
Rao's concept of Non-duality

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Abstract

Raja Rao's concept of 'non-duality' or 'oneness of all' is quite close to the Advaitavad' of Shankara. In 'The Serpent and the Rope', however, Rao, the author himself has maintained it. He is of the opinion that life reveals its meaning when duality merges into non-duality. But in the case of Rama, the protagonist and his mouthpiece, it is otherwise. His ego does not die. Consequently his affinity with Madeleine and Savithri is marked by temporal isolation. Rama, the orthodox Brahmin is often in the grip of anguish of time that he wants to annihilate. When estranged from Madeleine, he feels rootlessness but ultimately sets out on a spiritual journey to know his own 'Self'. He feels himself homeless, aimless and think as if he were reduced to cypher. The novel describes Rama's shift from the Vedantic philosophy to the tantric cult. The propounders of this cult are of the opinion that it is a way to salvation. People can perform wonderful things by the tantric cult. There are several references to it in 'The Serpent and the Rope'. Rama dreams of Mahatma Gandhi working with him, making the railway line stand up, going to Fatehpur-Sikri and speaking to Emperor Akabar, an airplane floating over a mountain and then sitting carefully on a peak, an elephant giving birth to her young one within twenty-four days and the like. Of course, Rama's dream is an instance of tantric cult. Rama's desire for magical accomplishment reminds one of the desires of Dr. Faustus in the famous play by Marlowe.

Key words: Non-duality, The Serpent and the Rope, Rama, Madeleine and Savithri.

Raja Rao is an outstanding personality amongst the first rate Indian English fiction writers. He was an erudite scholar and philosopher, whose literary career spanned over more than half a century. Raja Rao's sensibility is verily Indian and presents a unified vision of life. His novels leave us with the impression that the Indian life can be understood in terms of its metaphysics only. In his fiction, Raja Rao has captured the core of the Indian thought and tradition and a quest culminating in an identification of the individual self with the Absolute.

Raja Rao's concept of 'non-duality' or 'oneness of all' is quite close to the Advaitavad' of Shankara. In 'The Serpent and the Rope', however, Rao, the author himself has maintained it. He is of the opinion that life reveals its meaning when duality merges into non-duality. But in the case of Rama,

the protagonist and his mouthpiece, it is otherwise. His ego does not die. Consequently his affinity with Madeleine and Savithri is marked by temporal isolation. Rama, the orthodox Brahmin is often in the grip of anguish of time that he wants to annihilate. When estranged from Madeleine, he feels rootlessness but ultimately sets out on a spiritual journey to know his own 'Self'. He feels himself homeless, aimless and think as if he were reduced to cypher. He falls a pray to uncertainty and anxiety like Shakespeare's Hamlet. His nostalgia makes him more and more sad. One night he sets out for Travancore but not in search of God rather in search of a spiritual Guru.

After estrangement from Rama, Madeleine finds herself in conflicting demands of quest. She oscillates amongst Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Her quest for identity drags her to the fringe of intellectual abstraction and her divorce from Rama. All this results into her isolation with a mind to emancipate herself from worldly shackles and she drifts away from Rama. In some way or the other, she attains self-realization by equating Catholicism with Buddhism.

The hero is a confused person; there are inconsistencies in his mind. He is paradoxical in his ideals and applied life. His marriage with Madeleine, a French woman is a fine example. He marries an alien woman and expects all the roles and duties of a traditional Hindu wife. How is it possible? He should not have married her with such expectations at all.

It is quite obvious that a Rama does know the 'Advait' philosophy very well but he fails to practise it in his private life. He is a homeless, templeless and rootless figure. Even then, he is in search of questhood. His desire to seek self-realisation through the Upanishadic philosophy becomes a failure due to his excessive involvement in worldly pleasures and possessions. Ultimately, he is brought to Tantric cult by his carnal desires. Very often, he looks before and after and hence, is never contemporary.

