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Raja Rao's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
It would be befitting to have a lengthy discussion on Raja Rao's novels and the impact of Indian philosophy on him. His preference for Indian philosophy has given a philosophical tinge to all his creative activity. It must be kept in mind that he hails from a family known for the knowledge of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara.
In its long history, Indian thought with its several systems of philosophy and two major religions (Brahminism and Buddhism) has evolved on its own. In spite of its theoretical variety, there is the core, a cherished cluster of values that has shaped an attitude we call Indian, and this has been implicit in the Indian writer's world-view.

INTRODUCTION

Indian philosophic thought does not lend itself to be characterised in a way that would comprehend all its diversity represented by its orthodox and heterodox schools. Even the principles of these two broad divisions no longer obtain in their original form, for each has over the centuries dominated the other, modifying one another subtly and at times radically. However, there are certain common features identifiable and also helpful to focus on the attitude that defines the categories of approach to reality and experience.

Highest State of Enlightenment: Hiriyana comments, "A seeking for the central meaning of existence" (Hiriyana 17) and a ceaseless aspiration for an ideal are shared both by religion and philosophy. In their pursuit they seem to converge so fully that they cannot be treated separately. In this sense along religion merits to be called "applied metaphysics". Philosophical knowledge in India was considered a means of liberation (*moksha*). It was not an intellectual classification. The enquiry was into the presence of evil both physical and moral in life followed by an intense struggle to remove it. The reflection on metaphysical questions was part of philosophic enquiry which was principally directed to find a remedy for the ills of life. Knowledge for its own sake in a spirit of endless curiosity was not favoured. Manu enjoins that one should never cultivate idle curiosity that is of no avail. The moksha ideal was to be realised in this life. It was the highest ideal, and man's life within its limitations was constantly directed towards it. This brings us to the belief that attainment of complete freedom is possible while still here in this life [jivan mukti]. All the Upanishads endorse what the Katha concludes: As Sri Aurobindo underlines, "when every desire that finds lodging in the heart of man has been loosened from its moorings, then this mortal puts on immortality : even here he tastes God, in this human body" (Aurobindo 240). This is the highest state of enlightenment.

There is a way of life to realise this. A procedure of discipline is laid down in every school. One should realise the ideal through the ashrama discipline progressively. It was not to turn away from social obligations but to disengage oneself through self-culture which has no room for revulsion or neglect. This is at the root of the principle of detachment culminating in disinterested action. The spirit of renunciation implicit in this principle defines Indian attitude to morality. The ultimacy of renunciation is complete cessation of personal interest realised through performance of social obligations with no thought of one's rights, going

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beyond the conflict of rights and duties that relate to the individual and his social environment. When one transcends common morality, one reaches the stage that resolves all conflicts as the Upanishad says: Shri Aurobindo explains, Verily to him cometh not remorse and her torment saying, "Why have I left undone the good and why have I done that which was evil?"(274).

The Serpent and the Rope is a sensitive revelation of Sruti, Smriti and Achara in its numerous references to the Upanishadic Yagnyavalkya and Maitreyi, the variety of rituals, practices and the popular culture of legends and tales. All these interpenetrate one another with extremes meeting from the folk tale of budama kaye to the most difficult philosophic poem Dakshinamurthy Stotra ascribed to the great philosopher Sankara. All these exist in a state of simultaneity in Indian mind shaping its tradition. This makes the novelist marvel "Oh, to be born in a country where tradition is so alive". The fact is evident to Raja Rao:

Civilization is nothing but the familiarity with which we go into this inner property, cultivated and manured from age to age. The rivers have washed alluvial soil to it and the rains eave poured and gone down into the sea, and brought back as it were, the perfume of the same land; so that when our mangoes fall and we eat, we know it is the product of a thousand years.

Its essence in Indian psyche is unmistakable. His longing for "the integrity of selfness" cannot be belied. Whatever the superficial crust that covers it, "you can remove it with a babul-thorn."

Integrity of Selfness: Ramaswamy in the novel realises that life is a pilgrimage. He wants to know the sacred place that the pilgrimage might lead to. As long as he is uncertain about it, he is an orphan. "Some deep absence which neither love nor learning could fulfil" invades him. He is urged to intone to himself the lines of Sankara's Mohamudgara Stotra :

Who am I? And who are you? What is the place from which 1 come? Who is my mother? Who my sire? pondering thus, perceive them all as fancies only, without substance. Give up the world as an idle dream.

He is brought to face the fact that has given "importance to unimportant things." He is required to become dhira of the upanishads and seek "the meaning of the ultimate." This is possible when one can distinguish the real from the unreal, rooted steadfast in knowledge that the awful serpent is but the innocent rope, negating what the Vedanta calls the illusion of the world while affirming the underlying reality of Brahman. This exemplifies what Sankara said in Direct Realisation, G.A. Natesan says:

Just as, by delusion, one ignores the rope and perceives the serpent, so does he of deluded intellect perceive the universe without realising the truth. When the form of the rope is understood, the appearance of serpent disappears. So too when the ultimate reality is realised, the universe vanishes (Natesan 57).

