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Philosophy of 'Marjaranyaya' Through The Characters: An Analysis

(With special reference to The Cat and Shakespeare)

Mayur Wadhvaniya

Research Scholar, Faculty of Arts (English Literature), Dr. K.N. Modi University, Newai, (Rajasthan) India

Abstract

Raja Rao believes man to be 'a metaphysical entity.' To him, the key to man's existence as a social being lies in the soul, not in the body. A remarkable feature of **The Cat and Shakespeare** is its characters which exist on more than one existential plane and thus they can be interpreted in as many ways. Most of the times, these characters reserve one or the other philosophy, theory or a pattern of life which is shrouded under their unassuming personalities. Here, instead of what is said, what remains unsaid, seems to be more important. Characters are moved by the code of conduct which preaches that the only commitment that one should have in the world is to oneself. The philosophy of 'Marjaranyaya' (kitten principal-complete surrender to the almighty) is the central doctrine of "Visista-advaita" (qualified monoism) is well exemplified by Raja Rao at thematic level. Surrender born of faith is enough to bring about 'AtmaNivariti'-freedom and pleasure in self. This study focuses on how one of the characters (Govind Nair) surrenders completely to the almighty and the at the same time does normal duties of life as per teaching of Ramanuja's "Bhakti Marga".

Key Words: Marjaranyaya, Visista-advaita, Atma Nivariti, Bhakti Marga

1. Introduction

Raja Rao is a powerful philosophical writer. He is profoundly metaphysical in the way he thinks and feels. He has a scholarly background and intimate familiarity with primary texts of Hindu religion. Most of Rao's works explore philosophical concepts of Hinduism. His works are deeply rooted in Brahmanism and Hinduism. Rao's themes include the metaphysical apprehension of god, the nature of death, immortality, illusion & reality, duality and non-duality, good and evil,

existence and destiny, *Karma and Dharma*, the quest for self-knowledge, the place of the guru, the influence of the religion and social concept on individual and collective life and also the meaning of India's real and symbolic content. Raja Rao is often been appreciated by many critics for his skill of characterization. He very well traces the tender contours of human mind and personality with amazing skill. Raja Rao has a tremendous hold on the personality factor on many faceted scales. His characters are fit in

nically in the social milieu in which they move and breathe. The local seems to determine the tone of characters the soil sticks to them. In the novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* its cardinal characters have roots shooting deep into the inner life and well connected with stem and trunk externally exposed to fictionalize a philosophy is a hard task, and Raja Rao through his characters does it.

In the novel, novelist has projected India in its manifold aspects and revitalizes the metaphysical truths and spiritual values. An understanding of Raja Rao's art can be enhanced by contextualizing his novels. Although he admits that his works have western influence in it, but his work can be best understood as part of Indian tradition. Raja Rao regards literature as "*Sadhana*" or spiritual discipline; for him, writing is consequence of his metaphysical life. His novels, hence, essentially represent a quest for the absolute. From *Kanthapura* to *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, Raja Rao's protagonist has the same concern to quest about truth and way of its achievements. Raja Rao emerges as one of the central figures of Gandhian era in Indian English fiction. He is awarded by the Sahitya Akademy Prize in 1964, and in 1969, he received the Padma Bhusan from the Indian government for his ambitious novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. He also won the prestigious Neusted Prize in 1988. He has been invited to lecture by several institutions in India, France, and the United States

and has travelled extensively, both in India and abroad.

2. Objective of the study

- To study the 'Vendantic' idea explaining how the world is a play 'Lila' of absolute for an individual, shaping destiny and the solution.
- To study the symbolic characters through which Raja Rao has done innovation.
- To understand the 'Cat hold theory' which is advocated by Govindan Nair.

