

SPIRITUALITY IN THE NOVELS OF RAJA RAO

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ABSTRACT

Raju Rao is a famous Indian writer writing in English. Rao as novelist of spiritual dimensions is redemptive in the extreme. Deeply affected by the loss of traditional, cultural and metaphysical values, he dedicates his novels to a very deep and penetrating quest through fictional exercise. In the beginning of his novels, he delineates the feelings of patriotism and religion but gradually his wider, deeper spiritual outlook embraces them all and transcends them too as he does in Kanthapura. He presents a spiritual problem of man and also its worthwhile solution through an imaginative and emotional exploration of a particular metaphysical system. The Kernal principal of his novels, therefore rests in his quest for Truth-the Shiva in the 'T'.

INTRODUCTION

Raja Rao is the famous Indo-English writer whose native language was Kanarese, he did his post-graduate in France and all his publications in book form are in English. He was concerned with language and consciousness. ¹ Rao attempt has been to revive through his fiction the Indian quest tradition, thereby stressing the paramountcy of spirit over tea-tabling incidents and behavior of his characters. As a voyager in the realm of spirit, he discovers man's inner essence which is to seek truth and strive for merge with it. His novels are intense and impassioned expositions of the Indian consciousness which are completely embedded in the Upanishadic tradition of India and rooted in the Advaita Darshana or Sankaracharya. The incessant search for the Absolute is the theme song of Rao's novels. Through fictional exercise, he maps out the process of his quest for truth and explores the possibilities of being and becoming He once said "writing is my dharma". ²

MATERIAL AND TOOLS

Raja Rao's four novels namely, Kanthapura (1938), The Serpent and The Rope (1960), The cat and Shakespeare (1965) and Comrade Kirillov (1976) compose a quarter with each dealing a particular area of human experience and a particular phase of Rao's spiritual as well as fictional development. ³

Each novel composites of its own music, when one reads any one of them, the music of the other keeps ringing in the mind. Each novel is the product of his deep spirituality. He is firmly committed to the chore of fulfilling his spiritual dimensions through spiritual discipline, zeal and self surrender.

Raja Rao attempts at presenting a picture of life that is in close proximity to the actual and the real physical and the metaphysical. The character in a spiritual fiction move in an atmosphere that knows no limits as it deals more with spiritual dimensions than with the picturesque details. It seems that characters of such a novel „are living at once on the plane that we know and on some other plan of reality from which we are shut out, their behavior doesn’t seen crazy, but rather in conformity with the laws of some other world that we can’t perceive.”⁴ The novels thus become a way of responding to the world that is timeless in the manner of Shakespearean plays. Rao himself confesses that “Shakespeare is almost an Indian of my India... he too has influenced me fundamentally Hamlet, first and foremost, than King bear and finally The Tempest.”⁵

M.K. Naik rightly observes, “Raja Rao goes to the very roots of transformation by demonstrating how the new nationalistic fervour in rural India in the 1930s blended completely with the age-old, deep-rooted spiritual faith and thus revitalized the spiritual spring within and helped rediscover the Indian soul.”⁶

The man, for Rao doesn’t mean the social being trapped in the monotonous routine of the day to day struggle for physical existence only like animals but the man here stands for the metaphysical entity in him engaged in the quest of Truth and seeking the final and unconditional merger. By realization of Truth “I” becomes “Shiva” – Shivoham. For Raja, Shiva means Truth. Rao is greatly impressed by the French metaphysical novelists. Rao himself confesses, “I love Gide and Malraux. They are two great French novelists I have loved to read. I don’t know whether they have influenced me, but I love them.”

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This quest for the knowledge of Truth begins with his very first novel, Kanthapura, demonstrating the Gandhian impact on the struggle for India’s freedom from the British rule. “Soul of the novel resides in the all inspiring ideal selfless action Satyagraha which manifests itself in the guiding principles of Truth, non-violence and universal love.”⁸ His next novel „The Serpent and the Rope“ depicts man’s quest for self-realization. According to Rao its theme is “the futility and barrenness of man in human existence when man has no deep quest and no thirst for the ultimate Man’s life here in Sansara is an august mission to find the Absolute.”⁹

His novel „The Cat and Shakespeare“ is a „book of Prayer“ glorifying the extreme dedication and complete dependence upon the grace of the Guru in his feminine aspect. The cat in the novel is symbolic of the Guru as the „Mother“, the „Protector“ and the „Initiator“. His novel „Comrade Kirillov“ is a quest for the rediscovery of traditional values and identity for the Indians themselves who have left their motherland and as expatriates worship at now shrines.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Raja Rao, in his endeavour to communicate his vision of spirituality holds a very distinct and special view of life and the nature of existence. The voice of Rao as a novelist and spiritualist is the voice of ancient seekers and seers who composed the puranas and scriptures. Each of his novels is the product of his varied and deep spiritual dimensions of life.

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