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# V CONCLUSION

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Raja Rao is considered to be the most original of all the Indian writers in English. Dr. M.K. Naik thinks his "Indianness"<sup>1</sup> is superior to the best Indian novelists such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya. C.D. Narasimhaian admires his "distinct, profoundly Indian sensibility"<sup>2</sup> while Dr. J.P. Sharma justifies Raja Rao's preoccupation with Indian culture as expressed in the following words:

Indian culture is the only hope of man in this world of frustration, turmoil, insecurity, confusion and selfishness.<sup>3</sup>

Though the central focus of my attention is on Raja Rao's women characters, his incessant preoccupation with man and his spiritual quest for salvation cannot be ignored. The woman is subordinate and not equal to man; she neither determines her life nor defies herself as man does. Raja Rao's female characters range widely, from a child to an old woman, and from a highly educated European to an illiterate Indian. The galaxy of female characters is full of variety and multiplicity which is a unique feature of Raja Rao's novels. He portrays them with greater depth and details, and so they are convincingly authentic. He surpasses Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya,

R.K. Narayan and others in presenting varieties of women characters. He has a perfect sense of female psyche and is creatively involved in his women characters. His attitude towards his women characters is at once detached and involved, but the balance is maintained aesthetically by parallels and contrasts.

The psychology of Raja Rao's women characters is true and revealing. He has not created an Anna or a Tess, but within the framework where they figure, they are fully realistic. He has not explored the inner world of his women characters like the psychological novelists but he reveals their psychology in manifold human relationships. He successfully and effectively penetrates their psychology by dramatizing the emotional tensions, conflicts and disturbances in the characters like Savitri, Madeleine and Saroja. In this regard his accomplishment is unobtrusive. Raja Rao's women do not appear to be out of place. He is familiar with their background and they appeal to a larger audience. He describes the women who are fully known to him and so all his women appear to be real with a universal appeal.

Raja Rao upholds the traditional concept of woman who consciously accepts the Sati ideal of Pativrata who is a conformist and not a rebel. She can be a part of his transcendental vision only by denying her own reality. He tends to side with the traditional pattern of identity or male-dominating tradition. The women in his novels are consistently reduced to vegetative life or

symbols or spiritual aspects of human life. His aspiring women are punished, like Saroja, or settle for abject passivity like Savitri, dutifully distributing prizes or presiding over the tea table at Government receptions. He is too deeply rooted in tradition to offer any radical shift in his attitude to women. His concept of woman is continuous from early to later novels. There is a double pull in Savitri and Saroja, between romantic sensibility, idealisation and an awareness of the conditions of despair in an Indian woman. Such women are symbol of an escape from a tired civilization into rosy mythic and vedic fantasies.

Raja Rao's Kanthapura is the novel of woman's awakening and enlightenment attained spasmodically, where Gandhian struggle for independence is an impetus. His women in Kanthapura represent the women of 1930s, of towns and villages. Raja Rao glorifies feminine principle in this novel. Goddess Kenchamma embodies mother principle in Kanthapura. The narrator Achakka is herself a mother.

The Gandhian movement evokes an awakening of such ideas as equality, widow-remarriage, removal of untouchability, abolition of purdah, child marriage, education of women and improvement of the lot of the widows. Simple illiterate, unsophisticated, rural women from all strata of Kanthapura, shed their age-old taboos of caste, orthodoxy, the ancient code of behaviour formulated by Manu and come out. Political upheavals

help in bringing about social change. In India, feminism and nationalism are closely inter-linked. The women receive the traditional wisdom and contemporary information from the Harikathamam, a religious teacher. The Gandhian movement makes the women of Kanthapura bold enough to accept the challenge of time and become self-reliant. The eminent women leaders, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant are the eternal sources of inspiration. Rengamma, a childless widow, Ratna a child-widow in Kanthapura are entirely moulded under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. They are strict disciplinarians and obedient followers of Gandhian ideals. Their lazy and meaningless life is totally transformed by Gandhian movement. Sincere work, deep attachment and devotion make them true disciples of Gandhiji. They are the Gandhian products. Rangamma is the forceful leader of women of Kanthapura and an unconventional widow. The source of her widened awareness comes from various newspapers. She is well-informed of modern scientific discoveries and life-styles of people of foreign countries, particularly Russia. The formation of Sevika Sangh is a sign of their awakening. Participation of pariah women in Satyagraha is another striking feature which emphasises the evils of untouchability.

Other important themes of Kanthapura are child-widow, child-marriage and the plight of widows. Ratna is a child-widow of fifteen. She is modern, unorthodox, progressive in her outlook

and a rebel which causes her to face harsh and bitter criticism of the villagers, particularly traditional women. Nobody has sympathy, kind consideration and compassion for her miserable plight. But she is bold enough to ignore petty jealousies. Her love for Moorthy sublimates and spiritualises into Gandhian mission.