3. Need and Importance of the study

Raja Rao has a remarkable hold on the personality factor which enables him to explore into a character. His characters are powerfully portrayed. They fit very well in the social background in which they breathe and live and the tone of a particular character is determined by the locals in which they are placed. They are not flat types but are individuals. His important characters have enough potential to be patterned into proper shape. Therefore study of characterization in *The Cat and Shakespeare* is of great importance, from thematic point of view. Raja Rao fictionalizes philosophy in these characters and therefore he achieves expected goal in characterization. His cardinal characters are more symbolic than realist people of flesh and blood. They symbolically represent the idea of the Cat-kitten relationship.

4. Characterization in *The Cat and Shakespeare*

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Raja Rao does not present any foreign character. Ramakrishna Pai is the prime character. He is a Brahmin clerk at the revenue department of Trivendrum, in Kerala. He is the protagonist of the novel. Pai, the narrator hero is an average human being or an 'everyman'. As he himself says, "I am not particularly tall or fair, or good or bad. I am just a man."

Govindan Nair, a neighbour and friend of Pai, towers above him. In fact, he is the prime mover of the action. As K.R. Srinivas Iyengar says:

The action of the novel menders though the haze of the Govindan Nair's mood and words is unpredictable action and reaction. (Iyengar: 69)

Ramakrishna Pai

The central concern of the novel is not the progress of Nair but that of Pai. Even the efforts of Govindan Nair are not directed towards himself but to facilitate Pai's journey across the wall. As Esha Dey says, "Though as an agent in action, his purpose is to be instrumental in the story of Pai's salvation." (Dey: 105)

Ramakrishna Pai has many qualities in common with the other protagonists of Raja Rao, even though he also differs from them in many ways. Pai like other protagonists is in search of truth and a number of complex questions arise in his mind too. Pai like others is a Brahmin and is conscious about it. He is lost in abstraction and is fond of

philosophy. All protagonists of Raja Rao are partly autobiographical. Raja Rao has put a part of himself in Pai also. Like Rama, Pai is too divided between wife and beloved. Pai in comparison with others is small because he is self-centred and his concerns are worldly. He is not made to stand for any ideal or philosophy. Moreover, in spite of being a protagonist he has a little to talk about himself and more about Govindan Nair and others. Most of the protagonists of Raja Rao are serious minded and sincere. Pai is neither serious nor sincere. He talks as if his first aim is to arouse laughter.

Pai is not harmonized with this world. Even though he is in a dilemma he is not conscious of it. He was made conscious of it by Nair. All other protagonists think and feel much. Pai has no real sorrow in leaving his wife Saroja. He is governed by his instincts.

At the age of thirty-three he is so dejected with life having to dine at different hotels, that he complains, "I was thirty-three and I had ever wondered that one is alive." (9) In his narration Pai has claimed himself to be a quiet man. He says "And to speak the truth, I don't know what it is to be a husband." (7) Yet he has also confessed, "In heat, I strike, I struck my wife only twice and have left mark on her face." (10) This, in fact, could have been one of the reasons why Saroja did not live with her husband.

Shantha, a school teacher, is the other woman in Pai's life. Shantha is the complete woman in the life of Pai. Pai says,

I like woman. Not that I like all sorts of women. I like woman in fact. What is woman you may ask. Well woman is Shantha. (22)

Shantha is wife without being weeded to him. On being face to face with Pai for the first time at the revenue office she at once comes to know that he is her man. As Pai states:

She said she knew me to be her man the moment I went and stood against the filing ladder. For woman love is not development. Love is recognition. (23)

The reason for his confusion is that there are always alternative in life; too many options both physical and spiritual; but how to determine which one would lead to the goal; would lead to reconciliation of opposite and salvation, that was the question. As he says,

Life is always this choice - too choose an old house nearer the office, or the new one sitting amidst coconut gardens. (S)

Govindan Nair teaches Pai to rise above the compartmentalized notion of the purely physical or purely spiritual by accepting the way of kitten, that is, to surrender completely to the mother Cat, and at the same time do normal duties of life. What Govindan Nair does is to live both by the wall (*Maya*) and the Cat (*Absolute*) by affirming faith, though may be unconsciously in Ramanuja's "*Bhaki-Marga*", logical sequence of cause and effect are insignificant to those who have qualified for the grace of God. Nair has

transcended these limitations and so he goes to the cause through the effect. Kathopnishada also emphasize to go backward from effect to cause until one is compelled to believe in him, once one is so compelled truth dawns.

