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COGNIZANCE OF TEACHING IN RAJA RAO'S FICTION

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Abstract

Guru Shishya relationship in Rao's stories and novels are very relevant, conspicuous and heartwarming in creating the definition of a pupil and the teacher, who are both walking down on the path of enlightenment. The study of perception of Raja Rao's Guru Shishya association will lead us to understanding of the educational environment of our times in context to the relationship between a pupil and a teacher. Raja Rao's literary, intellectual as well as spiritual awakening helps the readers to benefit in the terms of acquisition of knowledge regarding importance of education based on the relationship of the Guru and Shishya. This is the edifice of this paper. Comparative and analytical methodology is being followed to support the main discussion and answer to the arguments of the paper. In present times, there is an up thrust of awareness that there is a requirement to realize the significance of the intellectual encounter with the great 'Gurus' for the betterment of the pupils' real knowledge realization.

Keywords

Raja rao, Fiction, Guru-Shishya, Cognizance, Intellectual, Spiritual. Literary Analysis, Indian Writing in English.

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The central concept is the idea that there is a meaningful and compassionate bond between Guru and Shishya. Raja Rao has told and retold through his stories and novel about traditional pattern of dissemination of knowledge that has been accepted and followed for centuries in India. The traditional culture of educational system has been afloat in our country and treated functionally as cognizance in the stories and novels of Raja Rao. The contemporary educational environment makes it compulsory to understand Guru Shishya bond of old times particularly through historical divergences and continuities, that is what forms the edifice of the discussion in this paper. When the spring of the Guru's graceful glance upon the pupil could fill his heart with grace.

Touches the garden of the Vedas only then does

The garden blossom and bear fruit for the aspirant.¹

Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu Gurur Devo Maheswarh I

Gurur Sakshat Param Brahman Tasmayh Sri Guruwah Namah II²

One of the most leading factors of Raja Rao as a master author of Indian English fiction has been his deep understanding and perception of the Guru-Sishya association persistently surviving in the Indian social psyche. The great Epic 'Ramayan' has very profoundly stressed upon the Guru-Sishya relationship. Guru Vashistha shaped the mind set and thinking pattern of Lord Ram. The idea is that this traditional custom became a forceful practice that created a hereditary spiritual and psychological mental framework of a student or shishya in India. This ideal Guru Shishya relationship of old times created the undercurrent that provided rhythm of Indian life and thought till the times of 'Google'. A famous couplet in Hindi, quoted below provides a glimpse of Indian disciple's reverence for his Guru:

Guru Govind dou khare kake lagun paion I

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Balihari guru apne jin govind diyo batay II³

We know 'Guru' has been a very pervasive influence upon deep rooted unconscious psyche of the traditional society, of our country India. The Guru-Shishya paradigm has been time and again resurfacing in fiction. The revered Epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, which are read for centuries have kindled the tradition of the custom of 'Guru-Shishya Parampara'. These Epics have helped in different ways in transmitting this age-old great realization to the coming generations. Thereby, the values of the Indian society can be regenerated by providing tradition the required platform. It can be used as a symbol in the form of themes and patterns.

We are aware that Raja Rao himself was a disciple of Sri Atmanand Guru, he himself has been a living example of the tremendous possibilities of this tradition. And 'the all-knowing' and the motivating 'Guru' figure is found as an inspiration and a influence in some of Raja Rao's stories and in all of his novels, that is from 'Kanthapura' to 'The Chessmaster'. Surprisingly, the mentee figure or the archetype disciples are found as the protagonists in Raja Rao's novels. Moorthy in Kanthapura, Rarmaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope, the narrator 'R' in Comrade Kirillov, Ramakrishna Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare, Sivarama Sastri in The Chessmaster and His Moves are all disciple figures operating within the archetypal Guru-Sishya mould. These figures are symbols of the struggling human soul, like Arjuna, yet to reach the Absolute. Raja Rao in an interview proclaims:

"The Serpent and the Rope is a novel of the discovery of the Guru. The Cat and Shakespeare shows how one functions after one has found the Guru – the Vedantic Guru."⁴

