

The Wandering Experience in Raja Rao's Oeuvre – A Critical Elucidation

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Abstract: *For various socio-political-economic reasons writers belonging to one nation have been migrating to other nations in the twentieth century. Especially after the colonial rule ended by the second half of the century, this migratory habit has considerably increased. The advances in sciences and technology in the west have encouraged the writers of the former colonies to seek pastures new in the west. Then only creature comforts have been satisfied by the progress in the west. But their spiritual moorings are still in the west. They look back upon their native roots with nostalgia and pine for the lost paradise.*

*Therefore, Expatriate Experience or sensibility has become a major theme in the 20th century fiction. It being a second generation writers, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Parwar, Jabbar Al-Bakri have dealt with expatriate themes in the process of transformation of the whole corpus of subjective experience into a magnificent art form in his work *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Chess Master and His Moves*. The two protagonists in these fictions of Raja Rao himself has had his own wandering experience sensibly operates in the oeuvre.*

*However, I have chosen the title for my article presentation that “**The Wandering experience in Raja Rao's Oeuvre – A Critical elucidation**” which makes an exploration into the works of Raja Rao about the peculiar attitude of a man like a vagabond.*

Keywords: *wandering, vagabond, expatriate, experience, elucidation, oeuvre, attitude, exploration*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Modern world has become a sort of global village so much so that, with the distances between places having been reduced because of the growth of technology, the boundaries between them remains only on the geographical map of the world. In fact, the world has really become one place. This has resulted in migration of people from one part of the world to the other for various reasons. The European community has become one unit and an attempt has been made to bring all the cold war having become a thing of the past, the political changes taking place all over the world, have indicated the possibility of a sort of unification of all the nations of the world. As a matter of fact, economically the world seems to have become one. But culturally each nation has its own identity and when people move from one culture to another, though politically and socially they may become a part of the new environs they choose to settle down, they cannot and will not shed their original cultural identity. Culture works in an almost invisible and instinctive manner. How and when it manifests itself in a person, it is difficult to say. But the racial unconsciousness is quotes strong in any person.

When a writer migrates from one culture to another, “he being a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness” feels it so intensely that in his writings his mother-culture reflects itself automatically. He for various reasons may lead a nomadic life may take him to different continents in search of material. Wherever he may be, he will look back upon his original culture nostalgically. He does imbibe the culture of the place to which he has migrated, but that is only a veneer because his heart, the seat of his sensibility, is with his original culture. Alwin Wintoff speaks of the modern man uninterested in putting down the roots anywhere. It is a moot question whether atleast the expatriate writers from India like Raja Rao, A.K.Ramanujan and other have not put down the roots in India as is reflected in their writings. But Meekaksho Mikherjee rightly says “today it is not at all rare to find a writer for whom the multicultural situation is not only a subject matter but a mode of perception as well” The expatriate sensibility works in a powerful manner in the expatriate writers who for some reason or the other have exiled themselves from their native lands.

Their writings abound with references to their parent culture. A major cultural displacement has taken place since the Second World War, especially after the colonial rule ended in many of the colonies. If on one side the colonies were subjected to a cultural shock as a result of the new ruler's culture having interfered with the existing local culture leading to things falling apart, the post Independence situation in the colonies has brought about a new cultural change, in that there is an attempt to go back to the roots of the parent culture. This revival of interest in the past of a nation has affected the writers so profoundly that when they move to other countries for economic or political reasons, they carry with them this paradise of their past. The western education which they have had and the cataclysmic changes they have witnessed around them in the world have made them objective enough to sift the grain from the chaff of their culture. But as creative writers with a commitment to realism in fiction, they have to depict the society of their origin in as factual terms as possible, which means they have to mix the grain and the chaff. For example, whatever may be the author's own attitude towards Brahman orthodoxy the reference to such practices in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* when he is talking about the absence of a *sahadharmacharini* in the performance of obsequies of Ramaswamy's father are an indication of the author's native sensibility.