In the beginning Ramakrishna Pai is amazed at the strange way in which Govindan Nair used to cross the wall (*Maya*) that separates his house of that of Nair's. Pai never really aspired to cross the wall like his friend or to peep into the other side. Nevertheless Pai is always conscious of Nair's deep devotion in the grace of mother Cat. One day Pai accidentally watches the mother Cat carrying a series of kittens by their necks. The kitten neither meowed nor did they paw in the air. One by one mother takes them down to the wall. Pai remembers Nair's description of the divine pleasure in being carried by the mother follows the Cat across the wall. Pai who had crossed the wall for the first time is amazed on witnessing the scene. On the other hand, on the other side of the wall Pai beholds a "Garden all rosy and gentle." There were flowers and many sweet smelling herbs. There were old men with long beard and young men in green turban. The women and children danced there in the tune of the tress. He describes;

Snakes lived there in plenty, and the mangoes roamed all about the garden. I saw deer too. The air was so, like a mirror you just walked towards yourself. (100)

This is the vision of life that Pai has. This is life full of diversities and of the blending of the opposites. The day Pai

follow the Cat down into the kitchen and up to the staircase suddenly the staircase turned down into the kitchen the Cat went into a place of divine perfection, absolute good, pure love and bliss. Beholding the vision Pai realizes,

Death said it had died. I had killed death, when you see death as death, you kill it. When you say, I am so and so, and you say, I am such and such, you have killed yourself. I remain ever having killed myself. (101)

Pai has killed his ego and their by his quest suddenly reaches a consummation. Pai has a vision by pure accident. He is like the hunter in the novel who threw *bilva* leaves on the idol of lord shiva unknowingly and suddenly realized that the lord was pleased by this accidental worship. However Pai has to climb the stairs, the traditional symbol of the stages of the quest of self-realization, before he is face to face with truth and hears the divine music. Pai undergoes an intense spiritual exercise, and gets thoroughly transformed in the white heat of divine knowledge.

The chief concern of the novel is to display the transformation of Pai, to which Govindan Nair is a means. Pai who in the beginning played merely the role of an object assumes a subjective role after the imprisonment of Nair. As Esha Dey states;

Out of the absurd imprisonment of Nair emerges the new role of Pai as agent, for he takes charge of the Cat and he succeeds in reaching his goal. (152)

Govindan Nair is one of the most significant characters of the novel. Govindan Nair is a neighbour and friend of Ramakrishna Pai, the protagonist of the novel. He is a big, round tall and simple man who has studied law up to the first year. In his youth Govindan Nair had been quite handsome. Everybody had the feeling that he would be a big man in the future. A grand lady named Tangamma from a family that was well spoken of every where married him. And eventually Govindan Nair becomes a big man but only with fat.

Nair also becomes the second clerk in the Ration Office No. 66 at rupees forty five a month. Tangamma had some land in her own name and the income from that supplemented Govindan house on rent, and though he could not provide all facilities to his sons Madhu and Shridhar, he knows how to keep his family happy. He is always satisfied with whatever he has and a man of solace and peace. Nothing could make him unhappy. As the narrator Ramakrishna Pai says;

Govindan Nair is a terrible man; huge in his sinews but important in his fought, devious though it is. (14)

He never says anything indifferently. For him all words, all gestures have absolute meaning. He has an explanation for everything, and every occasion serious, intelligible and final. He talks with animals and insects as if they are human. Everybody and everything understood his speech. His style of speaking is as Pai says "a mixture of Vicar of Wakefield and Shakespeare."

Like the vicar he is generous and soft hearted, though more practical, and like Shakespeare he has a wide understanding of things. Once he talks so much on manure that an agricultural expert asked if he is a professor at the local college. On another occasion he talked of the twenty three types of Enfield guns. He can talk of revenue, land, medicine, sports etc. and whatever he communicates he does it with full confidence.

