English writing was in vogue by the most of the Writers in English. He realised the goal of human-life by writing the experiences of his life in the form of puranic and mahapuranic fictions.

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