
Ideological crisis in Rao's Comrade Kirillor

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Abstract

Rao has played very vital role in the evolution of Indian English Fiction. He has given is quite different from the other novels of Raja Rao. Its theme is political. The novel does not have any metaphysical quest. Indian thoughts and traditions do not find much room in it. However, political thoughts are discussed in the novel. Its main thrust is ideological. The novelist has particular focus on the predicament of the Indian intellectuals' fascination with Marxism which was a craze amongst educated people of India during those days. They had developed a taste for Marxism as they thought it was almost necessary for proper intellectual evolution of educated class. Today, Rao is regarded as one of the most perfect Indian English novelists. Though his short stories are not of the best quality, yet they have been of much significance. Some of them may be said to be prologues to his novels. The way of story-telling that Rao has employed in them, is praiseworthy. 'Comrade Kirillov' is quite different from the other novels of Raja Rao. Its theme is political. The novel does not have any metaphysical quest. Indian thoughts and traditions do not find much room in it. However, political thoughts are discussed in the novel. Its main thrust is ideological. The novelist has particular focus on the predicament of the Indian intellectuals' fascination with Marxism which was a craze amongst educated people of India during those days. They had developed a taste for Marxism as they thought it was almost necessary for proper intellectual evolution of educated class.

Key words: Indian English Fiction, Comrade Kirillov and Political thoughts.

Raja Rao along with Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan is collectively called the 'Big Three' in the history of Indian English Writing. Rao has played very vital role in the evolution of Indian English Fiction. He has given native flavor to Indian English both in theme and treatment. He has declared that the Indians cannot, and should not write like the English as English is, to an Indian, not a language of emotional make up, Rather it is a language of intellectual make-up. M.R. Anand, another stalwart of the 'Big Three' is also of the same view. He is of the opinion that we do not use English language for our most intimate purposes like kissing, caressing, abusing and blessing. R. K. Narayan's

fiction is also a portrayal, of Indian thought, tradition and society. Thus, 'India' is a common theme of the 'Big Three'.

Raja Rao is an outstanding figure amongst Indian English writers. His fiction is not an imitation of the West or the Westerns; it is a part of our ancient Vedic glory. The definition of 'Indo-Anglian Literature' as propounded by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, **Indo-Anglian literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian Literature. It is part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the 'Vedas' has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater, now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history, ever increasing up to the present time.**¹ This has been realized by Raja Rao in his writings in the fullest sense. He has brought philosophical dimensions to Indian English Fiction. The rich treasure of the Vedic and the Upanishadic thought and tradition has been mingled with the present in the novels and short stories of Raja Rao. He has continued the flow of Indian thought and tradition in his works with proper glorification and justification. As far as quest is concerned, it is an innate and eternal trait of man. The moment, a child is born, right from that very instant, it thinks of its surroundings, tries to keep itself safe, feels hunger, tries to develop intimacy with its mother and struggles for existence and survival. Day by day, the child faces new things and situations, changing weathers, persons, and places. With the passages of time, he grows into a full man. His mind-set becomes stronger, more comprehensive and so, more and more quests arise in his mind.

Today, Rao is regarded as one of the most perfect Indian English novelists. Though his short stories are not of the best quality, yet they have been of much significance. Some of them may be said to be prologues to his novels. The way of story-telling that Rao has employed in them, is praiseworthy. It is very close to oral tradition of story-telling in India. Mostly the themes of his short stories are taken from the contemporary society in relation to old myths. They are steeped in Indian coloring. The third group of Rao's short stories can be woven into a novel, if read at one go. Some of his short stories are very complex due to his philosophical bent of mind. Rao's spiritual nature causes hindrances in understanding them.