Of all the protagonists of Raja Rao's novels, Govindan Nair in The Cat and Shakespeare is the culmination of discipleship. The novelist invites the reader to partake the experience of discipleship – a characteristic feature of Indian life. Arthur Coestler has rightly said:

In Europe the Gurus have died out, in India the tradition is still alive, though declining it was the secret of India's greatness, the emotional yeast by which its great gurus from Buddha to Gandhi had kept the race in spiritual fermentation.⁵

It is an interesting realization that the 'Guru' or the most powerful influencer in the stories and novels of Raja Rao can be classified into three types. To clarify this aspect let us consider the various characters of different fiction of Rao.

1. The first one to be considered should be the highest-level, 'Guru' that is the 'Karana Guru' who can transport the shishya to the 'Real World' from the 'Unreal World'.
2. Secondly, there is an influential political figure, like the great Mahatma Gandhi in Kanthapura, who could not only express strong views about social, economic, cultural aspects of the country and human values but also swipe public opinions.
3. Thirdly, a Guru can be that ordinary man who has a metaphysical bias and who is in the search of truth while guiding to his fellow beings.

Now arises the most pertinent question and that is, how can we define a real 'Guru', and a real 'Shishya'? This question is answered in one of Atmanand Guru's discourses:

A man becomes a true disciple only when he almost rises the highest level. And then the Guru-disciple relationship is no longer there.⁶

The object can never be the subject. The disciple as well as the fact that he is a disciple is something perceived by him. And that

means that he has perceived himself...
that is impossible...And therefore, you who
see that you are the disciple are not the disciple.⁷

If you say that you are a disciple or if you
think that you are a disciple the seer stands
away from the disciple and then how can he
be called a disciple.⁸

Raja Rao's concept of the 'Guru' is very different than his contemporaries. According to him, Guru is not at all a dominating man or a superior personality. The novelist clarifies the meaning of the word 'Guru' in the following words:

The sage truly is beyond the impersonal and
the personal but as a working statement we
could define him as the impersonal being.⁹

Raja Rao believes that the Guru helps the learner to be aware of his own, 'ego' and the 'self', this principle is also considered as 'I' principle. This concept was first emphasized by Shri Atmanand Guru.

You find that the 'I' principle, whatever it is,
is persistently present in all the three states...
it follows then that this 'I' principle is falsely
joined on to body, senses and mind and that
it is really independent of them as you see it
in the deep sleep state, where it shines in all
its glory. Then you see that it is pure
consciousness and happiness.¹⁰

'The Policeman and the Rose', is an impressive story written by Raja Rao. In this story we find the principle of self-realization of Shri Atmanand being elaborated in symbolic language by Rao.

Every living man has a policeman and his
name is your name, his address your address,
his dreams your dreams...in the last life too he
was a policeman. He always was a policeman.¹¹

I, that is the policeman was born...that is some
thirty-three years ago, he that is the Police
child, cried like every child...I was arrested immediately...
when I was born he said: I am a big Policeman for a
small child, you are free and grow and become free...¹²

In the above lines, it is explained that a newborn baby becomes attached to the new body spontaneously as if he has been arrested. Here, the policeman is symbolically corresponding to the Guru. The 'police child' is the pupil, who happens to be the vulnerable pleader. The idea is that the Guru-Shishya relationship can be traced to the early story. Another example is the story, 'The Cow of the Barricades', the cow symbolizes the true spirit of India, it moves round the 'Guru' figure, the Master, "to be born a sage in the next"¹³

Raja Rao's 'Guru' figures in *Kanthapura* and *Comrade Kirillov* are images of a political ideal model, and in the other three novels, *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare*, and *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, the Guru refers to "a perfect image that transcends particular circumstances because it goes straight to the essential point whenever one chooses to tap it no matter whether, the context is religious, mythical or fictional."¹⁴

Moorthy, the young revolutionary in *Kanthapura*, represents a political leader, like Gandhi, an unknown disciple of the Mahatma. The concept is that such local 'Gandhi' figures were found throughout the country during the freedom struggle. Similarly, the relationships of Rama-Savithri in *The Serpent and the Rope* and Shiva-Jayalakshmi in *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, are modeled on a Guru-Shishya paradigm as in the Krishna-Radha myth or the Yagnyavalkya-Maitreya story.