Narsamma, Venkamma, Kamalamma are traditional stereotype widows and Raja Rao's minor women characters. Savitri, Bhatta's wife is a pathetic woman, silently suffering her husband's cruelty. Raja Rao's minor women characters in Kanthapura have been portrayed with their distinct traits and peculiarities. They come out fully alive in their relationship with the main characters, but, otherwise, they are relegated to the background. Kanthapura is perhaps the best example in Indian fiction in English which deals with the Indian women's fight against foreign rule as well as their own orthodox thralldom. It heralds the dawn of progressive times ahead for the emancipation of women in India.

There is a galaxy of women characters in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope, where he glorifies and idealises the feminine principle and romanticizes the womanhood. The ideal and reverential womanhood for Raja Rao is motherhood. The prime goal and fulfilment of woman's life is to be a mother of a son. The mother and feminine principle dominates the novel in the images of 'mother-country', 'the river Ganges'. Little Mother, though a

young widow, manifests the reverential mother-principle by sublimating and transforming her own sorrows in family love. She is a traditional widow. Her firm belief in her traditional role of mother and hence the head of the family offers her tremendous courage to surmount her miserable lot. She represents the continual role of the widow who is a custodian of Hindu heritage. There is a touch of authentic Indianness here. Dr. M.K. Naik comments on Raja Rao's Indianness, "He has always remained Indian to the core."<sup>4</sup> The Little Mother discharges her family responsibilities confidently and finally settles down to a spiritual life.

Savitri is Raja Rao's triumph of creation in The Serpent and the Rope who is his Ideal Hindu heroine, beautifully and realistically drawn. She is a Rajput Princess who has different layers of personality - a modern Cambridge-educated, chain-smoker, jazz-singer, boogie-woogie-dancer, a flirt, and finally a traditional wife to Pratap performing her worldly duties. She transforms Rama's romantic impulses into metaphysical love, leading him to higher consciousness of Vedantin. She embodies Radha and is an ideal Hindu woman at the core. Raja Rao glorifies the ambivalent relationship of Rama and Savitri. But, finally, she follows dharma and accepts the traditional, secure role of 'wife' to Pratap. Saroja, Rama's sister, is a charming, sensitive, intelligent young Hindu girl who manifests holy, pious, complex womanhood to Rama. She represents the emergence of new woman

though she is compelled to marry an unwanted man and to accept the conventional role of wife. Her revolt proves to be unsuccessful. She is broken-hearted though married and settled. Sukumari, another sister of Rama, represents young, spirited, enthusiastic, modern and unconventional girl who is emancipated, individualistic, who always tries to assert her individuality. She is bold enough to challenge the traditional pattern and chooses the husband of her own choice and commits herself to his ideology. Rani Saheba, Aunt Lakshamma, Sharifa, Lakshmi Iyengar, Pushpavathi are the various minor women characters who play the role, supporting characters in The Serpent and the Rope.

Raja Rao's western women characters, in juxtaposition to their Indian counterparts in The Serpent and the Rope, are fascinating. The French heroine Madeleine is beautifully and authentically drawn. She represents highly intellectual, sophisticated and individualistic Western woman. She is passionately in love with India and marries Rama. Her both sons die leaving her to inconsolable dispondancy. She never recovers from the shocks of deaths and embraces Buddhism as an escape from personal frustration. The marriage fails miserably. Critics attribute different causes for the failure of the marriage of this highly sensitive and individualistic couple. The main cause is the cultural differences between them.

Raja Rao has created an authentic and convincing character



in Madeleine with greater perception, sympathy and understanding. Catherine is an average, docile, loving and resourceful French housewife who provides contrast to Madeleine, while the character of Tante Zoubie is humorous, jolly and a bit eccentric who offers comic relief to the tragic story of Madeleine and Rama. Madame Rousselline is an affectionate old French woman of eighty seven. Catherine's mother is a pious woman with abundant faith in religion and god; she is a neglected wife, and a silent sufferer who spiritualises her sorrows. She is a parallel to Rani Saheba. The autobiographical details especially with regard to Rama-Madeleine relationship add to the authenticity of characterization.

Irene is another European heroine created by Raja Rao in Comrade Kirillov. She is a Czech woman who is not sketched in depth, but has a distinct mark of personality. Though she is the wife of hero, a prominent character, she has to play only a marginal role, perhaps due to her abrupt death in child-birth. Peggy is an Irish woman character to whom Raja Rao has sketched in outline only.