Ramaswamy confronts the fact of human condition when he concludes:

Existence is a passage between life and death, and birth and death again, and what an accumulation of pain man has to bear? Is it then a wonder the Buddha, with palaces and queens, with a kingdom and an heir, left his home to find that from which there is no returning? You could only live in life, and to find what that means to know the whole of wisdom (Rao, *The Serpent* 135).

As a Brahmin he strives to go beyond history to shuttle in time and to take the accumulated wisdom by horns as it were. He cannot ignore this imperative with "a sage to begin the geneological tree." He should seek a guru to end the cycle of birth and death. Rama may do it sooner or later.

Vedanta is called Adhyatma Sastra. It is not confined to a geographical entity. It is a principle India is credited with. Therefore, "jnanam is India" which is perhaps the only nation that "has questioned the existence of the world - of the object". Once, the principle is espoused, wherever the Sadhaka is or goes to, he discovers India and finds that the "Ganges flowed everywhere." He is India. Raja Rao quotes a verse from The Kasipanchaka :

This body is the holy place of Benares; (and here flows) the all-pervasive Ganges of wisdom, the mother of the three worlds; this devotion and this faith are Gaya; the contemplation of the feet of my own preceptor is Prayaga; this Innerself, the

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Brahman, the witness of the mind of all people, is the God, the Lord of the universe; if everything (thus) abides in myself, is there any other shrine (besides it)?

The ideal of India is sainthood reached by "the extinction of. the ego." Raja Rao has commented in his novel on the concepts of Karma, Jnana and Vairagya. The Vedanta makes use of them in the context of Jivan-Mukti. This is the impact of Indian philosophy which is brought to the fore in "isolate existences of India, in which India is remembered, experienced and commemorated; beyond history, as tradition, as the truth". Professor Narasimhaiah has in recognition of this unique character spoken of *The Serpent and the Rope* - "as an evocation of this truth, the tradition of India and its vitality, especially in its encounter with the West - India seen as an idea, not as an area on the map"(10).

Doctrine of Self-Surrender: *The Cat and Shakespeare* reflects on the concept of grace in the light of Shri Ramanuja's philosophy of qualified monism. A great deal of commentary has explicated the symbolic richness with which the cat, the wall and the house of three storeys function in the novel. The metaphysical background has direct reference to the latter Vaishnava schools that derive from the cult of devotion [bhakti] which in course of time developed into the extreme doctrine of self-surrender. The followers of the Northern learning who formed the Vadagalai sect of Sri Ramanuja's philosophy while recognising the necessity of self-surrender insist that it should be preceded by self-effort. When this self-effort fails, the consequent feeling of helplessness will bring about firm faith in God's grace. At this stage alone one should resort to self-surrender [saranagati or prapatti]. The followers of Southern learning on the other hand do not need such self-effort, as God's love is spontaneous [nirhetuka] and, therefore, can-bring salvation to mankind. V. Rangacharya comments:

One party asserts that the soul must exert itself to get saved, as the young monkey actively seizes its mother when she jumps from tree to tree; this is the well-known markatanyaya (analogy of the monkey). The other party asserts that God's grace is like the care of the mother cat for its young, which is independent of all efforts on the part of the latter. This is known as marjaranyaya (Rangacharya 60).

Raja Rao has made explicit remarks on the principle of self-surrender. Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* knows that only the fortunate few realise the significance of Prapatti. God's readiness to save man is suggested through the fable of the hunter and the bilva tree. When man's surrender to God's grace is total, it becomes the source of delight as he can watch the world-play secure and detached:

Ah, the kitten when its neck is held by its mother, does it know anything else but the joy of being held by its mother? You see the elongated thin hairy thing dangling, and you think poor kid, it must suffer to be so held. But I say the kitten is the safest thing in the world, the kitten in the mouth of the mother cat. .. I often think how noble it is to see the world, the legs dangling straight, the. eyes steady, and the mouth of the mother at the neck, Beautiful (Rao, *The Cat* 101).

Nair has watched the world as a play. Every event, no matter how trivial, brings him a revelation which he accepts as a matter of fact. The Cat saves Nair. Pai is saved through Nair. He is, therefore, able to comment at the end that "Life is so precious. I ask you why does not one play?" and again, "oh, how beautiful the earth is."

There may be other aspects of these novels in detail. But in the presence of this overwhelming truth of Vedanta "why give importance to unimportant things?"

In India, the universe and its subsystems including human society were seen as organic wholes in which each jati [on the cosmic plane a form of life, on the social plane a class or community] has a specific task [dharma] to perform. Only in the faithful, dispassionate performance [nishkam kanna] of this duty can an individual acquire merit and a higher station in the next life.

S.C. Dube in his pioneering anthropological work on the actual practice of the faith points out:

Hinduism ... as it is practised is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter.

Conclusion: However, it is the popular practice of Hinduism rather than the standard version of its core which gets reflected in the responses of particular persons in specific situations in different phases of Indian history. The two often differ very substantially

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and for that reason Milton Singer thought it fit to organize the diversity found in Hinduism along a continuum ranging from 'Sanskritic Hinduism' to 'Popular Hinduism.'

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