Govindan Nair is a blessed person. He is a '*Sadhaka*' who while leading a social life, like any other human being is at once above it. He is philosopher who is involved in life and yet can be the detached. He corresponds exactly to the description of "*Jivqn Mukta*" in the *Advaita* philosophy, as a man "who has transcended duality and moral conflict." This is possible because of his deep "*Shradha*" in and total dependence upon the benediction of the mother. The central doctrine of "*Visistaadvaita*" is well exemplified in the life of Nair.

Govindan Nair, an initiated soul, had firm belief in the "*Marjaranaya*." The human spirit remains passive and helpless, and his consciousness undergoes pain and suffering; but once he resigns to God, he is seized and willingly carried across all pitfalls, just as the mother Cat does her kittens. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says:

We all do stumble, the cleverest and the nimblest of us do, but had we the total trust of the kitten in the mother Cat, our stumbling wouldn't matter, for we would be arrested half way in our stabling and jerked away to a heaven of safety. (90)

Govindan Nair advises Ramakrishna Pai, who is uninitiated to "Let the mother Cat hold you by the neck." His advice to his colleagues in Ration office No. 66 is "Learn the way of kitten then you are saved. Allow the mother Cat to carry you." He makes Abraham accept that the Cat was the purest animal in the world, asserted that it was sacred in Egypt, and compels John who has lightly treated a Cat by putting it into a rat trap and using it for practical joke, not only to bow before the animal but to kiss it too.

Being a true devotee of mother Cat and having accepted the existence of an uncaused cause, the *Prakriti*, Govindan Nair was unconcerned with the actual casual chain connecting events with events. To him it is sufficient that the world is of one homogeneous substance of world is of one homogeneous substance of which all things are but different configurations resulting from the different combination of its ultimate constituents. So he could truthfully say that Usha gave pneumonia to Shridhar. He says,

Since you want a cause, anything is the cause. The more innocent a thing, the more mysterious is its cause... so Usha is the cause of Shridhar's illness. (65)

For the same reason it was natural for him to think of death not as an end, but as a stage in the process of change governed by

Prakriti so he says, "Reality is when you die really.....You sleep to die. When sleep is like life, where is death?" (21) Govindan Nair could therefore remain unmoved at the death of Shridhar.

Nair's perfect equipoise is shown when he talks about complex metaphysical problem of the origin of happiness with a young girl who has stripped herself before him for some money. Through his own instance he tries to convince Lakshmi of the need to believe in the grace of the absolute. He tries to convey to her the message that it is through surrender that man can achieve fulfillment not only for himself but for his fellow beings also. Once again Nair wants to focus on the irrelevance of the principle of logical sequence and that of cause and effect. Divine grace comes more easily to the sinner than to the saint.

Govindan Nair is not disturbed either by the loss of seventeen sacks of rice from the ration shop nor is he worried by the charge of bribery against him. In his trial in court he has faith in the Cat is justified because it is due to the Cat that the significance of Bhoothalinga Iyer becomes visible under Nair's signature. Hence it is established that Nair is not guilty of corruption and the court declares him to be innocent. At this time he says;

Destiny chooses the exact time for your redemption. Ah, sir, you need the mother Cat the only thing which can rid the world of the rats and make man feel protected like the kitten which the mother Cat carries by the neck to a safer place. (64)

Govindan Nair was conscious of the fact that in this empirical world being governed by the feminine principle, man in order to be in harmony with the world, must accept and surrenders to it. This idea of the mother

as an invisible protector is not only suggested but emphasized by Nair;

But I say the kitten is the safest thing in the world, the kitten held in the mouth of the mother Cat. Could one have not without a mother? Modern inventions do not so much need a father. But a mother - I tell you without mother, the world is not. (13)

Man has simply to seek for the mother because the mother is the truth and the truth is a matter to be sought. The Cat is the truth hidden always in the bag; when we seek for it and make it come out of the mysterious bag we know the truth and as soon as we begin to love and care it becomes the mother. As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says;

For Govindan Nair, faith and surrender or surrender born of faith, is enough, it would be about instantaneous 'Atama Nivritti' freedom and facility in the self. (Iyengar: 94)

Govindan Nair is a complex character. He liked politics and read "The Hindu". He always loved people who were in search of the paradise flower. He knew Sanskrit better than Pai who was a Brahmin. The complex nature of the Nair is seen when one hand he professes love for the British "I love such shopkeepers" while on the other hand he believes that the evil element symbolized by the British bubo must be driven out of the body.

