
MYTHICAL TECHNIQUE IN THE NOVELS OF RAJA RAO

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Indian fiction in English has matured itself over the years. It has become more expressive and experimental both thematically and stylistically and has come to establish itself as indigenous branch of world literature. With the passage of time, Indian novel in English has been recognized as an effective vehicle of mythical method in Indian Literacy world. Novelists, since the formative years of this generation have been exploring the myths prevailing in Indian society. R.K. Narayana, Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy and Raja Rao etc. have produced many Novels dealing with the theory of myths.

Raja Rao is a novelist of philosophical consciousness. This consciousness is primarily the outcome of his aspiration for spirituality. His writing invariably manifests his quest for Truth. The novelists urge to know the reality reveals that he has a philosophical mind. His intense predilection for Indian philosophy has provided a philosophical ethos to fall his literacy creativity which he calls a spiritual discipline.

Raja Rao is one of the most innovative novelists departing boldly from the European tradition. He explores the metaphysical basis of writings. He is essentially mythic and the fibular in order to deal with the height of sublimation. The structural framework of his fiction evidences his keen interest in new experiments in the presentation of philosophy in novel. He has brought to the Indian novel in English;

Lyrical fervor and essential Indianess of style, an epic breadth of vision, a metaphysical rigor and philosophical depth, a symbolic richness.

The Indian English novelists have to search and nourish their roots in their own past. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

“Indian people are still closer to their mythology than the modern Irish or British people are to Celtic folk-lore or Greek legends.”

Philosophy permeating through Raja Rao's novels is generally held to be Vedantic in tone and temper. Being a Vedantic, he seeks truth on the lines of 'Advaitavada' (The philosophy of monism) and frequently refers to the precepts from the Upanishads. To him writing is a visible expression of his deeply felt spiritual experiences. Duly recognizing men's deep need to seek and realize truth, he endeavours to revive the traditional Indian quest with all its region. A study of Upanishads and in attainment of knowledge and realization. 'Upa' means near and 'Shad' means to sit. The medium of this exercise is the shared bond and closeness to the guru or spiritual preceptor. Schopenhaver, who read a translation of Upanishads declared:

“From every sentence deep, original and sublime. Thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy earnest spirit.... It has been the solace of my life, It will be the solace of my death”

The Advaita philosophy of Shankaracharya forms the core of Raja Rao's fictional work. The first exponent of Advaita was Gandapada, the paramguru of Sri Shankaracharya. The quintessence of Shankaracharya's philosophy has been summed up by himself in half a verse:

“Brahman (the absolute) alone is real; this world is unreal; the jiva or the individual soul is essentially non-different from Brahman”

Rao's first novel Kanthapura expands the nationalistic movement through the myth of Gandhi. The novel centers around young Moorthy, who with his fire and idealism wages a battle against the conservative forces. He introduces and conveys the impact of Gandhi's ideals on this sleepy village and makes it aware of the turbulence of the movement. So Kanthapura can be called the Grammer of the Gandhian myth.

The present novel is mainly rendering of the localized myth – the legendry history of a village in the western coast of India i.e. calls Sthalapurana. Even localized myth such as that of Kanchamura has been made use of. By employing Indian myth of time and chronology and by mythologizing the historical characters, he has telescoped the known epic of Puranic myths are revitalized in the novel as it dramatizes the philosophy of selfless action as expounded in the Bhagwat Geeta.

The Indian struggle for freedom is equated with the great war of Mahabharata, and Kanthapura becomes a veritable Kurukshetra. He has even mythologized the historical characters like Gandhi to exact the war between the forces of good and evil, truth and untruth and love and hatred. It is microcosm of macrocosm ; it is Indian in miniature. The novelist's style or mythical method makes it a Gandhi Purana or a Gandhian epic. K.A. Aggarwal observes about Raja Rao:

“He was a child of Gandhian age, remarkable novelist among ‘Big three’ the other two are Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan.”

All the novels of this great novelist deals with quest theme and represent different stages of quest coinciding with the growth of his metaphysical convictions. Northop Frye says in his wonderful essay ‘The archetypes of Literature’:

“We have identified the central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect, with the quest myth”

By incorporating the myth of the wondering gods, Rao has enriched his description and given it a mythical or Puranic touch. The sectarian Puranas preach the supremacy of their own deities like Vishnu or Shiva. In the true Puranic manner, Kanthapura exposes and sings the glories of the Gandhian philosophy through Moorthy, Rangamma and

Ratna. Moorthy has a mystic experience when he fasts in the temple before he begins the 'Don't touch the Government' campaign:

“..... But he merged deeper into himself and radiance powered out of his body and he seemed to rise sheer into the air. He floated and floated in it, and he felt he could fly so far and so free....”

The Serpent and the Rope explains the dynamics of mythical devices and its concomitant usage in order to comprehend the work through theological explorations. The present study of Rao's novels is based on the quest myth. His quest however is different : it is not a quest undertaken for some material object ; it is a metaphysical quest. In an interview Rao has said:

“For me Literature is Sadhana- not a Profession but a Vocation.”

When he began writing, he was a baffled person not knowing his bearings. So he totally abstained from writing for a long time. After meeting Guru Atmananda, he wrote 'The Sapent and the Rope' and 'The cat and Shakespear' and Kanthapura.

Raja Rao's trilogy woven with his deep knowledge of the Indian myths, has enabled the reader of understand the soul of traditional India Rao is admittedly an upholder of traditions. In reply to a questionnaire he says:

“The more people think they have to go to Valmiki, the better it will be. What is tradition but the wisdom of ages? If you go against it, it will kill you.”

The myth of Radha and Krishna, Gautam Buddha and Yagnavalkya and Maitreyi all amalgamate into one central Indian myth; they form over the ages the collective consciousness of the masses. Raja Rao reentered the old myths of his own culture as a node of achieving coherence and order amidst the chaos of the present whose temper is essentially egoistic given to inordinate assertion of the self. The Serpent and the Rope ought to make India real not to Europeans only but to Indians as well.

The present research paper envisages to study Raja Rao's two famous novels with a view to exploring the use of mythical technique. It is presumed that the rigorous investigations of these two novels will lay bare the inherent philosophical insights that Rao has embedded into his texts.