He does not find satisfaction with his wife Madeleine. So he develops extra marital relationship with Savithri. He thinks of having many women as his wives. His attitude to his own sister is not in Indian tradition. Critics opine that he was even infatuated by his sister Saroja. He appreciates the old Greek convention when brother-sister marriages were a mark of being elite. However, he does not refer to the Rigveda, where Yama-Yami¹⁴² (brother and sister) are married to each other. Rama thinks that the monks who maintain celibacy, become ghosts in their next birth. In fact, through his mouthpiece, Rao has intended to glorify sex as a physiological necessity and natural urge. To Rao, sex is not futility, rather it is a source of blissful pleasure. Here, Rao's view to sex seems to be an echo of the Sanskrit maxim. 'Dharmarth kamah Sammev Sevyah'. that is to say, Religion, wealth and sex should be practised equally as their proportioned practices lead to Moksha. At the same time, excessive indulgence in sex

affairs does not make one satisfied and happy. The life of Rama reminds one of the life of 'Yayati' as described in the 'Matsya Purana'. Yayati was a 'Chakravarti' King, lived very sexy life, and lastly hated it. The observation of P. Dayal should be borne in mind as it is very judicious in connection with Rama's personality:

Since Ramaswamy suffers from sexual repression, he follows the path of tantra which promises the fulfillment of his carnal love as well as the attainment of truth.¹

The novel describes Rama's shift from the Vedantic philosophy to the tantric cult. The propounders of this cult are of the opinion that it is a way to salvation. People can perform wonderful things by the tantric cult. There are several references to it in 'The Serpent and the Rope'. Rama dreams of Mahatma Gandhi working with him, making the railway line stand up, going to Fatehpur-Sikri and speaking to Emperor Akabar, an airplane floating over a mountain and then sitting carefully on a peak, an elephant giving birth to her young one within twenty-four days and the like. Of course, Rama's dream is an instance of tantric cult. Rama's desire for magical accomplishment reminds one of the desires of Dr. Faustus in the famous play by Marlowe.

In the tantric cult, woman is taken for a Devi. Man attains heavenly bliss, if blessed by her. The hero of the novel worships them as the emblems of shakti. The exaltation of female characters in the novel has tantric inclinations. Besides it, Rao has portrayed women as a baffling mystery. Very often women in 'The Serpent and The Rope' are described in relation to men, seldom independent ultimately, the novel ends with the un-released quest of the protagonist. According to Naik:

.....The Serpent and the Rope - a far more complex work is the novel as modern Indian Mahapurana.²

The Serpent and the Rope' is, of course, a novel of quest for the Absolute. It may be said to be a pilgrimage of a 'Picaro' saint—Ramaswamy. The pilgrimage ultimately culminates into search for a Guru. Rama's Spiritual quest develops its structure around palpable metaphysically perceptible socio-psychic movements and his inner conflict takes the form of an internal struggle between antithetical stirrings and unresolved conflicts. His quest is self-affirmative, a retreat from the world of illusion to the world of reality and finally, crystallized in the need of a Guru who can make him see God.

Thus it is found that Rama's quest for identity forms the thematic and central motif of 'The Serpent and the Rope' Madeleine also tries her best to transcend herself from her own. She has a quest to realize 'otherness' in herself. But it remains a latent thought in her. She comes to realize that she can

give others only what is hers. Her efforts to identify more and more with her anti-self, drives her away. On the other hand Rama is never carried away. The sense of 'otherness' alienates Madeleine but Rama does not. Alienation becomes supportive to Rama to realize his quest. It makes him more objective and detached. Now he can be at home in full bodied reality of an English pub. His rootlessness and homelessness lead to search for real identity. In the words of the author, it is 'a quest for the Absolute'. Finally, Raja Rao's own search for the Absolute is based on the Advait philosophy of Shankara but the quest of Rama, his mouthpiece, to strike roots, ends in an existential awareness of his spiritual urge. He ultimately surrenders to the paraclete but on the part of the novelist, 'The Serpent and the Rope' is a retreat from illusion to 'reality', from the 'Serpent to the rope'.

References

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