

Philosophical interpretation of Woman in Raja Rao's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao works from a readily available framework of supporting ideas, which are culled from Indian philosophy and mythology. He deals with the nature and meaning of relationship between a man and a woman in the same frame work.He is a writer who deals extensively with Indian culture and philosophy in his works. He introduced Indian philosophy to the Western readers. Raja Rao bases his ideas on women on the Upanishads and on his belief in the Feminine Principle of Sakti, the energizing force of the universe - the force which moves the cycle of the creation as well as destruction. His characters try to achieve the ideal of Advaita Vedanta, which teaches the oneness of all things. He also uses well known figures from Indian myths to illustratehis views.

KEYWORDS:Philosophy, Mythology, Woman, Relationship,Feminine Principle

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It is interesting to study the way Raja Rao delineate the women in his fiction. Raja Rao works from a readily available framework of supporting ideas, which are culled from Indian philosophy and mythology. He deals with the nature and meaning of relationship between a man and a woman in the same frame work.

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The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes the creation of woman thus:

He, verily, had no delight. Therefore he who is alone has no delight. He desired a second. He became as large as a woman and a man in close embrace. He caused that self to fall into two parts. From that arose husband and wife. Therefore, as Yajnavalkya used to say, this (body) is one half of oneself, like one of the two halves of a split pea. Therefore this space is filled by a wife. He became united with her. From that human beings were produced (Radhakrishnan, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* 195).

This passage contains the basic idea of the indivisible whole, which is split into two halves in order that the mystery of creation be realised. The created half never loses its mystical element, its sense of being apparently created. If imagined as two separate halves, they complement each other. The feminine half, *Sakti*, energizes its masculine counterpart, *Siva*:

Siva represents the static aspect of the Supreme substance, and Sakti its kinetic aspect: the term being derived from the root "Sak" which denotes capacity of action or power (Woodroffe, *Sakti and Sakta* 191).

The enlightened mind does not separate these aspects as two, for the feminine half, being only an apparent division of the indivisible supreme self, is *Mahamaya*, the Cosmic illusion, whose power is called *Mayasakti*. The important philosophical work of Stella Kramrsich, *The Presence of Siva* says, Sakti is manifested from the body of Siva and she had all the divine qualities of the Great God-Siva. Though she was all inclusive omnipotent, she appeared like a wonderfully embodied woman, bewildering and bewitching the entire world with her *mayasakti*, her magic illusion, for in reality she is unborn, though apparently born of Siva (202).

Shakthi is worshipped all over India as the Divine Mother and the Divine Consort. Almost every region in India has its own localised form of the Goddess, and its own treasure-house of hymns and legends associated with her. In Kolkota she is Kali and Durga; in Tamil Nadu she is Karumari; in Mysore she is worshipped as Chamundi. Those who worship her, worship earthly women as her representatives: “Striyodevah, striahpranah”- ‘ women are Devas; women are life itself ’, as an old hymn in the *Sarvollasa* has it (Woodroffe 109).

Sankaracharya, the great Vedantin, instituted the worship of Sri-vidya, which is the worship of "the Supreme Being in its feminine aspect of Sakti, the Creative Energy" (Sankaracharya, Soundaryalahari 7) in many centres, all over the country.

However, Sankara believed that a woman could not attain jivan-mukti, the salvation and that it was necessary to be born a male in order to realise the truth. The opening verses of his *Vivekachudamani* testify to this belief:

The man who, having by some means Obtained a human birth, with a male body and mastery of the Vedas to boot, is foolish enough not to exert himself for self-liberation, verily commits suicide for he kills himself by clinging to things unreal. Verse 4 (Sankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani* 2)

What greater fool is there than the man who having obtained a rare human body, and a masculine body too, neglects to achieve the real end of this life? Verse 5 (3)

Yet, some of the finest hymns to the Divine Mother were written by Sankaracharya.

Raja Rao uses all these ideas in his works. His first novel *Kanthapurais* full of the presence of the Divine Mother, Kenchamma-the village deity, who directs and controls the life of the village. He makes explicit reference to Sakti in *The Serpent and the Rope* :

There were not many women, there was but one woman, one form, one sound, one love (134).

To worship woman is to redeem the world (174).

Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is Fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought (352).

The sayings of Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi, quoted repeatedly in both *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*, is from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. When Yajnavalkya goes forth from the householder state, he wants to divide his wealth between his two wives, Maitreyi and Katyayani. Maitreyi, however, protests against his decision, and says to him:

If indeed, Venerable Sir, this whole earth filled with wealth were mine, would I be immortal through that? 'No', said Yajnavalkya: 'Like the life of the rich even so would your life be. Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth'. II 4.2. (Radhakrishnan, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* 195)

Then Maitreyi said, 'What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? Tell me that, indeed, Venerable Sir, of what you know (of the way to immortality)'. II. 4.3 (*Upanishads* 196)

It is in answer to Maitreyi's request that Yajnavalkya gives her a discourse on the unity of the self. This discourse contains the verse which Raja Rao quotes: "For whose sake, verily, does a husband love his wife? Not for the sake of his wife, but verily for the sake of the Self in her" (*The Serpent and the Rope* 24). It will be seen, in the course of the discussions, that Yajnavalkya's answer, quoted for its philosophical content in *The Serpent and the Rope*, is transformed into an intensely personal statement in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

Raja Rao also refers to the primacy of man, the particular destiny meant for the male, which Sankaracharya believes in:

...man is a stranger to this earth. We are all Bodhisattvas. and one night we, too, will leave the wife...(The Serpent and the Rope 136)

"Eternity is only for men', I remarked, "Women will die at the opportune time...(139)'"

In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Raja Rao uses Ramanuja's *Visishtadvaita philosophy*, and the symbol of the mother cat, to further extend the idea of the Feminine Principle. Dispensing with the "considerable chunks of metaphysical disquisition" (Narasimhaiah, Raja Rao 75), that blur the narrative of *The Serpent and the Rope*; the later novel succeeds in presenting the idea of oneness as an integral part of everyday life. India integrates mythology and legend into life experience. So, Raja Rao works from a fixed framework of ideas concerning women and his characters are invested with religious and social connotations implicit in the framework of Indian living, they sometimes slip into a set pattern which blurs their individuality.

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