



A study of similarities and differences between Eastern and Western culture in Raja Rao's novel "The Serpent and the Rope"

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is an autobiographically-based novel that follows a man's journey to seek truth. The book was critically acclaimed and was honored with the Sahitya Akademi Award for Literature in 1964. Its narrator, Rama, is a native of India; throughout the book, he analyzes traditions and life in his birth country and brings to light the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

Every incident or conversation that takes place in the life of the narrator is presented in the context of furthering or hindering his progress on his quest for truth and knowledge. The way the narrative is presented is as timeless as India itself, with the familiar blend of fact and fable. The novel tells the story of Rama and particularly his marriage while reflecting on the flavor and tradition of India. The novel also ruminates on themes of East meets West as Rama leaves his native India and moves to Europe.

Rama is described as a kind young man who is somewhat frail because of his tubercular lungs. He has been living and studying in France and has married a French woman, Madeleine. Rama plans to finish his thesis on the Albigensian heresy and then to move back to India, bringing Madeleine with him. Early on in the novel, from the moment Rama first references his wife, the reader gets a sense that something is not right in their marriage.

Key Words : Social Culture, Religion, Traditions of India

THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE

'*The Serpent and the Rope*' with their "kannadized" English, is Rao's most ambitious masterpiece published two and twenty years after *Kanthapura*. If the first is modelled on the *Upa Purana*, the latter is like a *Maha Purana* or epic; its scope is epic in geographical, historical, philosophical and formal terms. The novel comprises a number of settings, from Paris to the



ancient homes of the Ramaswamy family from a South Indian village in Europe, including Aix, Montpalais, Pau, Montpellier, Provence, Cambridge and London to indigenous places like Hyderabad, Lucknow, Bombay, Bangalore and Banaras. This novel also included the following settings. Rama, a trained historian, discusses his beliefs in dialogues with important characters through practically the whole of Indian history; from the invasion of the Aryans to the arrival of British dominion; European history, mainly the Albigensian heresy; Chinese history. The novel's breath is also philosophical: Rao talks about Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Daoism, Marxism, Darwinism, and Nazism.

Therefore, the form of *The Serpent and the Rope* with their "kannadized" English, too, is not unusual. Rao quotes from a wide selection of languages (including Sanskrit, Hindi, English, French, Italian, Latin, and Provencal). Many stories and interludes, such the storey of Grandmother Lakshamma of a princess who has become the "tale of Rama" of Ishwara Bhatta. Moreover, the work features Purans songs, myths, tales and philosophical debates. The core storey, Rama's progressive dissolution into his French wife Madeleine, is therefore just one strand holding together a rich and diversified work.

Savithri sums it perfectly in his novel: It is "a sacred text, a cryptograph with multiple sensitivities, in several hierarchies of awareness." *The Serpent and the Rope* is also an exceptionally demanding piece of work.

At least two levels, the literal and the symbolic, can be explored while the two usually act simultaneously. The novel may seem perplexing and unsatisfactory on the literal level of the storyline. The crucial point is: why is Rama and Madeleine's marriage disintegrated? Critics have tried different reasons, ranging from Rama's incompatibility with the French Madeleine to Rama's disloyalty. Although these responses seem plausible, they do not quite satisfy themselves because the characters themselves do not recognise these reasons. The two are both conscious of the widening divide between them, but they do not try to make it a practical bridge. Rather, both witness the union disintegrate in a quasi-fatal manner. It is also difficult to comprehend why, despite his statement that he does not hide secrets of her, Rama is seeking fulfilment in other women while at the same time asserting his love for Madeleine, and why he never tells her about his matters.

Rama, the storyteller, doesn't answer these questions; he merely narrates the relationship's demise, almost impersonally as though he had little to do to rescue it. He is also not liable for dealings with other women, one of whom involves a second ritual marriage, and at the same time he is married to Madeleine. What is absent is a sufficient motivation for the characters'



actions, something that many readers demand from a novel. But perhaps the best method is to consider carefully what it does, instead of asking the book anything it did not aim to do. In reality, questions which appear to be unsolved in a literal way on a symbolic level are answered more satisfactorily.

Rama, the hero of Brahman, is a seeker of truth by naissance and vocation (a Brahman is one who seeks Brahma, or the Absolute).

