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I INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

The novel came to India through the influence of the Western literature. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar rightly says,

The 'novel' as a literary phenomenon is new to India ... it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel, the long sustained piece of prose fiction - has occurred and taken roots in India.¹

The novel in English in India flowered really in the 'thirties of this century, which roughly coincides with the period after the World War I. Indian novelists in English upto 1950 may be said to have been swayed by the contemporary upheavals like the freedom movement and social change. The novels of this period are deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement. K.S. Venkataramani (1891-1951) successfully attempted the background of nationalistic Gandhian movement in his second novel, Kandan, the Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making (1932), though his first novel is Murgun, The Tiller (1927). A.S.P. Ayyar went back to ancient Indian history in his first novel, Baladitya (1930) which is set in the fifth century. A fellow Tamil, Krishnaswamy Nagarajan (1893-) wrote Athavar House (1937) is a Galsworthian family Chronicle dealing with an old

Maharashtrian Brahmin family settled in the South. The most significant event in the history of Indian English fiction in the nineteen thirties is the appearance on the scene of its major trio: MulkRaj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. William Walsh describes them as the 'big three'; and C.D. Narasimhaiah considers them, 'the three distinguished Indian novelists', largely because their names have been making news for more than three decades. Anand (1905-) is the eldest and the most prolific and compassionate in his treatment of the down-trodden. He has dealt with the problem of untouchability in his first novel Untouchable (1935) due to his association with Gandhian movement. The art of R.K. Narayan (1906-) offers an interesting contrast to that of Mulk Raj Anand. His first novel, Swami and Friends (1935) is a delightful account of a school boy.

Post-Independent Indian English fiction retains the spirit of the Gandhian age. Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-) in his novel So Many Hungers (1947) deals with political, economic and social exploitation. His novel, Shadow From Ladakh (1966) won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1967. Manohar Malgonkar (1913-) began his novelistic career with Distant Drum (1960). Khushwant Singh (1918-) offers contemporary realism to the Indian English novel in his Train to Pakistan (1956) in which he grapples with the complex situation of Partition. Balachandra Rajan (1920-) presented psychological realism in his first novel

The Dark Dancer (1959). Sudhindra Ghose (1899-1965) has experimented in expression in his And Gazelles Leaping published in 1949. G.V. Desani (1909-) daringly experimented in All About H. Hatterr (1949). With regard to the theme as well as the technique of narration, All these novelists helped to enrich the Indian English novel.

A notable development is the emergence of women novelists in more recent period. Ruth Pravar Jhabvala (1927-) was born in Poland but stayed in India for long. She writes about undivided middle class Hindu families. To Whom She Will was published in 1955. Kamala Markandaya (1924-) has been living in England but offers greater variety of characters. Her first novel is Nector in the Sieve (1954). Nayantara Sahgal (1927-) is an exponent of the political novel. A Time to be Happy (1958) is her first novel. Anita Desai (1937) is a contrast to Sahgal, she attempts to discover significance of things in Cry, the Peacock which is published in 1963.

By the end of the 'sixties and in the early 'seventies new novelists came upon the scene: Arun Joshi (1939-) and Chaman Nahal (1927-) are significant among them. Arun Joshi attempts the theme of alienation in The Foreigner (1968) while Chaman Nahal presents painful odysseys in My True Faces (1973).

II

The modern age is perhaps more complex than any previous age in history. It is full of innumerable cross-currents that cannot be easily grasped. The social and political changes were very swift in the first half of this century. The outbreak of the two world wars, the emergence of new political ideologies, the fast industrial development, all these brought about drastic changes in the societies of almost all countries of the world. The turn of the century initiated new movements. The rapid spread of ideas, particularly after the First World War, transformed the views of people towards life. In India there was a new awakening in the social and political fields. Great social reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Phule, G.G. Agarkar and others started social movements which have had far reaching effects. Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and others plunged into the battle for freedom and aroused in the people a new sense of national identity. Along with the political movement the social reformists were tirelessly striving to educate masses. The picture of the Indian Society upto the 1930s was bleak due to orthodoxy, backwardness and illiteracy. The caste structure of society was the chief source of exploitation and inequalities. Meena Shirwadkar aptly describes the condition of Hindu women in the following passage,

In the complex fabric of the Indian family, society and culture, the woman's sphere of life and activity was, in the past, bound by the protective and prohibitive walls raised by the moralists, from the middle ages down to the beginning of the present century. In the family itself, her position was almost invariably an inferior one. This was the situation at the turn of the century which saw the beginnings of the Indo-Anglian fiction ... she had been a creature trampled through the centuries, silently suffering ... in the dark corners of a joint family household, regarded as inauspicious, a woman with a white foot and forehead, if fated to be a widow who was even dragged to the pyre, or married before her fifteenth year to a man of fifty years. She had neither the desire nor the strength to revolt. The only way left for woman till the early twentieth century was to suppress or spiritualize her natural desires. This is reflected in Indo-Anglian fiction as it is in the Indian fiction of the first half of the twentieth century.²

Dr. A.S. Altekar has provided a larger historical perspective to illustrate woman's subjugation in the following passage:

