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Website

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Contact: - 02382 - 241913 09423346913/09637935252 09503814000/07276301000

E-mail:

visiongroup1994@gmail.com interlinkresearch@rediffmail.com mbkamble2010@gmail.com

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Research Paper

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English

Thematic Techniques in the Novels of Raja Rao

Dr. Anuradha Subhash Jagdale Head, Dept. of English, Shankarrao Patil Mahavidyalaya, Bhoom, Dist. Osmanabad

The novel in its modern form came to India with the British, and it was new in every Indian literature until then. The historical conscious and sense of life in society brought by European intellectual tradition and culture had in the first instance to achieve a satisfactory definition before the novel could rise. Whatever the language the novelist chooses to write in, 'a novel by Indian Writer certainly demands of him a direct involvement in the ethos and the social context. The Indo-Anglican novel is thus largely a twentieth century phenomenon; it emerged in 1920s spasmodically started off, then gradually gathered momentum and established itself in the next twenty years. It is significant 'that more novels have been written in the sixties than ever before and this increase in output may be relied to the fact that the emergence of the Indo-Anglican novel coincided with the development of the novel in the vernaculars.

The Indo-Anglican novel reflects more or less the same patterns of growth as the novel in the regional language. However, the novels written during 'the Indian Renaissance' tended to centre on the portrayal of contemporary life and events. They attempted to describe the rural and domestic life in India, with emphasis on morals, and the social evils and the insularities of the religious custom, and attempted to project the image of India that was in transition, open to cultural changes brought about by the Western impact. Thus the novels written in early days were a poor creative effort; they were drastically amorphous in from and woefully inadequate in aesthetic motivation. With the advent of the Gandhian Movement, along with the political consciousness, the creative sensibility

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also stood clarified. Under the impact of ideas and events of the contemporary history, the novelist turned their attention from representational art to symbolism, from the useable past to the contemporary reality and the complex destiny of India. The Indian novel, in its next phase, seems to veer round the cross-cultural theme, a theme which necessitated the novelist's examination of the dual nature of his identity—one inherited from birth and the other imbibed through education.

Raja Rao's literary inspiration is derived from several sources which he inherits and implicates, on an extensive scale, in his fictional work. His earlier writings published in his mothertongue Kanada and provide some gleanings into the understanding of his mental make-up. Raja Rao mentions the possible sources of his inspiration in an article entitled 'Books which have Influenced me' of the Indian influences, he mentions the classics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which according to him, are the summations of the Indian tradition and wisdom. They gave him an insight into Indian Culture and spirituality.

In Raja Rao' novels, the reality is transformed into a myth and in his search for truth. Raja Rao gets out of touch with reality in its concrete modes. This is largely true of his characters also, Rama, Nair, Savitri and Mdeleine, are all philosophers engaged in the pursuit of the impersonal reality. They often indulge in vain spiritual rigmarole, avoiding and evading, the flux of life around them. In retrospect, they become unreal and their suffering is merely a subterfuge for some other unnameable malady, and even the solutions found for their problems are illusory. Raja Rao's characters even as his themes are the complex individuals and the mysterious personalities caught up in the peculiar circumstances. They are more often sophisticated, English-educated men and women trapped in the existentialistic predicament. They suffer intensely because they realise that they are non-beings cut off from their traditional moorings.

Raja Rao's stories are particularly Indian and develop around a wide range of social and religious customs which sustain the Indian folk life. His short stores, with their typical Indian tone and texture, attempt the portrayal of the Indian life and the peculiar circumstances which shape the individual destiny. Stories like 'Javni' and 'Akkayya' describe with passionate indulgence and realism the untold miseries wrought by folk customs and the tragic erosion of the human personality. Raja Rao's gifts as story-teller and as myth maker are once again seen in the way in which he 'mythologies' contemporary event and lends to them peculiar native colour and resonance. He draws his inspiration from the resources of the Indian myth and legend, episode and anecdote, and creates and ethos all its own.

> Raja Rao's first novel

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Kanthapura focuses on the violence and the waste that engulfed India in her historic struggle for freedom. The novel traces the impact of Gandhian ideas on a remote South Indian village called Kanthapura. The waves of revolution surround this bucolic village, and the villagers, under their impeccable leader, Moorthy, launch, on the passive resistance in response to a call from Gandhi. They had to go through the most anxious period of terrorism as a result of their opposition to the 'Red-man's government. The novel clearly appears to be motivated by impulses other than the artistic; however Kanthapura is not a political novel though assuredly politics becomes its dominant theme; its economic and social concerns and the religious undertones are subsumed into myth and legend. 'No art of decoration'. Not only the sensibility that informs, Kantapura is rooted in the living tradition, but its form and narrative technique also belong to the idiom and vocabulary of traditional art. In Kantapura, Raja Rao employs analogous techniques on a more extended scale, and exploits well the larger frame work of the open-ended novel for exploring the interaction of space and time. Raja Raohere, makes an attempt to create a Sthalapurna, a legendary tale of a specific locality. The narrator of the story is the grandmother who narrates the annals of the historical struggle.

Raja Rao's next novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, is largely an autobiographical fiction,

revealing the author's own involvement, both spiritual and the material; the novel explores through the autobiographical strategies of narration the impersonal reality. The author's personality is projected in the novel that it becomes a chronicle of his life, and a spiritual autobiography which transcends both time and space. The Cat and Shakespeare, as a sequential work, takes up the same theme of metaphysical quest but with an altogether different perspective. It is a metaphysical comedy whose centres are located not in time and space, but in the timeless reality. The characters are not mere characters, but allegorical projections, the modes of novelist's philosophizing. The 'Cat' and 'Shakespeare; are the pivotal symbols around which its theme of philosophical quest moves. Raja Rao reaffirms the philosophy of complete self-surrender and acceptance of the world as a necessary step towards metaphysical identification.

In handling his themes, Raja Rao employs several techniques drawn from both the East and the West, and adopts them skilfully to suit the narrative purposes at hand. In his short stories, for instance, he combines the vernacular strategies of narration with the Western techniques of fiction. The focus of interest in these stories is impressionistic rather than naturalistic, in the sense that the narrative emphasis falls on the inner individual, and how he responds to the events and circumstances of the outer world. Raja Rao's

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Philosophy, as it merges from his fictional works, is in fact a re-assertion and a re-statement of the quintessential philosophy of the Upanishads.

Thus, Raja Rao presents a definitive view of life which accepts the world as reality. Raja Rao, in order to present this world view, works from the basis of his deep and new discovered personality and in the process of using fiction as an art of self-investigation, he seems to have made hermetical experience and prophetic vision and valid themes for the Indo-Anglican novelist.

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