On the other hand, Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* is the Guru figure who initiates Pai into the world of the Ultimate Truth. Janet Powers comparing the characters, Kirillov and Govindan Nair says,

Inhabiting both fictional worlds are guru figures who fascinate their respective narrators and attempt to initiate them into new world views. Pai in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and 'R' in *Comrade Kirillov* are disciple followers of two extraordinary figures, Govindan Nair and *Comrade Kirillov*.¹⁵

In *Comrade Kirillov*, the real Guru figure is Carl Marx and Kirillov is playing the role of a disciple. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the Cat is a symbol of divine wisdom, the real Guru, to whom the seeker surrenders like the kitten. Pai is a man of ordinary interests. He is a pleader, no doubt, but a disciple who is unready to understand the truth. Thus, Pai is the initiate and Nair shows him the path of the Cat. We can compare Govindan Nair with the image of Siva in mythology.

Siva is apparently thus the two opposite things, archetypal ascetic and archetypal dancer. On the one hand he is Total Tranquility... On the other hand he is Total Activity... these aspects are the dual manifestation of an absolutely non-dual ultimate, reality.¹⁶

Siva is here both Guru and disciple, seeker and the sought. Govindan Nair is a Guru for Pai and a friend in the role of a fellow seeker. Raja Rao says,

"For me it is poor Pai who is only an Arjuna and Govindan Nair is Sri Krishna. One is "man-man" and the other is "man-beyond-man".¹⁷

In *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, Sivarama Shastri like Pai is a suffering human soul who describes himself as "lecherous"¹⁸, "corrupt"¹⁹, and "unvirtuous sadhu".²⁰ Yet in comparison with the other characters in the novel Sivarama is on a higher level of spiritual advancement which ultimately takes him to Travanchore. In *The Chessmaster and His Moves* the Guru takes many forms like Yagnavalkya, Ramana Maharshi, Atmanand Swami and Mahatma Gandhi.

The novels of Raja Rao attain the quality and status of myth at the thematic as well as the narrative level for his novels are deeply rooted in Indian tradition. So his treatment of archetypal situations such as the Guru-Sishya relationship or the man-woman relationship imbues his works with a mythical quality. The structural unity of his novels especially *The Cat*

and Shakespeare, The Serpent and the Rope and The Chessmaster and His Moves is based on the Guru archetype. The common theme for the quest for the Absolute is a strand that beautifully links all his novels. Ayyappa Panicker rightly observes:

Character becomes symbol, action is ritual speech
mantra. Surface realism...is subordinated to the
mythical narrative. The immanence of the spiritual
in the mundane is the condition of the novel as
myth, it unites man and beast and tree and earth.²¹

India is a mythically and mystically empowered foreground for Raja Rao, which provides the environment, to nurture the psychological strength and physical path for spiritual wanderings of his characters whether living in exile or in India. To Raja Rao, India is an idea not merely geographical land. It's a myth and a tradition. As an author and a narrator Rama Rao visualizes, India as the 'Guru' of the world. Rural and urban India with all its unique traditional values and philosophies provides a base or a foundation for the evolution of Rama Rao's characters and hence enables the psychological, mental, and spiritual development and growth of almost all his characters. A paradigm is created by Rama Rao, that provides a reality check for the generation of today. The fictional world of the stories and novels of Rama Rao has the probability of future structure of the society. The content and form of his texts are incredibly realistic. The grace of the Guru can render, the paradox of duality and desolation which constitutes a major thematic concern in his metaphysical-cum-philosophical novels. Finally, perhaps more critical attention is needed for an in-depth analysis of these archetypal situations and patterns as expressions of the collective unconscious. Raja Rao was the safe apt hand to deal with such themes. He has explored then fully and finally.

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