

**WOMEN IN THE MAJOR NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES OF
RAJA RAO**

Synopsis

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STORIES OF RAJA RAO

Raja Rao with his philosophic consciousness and study of Indian myths and legends distinguishes himself in the Indian writings in English and especially among the ‘Great Trio’ (Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao) who raised the Indian novels in English to international heights. A descendant of Vidyaranyaswamy, an *Advaita Vedantist* after Adi Shankaracharya, his mind and vision have been profoundly influenced by *Advaita* Philosophy, *Tantrism*, Buddhism, *Sunyavada* and Indian metaphysics. His Philosophic awareness is at the root of the unique treatment his women protagonists in the major writings receive. His women characters can be studied from different perspectives: as Shakti Swarupini, ‘New women’, as ‘Orthodox village women’, as ‘Mischievous Slender-mongers’ and as object of desire and enjoyment.

Aims and Objectives:

This dissertation proposes to study the Women Characters in the Major Novels and Short Stories of Raja Rao. It will classify into different categories as given above and relate the major women protagonists to the *Shakti*, the feminine principle at the making of the world. It will also study them from the view point of *Tantrism*, Buddhism and Hindu worship of mother Goddess. Traditional Hindu concept of woman as “mother-wife-sister” will also be taken into account. Extra-marital relationship of woman, supported by *Tantrism* will also form a part of our discussion. Similarly the categories of women born of their socio-cultural context and with their peculiar-typical mindset

will also be studied. Women being a major section of Raja Rao's novels and stories, the study will make us understand better his world of metaphysics and his complex vision.

Rationale

Women in the novels and short stories of Raja Rao have not received adequate critical attention; we believe, no full-length study of them has been made. A detail analysis of the women characters will throw a new light on their mind and behavioural pattern and will relate them to Indian myths and legends and also the milieu.

In *Kanthapura*, Rangamma, Ratna, Venkamma, Moorthy's mother and pariah women inspired by the new awareness and ideals of Gandhi fall into different categories; but they have no metaphysical bearing. In *The Serpent and the Rope* Madeleine, Savithri, Little Mother, Catherine and Lakshmi will be taken up in relation to the protagonist Ramaswamy. Ramaswamy's mind has registered the impact of three separate glimpses of Indian womanhood revealed to him by his Little Mother, Saroja and Savithri; this revelation affects his relationship with Madeleine. "Madeleine loved bridges. She felt Truth was always on the other side". Madeleine's conversion to Buddhism brings an end to her marital self. Ramaswamy's relationship with Savithri unfolds a new dimension of womanhood—the feminine principle when Savithri becomes an archetype. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, the protagonist says, "there is only one woman, not for one life but for all lives, indeed, the earth was created... that we might seek here". The feminine principle is the focal-point in *The Cat and Shakespeare* where the cat is the mother goddess carrying with utmost care and love her kitten, that is the human beings. "Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the

mountain streamsLife is made for woman, man is a stranger to this earth". (*The Serpent and the Rope*). In the same novel Raja Rao observes, "Man is incomplete without woman. It makes all the difference in the world whether the woman of your life is with you or not; she alone enables you to be in a world that is familiar and whole. If it is not his wife, then for an Indian, it may be a sister in Mysore, or Little Mother in Benares". At times a woman may be an impediment in one's quest for self realisation; she can at times be a means of achieving the goal. Woman kills and saves. The two roles are symbolized in the novel in Lakshmi and Savithri respectively. Similarly *The Cat and Shakespeare* focuses on the feminine principle in its various embodiments, as Nair's Mother Cat, Shantha, Lakshmi and Usha, in whom woman appears as mother, lady love, sister and daughter respectively "Woman is the biggest puzzle", Shantha tells Pai. The same celebration of feminine principle is in *Comrade Kirillov* in its discussion of *Tantra* and here Irene will be taken into account. In *The Chess Master and His Moves* the relationship of Sivaram with Suzanne, Mireille and Jayalakshmi brings into focus different kinds of womanhood. "When the woman accepts man rises to his heroic self, the Linga, the anonymous assertion of power, the royal signature, the majesty of Shiva as he dissolves into himself. And the woman then is he". In the major short stories like "The Cow of the Barricades"; "Javni" the woman is the creator, lover and the sacrificer.

The woman with her primordial power *Prakriti* emerges as inevitable agent of creation and formulation and attains mystical heights. Those women who are not activated by their energy and power pale into insignificance and melt into thin air in course of time with their transitory, social and domestic self.

The thesis will make an indepth study of women in their different capacities which will contribute towards an understanding of Raja Rao's philosophic vision.

Methodology:

While analysing women characters in Raja Rao's writings, 'Women' as discussed in Indian religions and scriptures, myths and legends will be critically examined. The approach will be philosophical and sociological.

Work Plan:

The introductory chapter will discuss in detail women from different perspectives, especially from philosophical and sociological stance and determine the place of Raja Rao's women. Women characters in his novels and short stories will be studied in separate chapters and the last chapter will attempt to study their growth pattern and Raja Rao's looking at women.