Govindan Nair is a sort of 'Guru' to Ramakrishna Pai as he teaches him "the way of the kitten." Pai, because of Nair, achieves the spiritual goal of knowing the self. He acquires the "seeing eyes" and kills

the self binding ego. In the beginning Pai was the uninitiated soul. Though not a materialist spiritually he was natured. "I worship nothing." He constantly remembered the story of the hunter and the bilva tree, but he did not know which God to adore, what set of principle to follow, what attitude to adopt towards this confusing phenomenon called life. There are always alternative in life; too many options both physical and spiritual; but how to determine which one would lead to the goal; would lead to the reconciliation of opposites and salvation? Govindan Nair advised Ramakrishna Pai not to worry. He said;

Life is a riddle that can be saved with riddle. You can remove a thorn with another thorn. You can solve one problem through another problem. Thus the world is connected. (35)

In the end, with Nair's help, Pai's progresses in his self education and qualifies himself for grace and holds a beatific (showing great joy and peace) vision after following the Cat on the wall. Pai himself admits that he would never have gone to other side of reality but for Govindan Nair. As Esha Dey says,

Ramakrishna Pai is led to his salvation by his neighbour. Govindan Nair, who plays the role of a guru and ultimately proves his efficacy of his reaching in the life of his disciple. (Dey: 96)

It seems as if all the efforts of Govindan Nair are directed not towards himself, but to facilitate Pai's journey across the wall. As Esha Dey says, "Though as an agent in

action, his purpose is to be instrumental in the story of Pai's salvation." (Rao: 146)

Character of Govindan Nair is perhaps more advanced in his enlightenment than Raja Rao's earlier fictional heroes like Moorthy or Rama. Though he inherits from them his intellectual and his metaphysical craving for transcendence. He is a more complex individual with all the tantalizing qualities mixed in him. He is uncommonly common with desire for the material needs of life, and yet is perched on his ascetic strength. Pai commenting on his enigmatic personally observes, "The fact is, to him all the world is what does. He does and so the world comes into being."

Thus, character of Govindan Nair is therefore a highly complex and enigmatic character in the whole range of Indian fiction in English. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says, he is,

An outstanding figure who adheres to the ideals of non-attachment conquest and selfless love towards humanity. (Mukherjee: 63)

5. Conclusion

The Cat and Shakespeare are shows how one functions, after, one has found the Guru. The titles of the two companion novels offer a further more insight into Raja Rao's fictional design. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, novelist derives from the thinking of the eleventh century philosopher Ramanujacharya for whom personal salvation is more easily approached through the simple gestures of surrender or faith rather than through the complicated gymnastics of the intellect. And of all

available forms of surrender, that of the kitten or cat is held as exemplary. Where infant monkey actively cling to their negligent parents as some devotees actively pursues the elusive forms of divinity - the little cat is a model of faith, trusting that some powerful maternal agent will graciously lift it above the detritus of existence by the scruff of its unprotesting neck. So, the title is, indeed, appropriate and leads the readers to have an insight into its themes.

The Cat and Shakespeare is expositions of the ancient Indian philosophical outlook

Vedanta. Thus, in Raja Rao's works there is an ongoing discussion of Major system of thought, chiefly of Indian but also of the west. Kethleen Raine is of opinion that Raja Rao is much more than an apologist for Indian who also loves and understood the best in Europe; he is a writer who brings the water of the Ganga to the ills of the modern world. Thus, both stylistically and thematically Raja Rao succeeds in capturing the true spirit of India in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

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