The doctrine of the perpetual tutelage of women was universally accepted almost everywhere till quite recent times. 'To the average Athenian', says Prof. Gilbert Murray, 'it was probably rather wicked for her to take part in public life ... to acquire learning'. Aristotle thought that like slaves ... woman should occupy a subordinate place. 'Woman is always dependent', says Confucious, 'and owes due homage to her father-in-law and husband'. In Chritain marriage, the wife has to take the vow of obedience at the time of marriage ... this places her

under the perpetual tutelage of her husband. The Bible argues that women should never usurp authority over men, but always subordinate to them. Even Rousseau, the apostle of freedom condemned women to a servile position. 'Girls', he argues, 'should be early subjected to restraint. This misfortune, if it be really one, is inseparable from their sex'. Even educated and cultured ladies of the 18th century felt that women could never dream of independence. While writing about the education of girls, Hannah Moore says, 'Girls should be led to distrust their own judgement'. ... The French National Assembly treated women so contemptuously that it refused even to read their petition (George, p. 186). In Anti-Slavery Congress held in London in 1840, women delegates from America were not admitted because British representatives felt that it was contrary to the world of God that women should sit in the Congress. In England there was a determined opposition to the admission of women to the medical course down to 1888 A.D. Oxford University admitted women students, but would not give them any degrees till 1920 A.D., though bantered and ridiculed into granting degrees to women, still refuses to grant them the right to vote at meetings, where men holding corresponding degrees, are allowed to vote. Until the first Great War succeeded in shattering old prejudices and fetters, women did not succeed in winning elementary political rights. They are still without franchise in some countries in Europe. ... From the beginning of the Christian era, Hindu society began to assume a patronising attitude towards women as was done almost everywhere both in the West and the East till quite recently.³

Aparna Basu, in an article: "The Role of Women in the

Indian Struggle for Freedom", observes that there are broadly three stages in the movement for the emancipation of women in India. In the first stage which can be said to begin in the early nineteenth century with Raja Rammohan Roy, attempts are made to change the religious basis of certain social practices and conventions and to apply rational and humanitarian criteria to problems like Sati, Widow-remarriages and child marriage. In the second stage, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards great stress is laid on woman's education. The entry of woman into the political field marks the third phase, from this point onwards the woman's emancipation movement is no longer the ideal of a few social reformers, but part of a much bigger political crusade. By participation in the political movement, women helped their own struggle for liberation. In India, feminism and nationalism are closely inter-linked.

The spirit of patriotism strove to make women free and to curb the exploitation. The sincere efforts made by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jotiba Phule, Dhondo Keshav Karve, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, led to the abolition of Sati and widow tonsure, and child marriages considered to be unfair. The passing of the Sharada Act⁴ helped to raise the girl's marriage age and the spread of woman's education. Gandhian movement changed the woman's position in the family and society. Western influence and education changed the old values. It was a time of political, social and

cultural turmoil.

Indian writers, including writers in English, have been sensitive to the problems of women and have articulated the changing situation with insight and understanding. Mulk Raj Anand's The Old Woman and the Cow, Raja Rao's Kanthapura and stories like Akkayya', Bhabani Bhattacharya's Music for Mohini, Kamala Markandaya's Two Virgins and Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock are just a few examples.

At the present juncture, of course, the woman's liberation movement has grown into one of the most significant challenges of this century. All the options from girlhood through motherhood and manless life style are now open to her. Equality and liberation are the two operative words, but it is seen to be difficult for the woman to reconcile these concepts with the reality of her life, bent down as she is by the weight of traditional Hindu values.

As the woman's sense of individuality is matured she refuses to remain a sacrificial, shadowy creature. There is a change in woman's personal status, social stature, her thinking and her feelings. The past half century witnessed great change in the attitude to sex, love and marriage. The prevailing ideas of advanced countries are affecting other countries through mass media. Modern Indian wife confronts the problem of multiplicity

of roles she has to perform. The modern husband is experiencing a value conflict and is pulled in two opposite directions by expectations of the 'traditional' and 'modern' wife. Dr. Promilla Kapur thinks that the husband is chiefly responsible for the tensions,

They like wives to take up jobs but dislike them to change at all as far as their attitude towards their roles and statuses at home is concerned and dislike their traditional responsibilities being neglected which results from their preoccupation with out-of-home vocation. Their attitude towards their wives being employed is found to be ambivalent.⁵

The women want more freedom from tradition but the elders in the family and particularly the husbands do not wish to offer them freedom. The movement of neo-feminism in the West reached the Indian women in the mid-fifties, and they began to express their exasperation at the continuance of the Sita image in literature. Mrs Mukherjee considers that Hindi films and the best-selling novels in regional languages are responsible for the firmly set ideal of the Sita-type.

There are no simple solutions anymore. The woman does not usually make an imaginative escape into a larger life created independently of sex and boundless in joy and sympathy. Even those women who are more fortunate, with advantages of birth, wealth, education and opportunity, do not find a fully mature

union with the opposite sex. The poor battle for survival does not train their sights for higher or equal job prospects, pay and sexual roles. When survival needs are met, they find they are confronted with other problems like loneliness and alienation.