Rao's literary output is a meager one, yet for his excellence, he has placed Indian English Fiction on the world map and achieved fame and recognition in India and abroad. His works have been praised by several critics. According to C. D. Narasimhaiah:

One is amazed at the range of life as well as the level of consciousness he has brought into the novel form, along with the creation of a suitable medium

for his concerns which are at once timeless and temporal, metaphysical and social immediately local but also international so as to enlarge the frontiers of the fiction from itself and justify the name of an innovator in Modern Indian Fiction, which, thanks largely to him more than any other single writer, has been ushered into the main stream of Twentieth century literature.²

Rao's own evolution as a novelist is a gradual shift from simplicity to complexity. Once Rao said to Forster, **I have abandoned literature for good and gone over to metaphysics.**³ Rao has a broad knowledge of Indian philosophy. His later novels are rather philosophical and show his artistic and intellectual maturity.

The foregoing penetrative studies of Rao's short stories and novels endeavored with special focus on the themes of Indian thought and tradition with special references to the theme of quest, make it evident that Rao is committed to such themes. His short stories, though not much admired, are true mirrors to Indian ways of life. As far as his novels, they are most widely read ones. There is an opulent quality and quantity of Indian thought, which is basically philosophical. His novels also present a good deal of Indian traditions in their varied forms. Almost in all the novels of Rao, there is a visionary projection of Indian life, society, culture and civilization. The vision that we find in his novels, springs from the unified sensibility of the novelist which reconciles the bewildering contradictions. His novels are not sociological documents but works of social vision reflecting Indian thought, tradition and incessant quest for the Absolute.

Although Raja Rao shuttled all his life between the East and the West, in his real life as well as in his fiction, he carried his India wheresoever he went. He started writing well before India's independence from Britain using the language of the colonizer to represent the experience of the colonized. More philosopher than novelist, Raja Rao was not a prolific writer, though he continued to write till his death 2006 in Austin, U.S.A. His highly metaphysical writings search for a fundamental reality in life. What makes Raja Rao unique is not just the highly innovative, experimental and dynamic English prose style that he developed much before Salman Rushdie, but the deeply spiritual contents of his works.

As compared to many new Indian novelists who see India through western eyes, the fiction of Raja Rao is full of Indian thought and traditions as he traces the inner evolution and self-analysis of his protagonists. Their surrounding reality is always filtered through Raja Rao's Vedantic lenses: Advaita or non-dualism, one of the six main schools of Hindu philosophy. It holds that the world is the

expression of an all-encompassing unity-Brahman-the ultimate and impersonal principle of the universe, from which all being originates, and to which it returns. What captivates the Western readers is the unusual blending of this monism with the ways of thinking of such diverse writers as Andre Malraux, Paul Valery, Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Kafka, Henry David, Thoreau and R. W. Emerson. Thus Raja Rao is one of the greatest novelists of India, whose fiction steeped in Indian thought elevates the spirit, taking the reader to higher plane of consciousness. 'Comrade Kirillov' is quite different from the other novels of Raja Rao. Its theme is political. The novel does not have any metaphysical quest. Indian thoughts and traditions do not find much room in it. However, political thoughts are discussed in the novel. Its main thrust is ideological. The novelist has particular focus on the predicament of the Indian intellectuals' fascination with Marxism which was a craze amongst educated people of India during those days. They had developed a taste for Marxism as they thought it was almost necessary for proper intellectual evolution of educated class.

The novel is a realistic document of the Marxist phase in India during post-independence period that lasted for almost two decades. Comrade Kirillov, alias, Padmanabh Iyer, the protagonist of the novel is caught in the whirlpool of ideological confusion. He cannot decide whether to follow the Gandhian path or the Marxian one. Rao has, at certain places in the novel, references to traditions also. He does not elevate traditions in the novel but expresses his disgust at their decadent practices in society. The novelist has maintained Indianness in the work. Narsingh Srivastava's observation of the novel shows its totality:

As a philosopher of history he depicts in 'Comrade Kirillov' a phase of contemporary Indian history in which one finds the intellectual torn between divergent pulls of two ways of life. The author seems to have dramatized an unrevealed part of his own being which in its disgust of all that is rotten in India leans towards communism of which Kirillov is an extreme case.⁴

References

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