As an Indian academic in France, Rama seeks Truth as the missing link in India's riddle of western influence. According to Rama, it is the Albigenian heresy that is missing: he feels that the Cather's had been driven to erraticism by the Buddhist influence, which had left India. In his search for the ideal lady, Rama's seeking for the truth also manifests itself as a union of husband with wife symbolises, in the Hindu tradition, the marriage between man and God. Siva's and Parvathi's marriages are one such paradigm union, which is married to Parvathi, the human, the concrete, and the possessor of the earth, the absolute, an abstract and ascetic. Another one, such as Savithri, is that between mythological Savithri and Satyawan, his husband to life. (Satya means "Truth")

The Cat and Shakespeare is a gentle, almost teasing fable of two friends. Govindan Nair, an astute, down-to-earth philosopher and clerk, tackles the problems of routine living with extraordinary common sense and gusto, and his refreshing and unorthodox conclusions continually panic Ramakrishna Pai, Nair's friend, neighbour and narrator of the story. This evocative novel brings alive the raw texture of Indian life, and delights in its humour. — Guardian 50

Rama, the thinker, meditator, the seeker of truth, may only find fulfilment in a Parvathi or Savithri, in accordance with these pictures, who can lead him back to earth with devotion. But Madeleine, who for Buddhism abandoned her Catholicism, became an austere and abandoned the earth, rejecting her body with abstinence and penance. Her union with Rama is significantly unclear: they are both born still. Madeleine considers the truth equally as something outside of herself which must be struggled to achieve. Its dualism is the philosophical opposite of the non-dualism of Rama; Rama thinks that the Self is a part of the Truth following Advaita Vedanta, as the wave is part of the sea and all separatism is an illusion like the illusion of a serpent being mistaken for one.

Rama's real partner is a Cambridge Indian bachelor, curiously Savithri. Savithri. Savithri is essentially an Indian despite her modesty—she dances to jazz, smokes, wears western clothes, etc. Savithri does not look for truth, unlike Madeleine; rather, she is truth naturally and



unconsciously. Therefore, her relationship with Rama is a natural one. However, Savithri opted for arranged marriages with someone such as Rama's sister Saroja, in an Indian tradition; therefore, her links with Rama were never fulfilled. Rama, who was divorced from Madeleine, saw a view in Travancore of his Guru and is planning to depart France for India at the end of the novel.

The Cat and Shakespeare is a sequel to The Serpent and the Rope ... it takes up the theme of Metaphysical quest at the point at which Rama's story has carried it, and showed the next step in this quest. [Sachdev] 51

The way towards Truth is Jnana Yoga (Path of Knowledge), also stated in a Bhagavad Gita, as opposed to Moorthy's Karma Yoga. Rama's an intellectual rather than a guy of action. Though he has collected wisdom, he does not yet clearly understand Truth; he confuses the seat of the snake like the misled seeker in the storey, who is not already linked with Truth, as it is by Savithri. For the Jnana Yogi a guru is usually important since only a guru can heal his delusion by demonstrating to him that what seems a serpent is actually a cloth. So Rama decided in the end to seek the healing of his guru.

CONCLUSION

The Serpent and the Rope was written after a, long silence during which Rao lived India. During that time he renewed a connection with his roots in the modern rendering of the Mahabharata legend of Satayavan and Savithri. The Work also dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture as well. Ramaswamy, a young Brahmin studying in France, is married to a French college teacher Madeleine, who sees her husband above all as a guru. As Ramaswamy struggles with commitments imposed on him spiritual quest and renounces worldly desires after the death own true self and also metaphysics of death. This leads to by his Hindu family, his wife becomes a Buddhist in her spiritual quest and renounces worldly desires after the death of their little son Pierre. She leaves her husband to find his own true self and also metaphysics of death. This leads to an inner truth of life. All human being need some space in life and the story depicts about that space. The entire concept of Karma, the twice born and eternity all are dragged into the tale. And, in this connection, he muses over Little Mother, his 26-year-old stepmother, and over his half sister, Saroja, on whom the adoring son and brother has an Oedipal and incestuous "crush". The Serpent and the Rope has so many tangled ideas, framed like a Chinese box, a box within a box, within a box that it becomes difficult to even present a summary of Raja Rao's palace of thought.



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