Shantha Krishna-Swamy's comments on the situation of Indian women are significant:

Outdated and outmoded family and marriage laws, divorce, abortion, dowry, rape and inheritance rights are all weighted against her, older models have crumbled round the edges while new models have yet to establish themselves on a firmer footing. Most women in fiction and in real life have to grapple with conflicting situations. How far to conform, how to break away to assert one's individuality, how to overcome the sense of loss in rebellion, how to resolve the identity-crisis, these questions still remain to be answered.⁶

III

Raja Rao was born on November 12, 1909,⁷ the eldest son in a family consisting of two brothers and seven sisters. He hails from an ancient South Indian Brahmin family which counts among its ancestors Vidyardanya Swami, perhaps the greatest teacher of the philosophy of non-dualism after Shankaracharya. The Rao family, originally belonging to Mysore, migrated to the then Muslim state of Hyderabad.

Raja Rao's grandfather was a remarkable man who was spiritually inclined. Raja Rao spent part of his childhood with his grandfather at Hassan. He was deeply and significantly influenced by him which is reflected in his works. Some of his early years were spent at Harihalli, where they had ancestral family land. His intimate knowledge and keen understanding of rustic life and the rustic mind are revealed in Kanthapura and in short stories like 'Akkayya' and 'Javni'. For his high school education he came to Hyderabad, 'the only Hindu pupil' in a Muslim High School, where he learnt philosophy in Urdu and some Muslim theology. He was a delicate child and weak in lungs, and sent to Aligarh up in the North, hoping that the change would do him good where he was impressed by a teacher poet Eric Dickinson who taught him to love France. He passed his B.A. with History and English, at Nizam's College Hyderabad, Madras University in 1928. He went to France with an Asiatic Scholarship to do research on 'Mysticism of the West'.

Raja Rao studied first at the University of Montpellier and then at Sorbonne, but his spiritual quest in his young days, his interest in India's political problems made it difficult for him to concentrate on purely academic work. Dr. M.K. Naik presents the autobiographical information about Raja Rao's marriage to a Senior Professor in French, in France and Raja Rao himself confesses,

I married her. I waited to get married because I was not 21 ... She was a professor of French. My wife played a very important part in my life till 1947.⁸

One contemporary journal describes Mr and Mrs Rao's visit to India during 1932-33 and refers to Mrs Rao's 'great love of Hinduism', 'her efforts to live like a Hindu'. The marriage dissolved in 1949 and reading The Serpent and the Rope one feels that its plot might have been based on his personal experiences.

Raja Rao took to writing both in English and French and gave up research. Though settled in France, he never lost contact with his motherland. His periodical visits to his country are his attempts to vitalize the contacts with his motherland and its traditional values. He is passionately attached to the Indian ethos; due to his long exile from India his attachment is strengthened. He is deeply influenced by sages like Pandit Taranath of the Tungabhadra Ashram and Sri Atmanand Guru of Trivandrum. He visited Sri Aurobindo's ashram at Pondicherry, Raman Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai and Mahatma Gandhi's Ashram at Sevagram.

Raja Rao was an active participant of 'quit India' movement. He found answers to all his questions from Atmananda Guru. He thought of settling down in India, but when Sri Atmananda Guru passed away in 1959, Raja Rao went back to France again. He

moved to the U.S.A. in 1965 from France.

Raja Rao is not a prolific novelist like A. R. Ambedkar or Narayan. He has to this date only four novels and two collections of stories to his credit. His first novel Kanthapura (1938) is the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English fiction. The Serpent and the Rope (1960, Sahitya Akademi Award, 1963) is perhaps the greatest of Indian English novels. The Cat and Shakespeare (1965, an earlier version called The Cat had appeared in 1959) is another attempt at philosophical fiction, a new direction, 'metaphysical comedy'. Comrade Kirillov (1976) is the most recent novel.

Raja Rao has published only a dozen short stories which are collected in The Cow of the Barricades and other stories (1947) and The Policeman and the Rose (1978), which is a revised version of the earlier collection, containing all but two of its stories and adding three more.

Against this background, it is interesting to study Raja Rao's attitude towards his women characters as it is reflected in his novels.

Raja Rao's novels present archetypal images, but with the sincere attention to its metamorphoses in the changing reality of Indian society. For example, Savitri, Saroja and Sukumari in The Serpent and the Rope, revolt a short while against the

traditional pattern of marriage, but finally reconcile defeatedly to situation. His female characters range from children to mature old women, though not all of them are presented in depth, they always appear as characters of flesh and blood. Each woman has a private universe and life.

Raja Rao has full grasp of the nature of psychological and social changes of Indian women in relation to the family, society, institution of marriage, political and national movements. His women characters are authentic and convincing.

/The aim of dissertation is to study Raja Rao's novels with regard to the women characters in them and to demonstrate the range and variety of such characters and the depth of his understanding of the psychic situation of the Indian woman in the context of the vast but authentic world. Characteristically, Raja Rao's attitude towards women in general appears to be idealistic and paternalistic which probably may not be acceptable to the new Indian woman.

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