The Cat and Shakespeare is Raja Rao's 'metaphysical comedy'. The cat is a symbol of glorification of Feminine principle and motherhood. Raja Rao's women in this novel belong to the matriarchal system of family in Kerala - a fact which provides the women an opportunity to assert their individuality and to lead the life

of their choice. Nair women are worshippers of mother. Saroja is a realistic creation of Raja Rao. She is an average woman but tremendous worker who aptly manages her own affairs by keeping her identity separate. Though she is married, she has no affinity to her husband who strikes her twice, leaving the marks on her face. Shantha in The Cat and Shakespeare is the extension of Savitri from The Serpent and the Rope and manifests feminine principle, a symbol of glorified womanhood. She is individualistic and capable of managing landed property. Rama Pai has extra-marital alliance with Shantha of which she is not apologetic at all. Moreover, she gives birth to a lovely child. Freedom of choice is her birthright. Pai is her self-chosen man. She is not a conventional mistress at all. For Pai she embodies truth, beauty, wisdom and spiritual life. Usha is a unique female child created by Raja Rao in The Cat and Shakespeare. Though the birth of a girl has been looked upon with resignation and she is unwanted among the Hindus as the parents are always worried about the economic problem or dowry system. Usha is a favourite child who brings happiness and joy to the empty house of Mudali. She has a sense of responsibility beyond her age. She embodies innocence and the feminine principle. Lakshmi, the beautiful young and pathetic widow at the brothel is a realistic creation of Raja Rao. Tangamma, a grand lady, Mudali's childless daughter, Abraham's childless wife, Velayudhan's wife, Bhoothlinga Iyer's wife Lakshamma are the other minor women

characters who are beautifully portrayed with their distinct marks of personality and individuality which exhibit Raja Rao's artistic talent.

In conclusion, I should like to specify that Raja Rao presents three phases of Indian woman in his novels. First, the newly awakened women even in villages, as in Kanthapura; second, educated and self-asserting women like Savitri and Saroja, who briefly rebel but ultimately submit to their traditional roles; and thirdly, the most emancipated woman like Madeleine who is led to renunciation ultimately. Secondly, I should like to claim that Raja Rao's attitude towards his women characters is contradictory and ambivalent. One may not like the phrase, but he sounds to be a 'male chauvinist' as he either apotheosizes woman or makes her ideal only in accepting her traditional role. This becomes obvious in his treatment of the couples. Raja Rao is fully aware of the fact that he is operating in a cultural context different from the West. The Western conception of the man-woman relationship differs from ours. His art consists in a suggestive appeal to the imagination rather than to provide all the details in their relations between the couples, e.g., Savitri-Rama, Madeleine-Rama, Pai-Shantha, Irene-Padmanabh Iyer. Raja Rao is thoroughly involved in Indian culture and does not resolve woman's issue in a concrete way. The conflict between marriage and self-fulfilment comes up sharply in the case of Saroja and Savitri. Raja Rao indicates that life is not long

enough for many achievements, a woman can perform only one role at a time in life. Saroja, Savitri and Madeleine want freedom of choice in marriage, but they confront harsh reality as they are forced to go through unwanted marriages. There is a disintegration of the familiar world and resignation to the inevitability of life. There is the dread uncertainties of matrimony and no harmonious marital relationship. Existential alienation and searing loneliness is the lot of partners in marriage, Savitri-Pratap, Madeleine-Rama, Saroja-Subramanya Sastri, Saroja-Pai. The harmony is found in mythically idealised unions like Savitri and Rama, Ratna and Moorthy, and in extra-marital alliance like Ram-Krishna Pai and Shantha. The marriages are not based on mutual love, accepted in Western sense. The marriages are traditional.

There is no love-triangle or adultery in the familiar sense. Shantha's relationship with Pai is presented in such poetic and philosophical way that adultery does not come in the picture at all; so also Rama's relationship with Savitri. Saroja, Sukumari, Savitri in The Serpent and the Rope are the newly emerging women in the context of contemporary India. They are to revolt or assert their individuality but unsuccessfully reconcile to the situation.

Raja Rao's women characters are at once type and individual with their peculiarities. Little Mother, Savitri, Saroja, Sukumari,

Madeleine, Catherine, Zoubie, Rangamma, Ratna, Venkamma, Kamamma, Seethamma, Shantha, Saroja, Usha, Irene, Peggy are highly individualized and have autonomous existence and leave an indelible impression on the reader's mind.

Raja Rao's women do not suffer from financial difficulties as Kamala Markandaya's heroines. In spite of their educational opportunities and economic independence, his woman is fettered by domestic injustice and tyrannical custom. No radical solution to the woman's dilemma is proposed. The solution, if any, is mythical and intensely personal.

The focus of criticism of Raja Rao's novels, by and large, has been on the eternal spiritual quest of man, philosophy, metaphysics, technique and form, but his women characters, barring a few examples like Meena Shirwadkar's Image of Women in the Indo-Anglian Novel, Shantha Krishnaswamy's The Woman in Indian Fiction in English, have not received serious critical attention, even in the age of fierce feminism and emancipation. It is hoped that this brief study would fulfil this need to some extent at least.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1  
Dr. M.K. Naik, Raja Rao (1972; rpt, Delhi: Blackie & Son, 1982), p. 158.

2

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3

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