The particular culture to which a writer belongs serves as a launching pad for him to take off into new areas whose cultures he assimilates in the course of his stay in the new climates. This double cultural life enables him to view both the cultures very critically and contrast them by a juxtaposition of the two. He makes a creative use of the bi-racial situation through characters, belonging to the two cultures. The essential character of drama, the conflict, is presented through the interaction of the bi-racial or multiracial characters. Their own culture, but living in another culture enrich their writing, as T.S. Eliot has said that the migratory experience has enriched his poetry because "his emotional roots lay in America alone". Certain cultures emphasize strong familial relations and bonds. A writer born and brought up in that culture may marry an outsider to his culture. But he cannot break away from such bonds. So he reflects fondly on such relationships as for example Ramanujan's references in his poetry to his mother. The mother in his poetry is not merely the woman who gave birth to him but also the mother land, as is exemplified in the famous Sanskrit saying of Sri Rama "that the mother and the mother land are greater than paradise" therefore, Saroscowasjee defends his alienation but argues "that a person who has strong family ties can not eventually roots".

The process of expatriation is similar to the process of leaving one's home to join institution, unfamiliar and unaccustomed, which means it is a transition from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the strange and from the native to the alien. This shift sometimes calls for an almost total break from traditional environment that one is used to from birth in order to evolve new relationship through new experience. Even in the place of migration he searches for the warmth and security in the company of his own people because the traditional bond is so strong in him. Ethnicity thus becomes desirable, so that total rootlessness may be avoided. His physical wants, vocational needs, and existential necessities are taken care of by the alien culture which by virtue of its extra-ordinary growth in science and technology has made it possible, but his emotional needs are still to be found only in his own traditions. This satisfaction he may have, by mixing with his own people in the alien country, speaking a common language, observe in common religious practices, evoking familiar traditions in private conversations or in public meeting. This there is a withdrawal from the new scientific, rational, progress-oriented western culture to a very old native tradition. For all the gregariousness that the emigrant may show he is essentially a lonely person. This loneliness is of the mind and it is compensated for by abundant references to his native religion and tradition in his work. Certain things in the new environs militate against his native tradition and he then longs for the latter. This finds expression in his writing, when he contrasts what ought to be his experience as a person belonging to a different culture with what is as he obtains it in the new situation. This experience as depicted in the novels is the expatriates' experience of the expatriate sensibility. Assimilation, the marriage of two cultures, the synthesis of two experiences may be an ideal very much desired in the immigrant fiction but the pulls of the native tradition certainly prove stronger than the counter pulls of the alien culture. The native tradition becomes a sort of regression with writer and it finds a very powerful outlet in his writings.

Having stayed for a considerable time and having enjoyed the fruits of a progressive and developed society, the expatriate writer is unable to return to his native grounds. The longer he stays abroad, the greater is his dilemma, whether to stay or to return to his native grounds. The longer he stays abroad, the greater is his dilemma, whether to stay or to return. The longer he stays away from his mother

land, the greater is his love for the mother land. It is a paradise, he yearns for. He can regain it by returning to it but he does not want to return. Therefore, he makes periodical visits to his mother land to be constantly renewing his contact with it. Strange as it may seem, He look forward, during his sojourn in his mother land, to returning to his adopted country as much as he looked forward to visiting his country. So he is caught between the two worlds - one that feeds his body and the other his spirit. He can neither discard the old nor can he completely adopt the new. This tension is very strong in the expatriate novels.

Another paradoxical situation that we notice in the expatriate novel is, it celebrates the victory of the experiential over the traditional and of the modern over the moribund but not without concomitant pain and suffering that the characters are subjected to naturally in such a conflict. Therefore, pride in the ancient culture is affirmed as the sanctuary as with travel from western cultures is proclaimed. In stay – at – home writing a progressive modern woman within the tradition is an ideal. But in expatriate writing the frozen static traditional woman is the ideal. The simple reason for this is that a stay – at – home writing looking at the “progress” that the western countries have made in all respects wants the woman of his county to be like a Western Woman in progressive thinking and behaviour. But the expatriate writer has been able to see behind the so called "progress", the loss of certain eternal values of life which he thinks are embedded in the tradition. Hence, the former's ideal is a progressive woman and the latter's a reactionary.

A brief survey of the works of some important writers reveals that expatriation has been one of the major themes in Indo- Anglian fiction. In *A Dream in Hawali* Bhattacharya describes the expatriate experience of Prof. Neelroy and it is a dissertation on the sickness of society both eastern and western, and at the same time it presents man's search for the self or alternately, his endeavour to discard the masks. It is possibly much more. Krishna Sarma and Rangan question whether Yogananda is the professor turned yogi in India and the Yogi on trial, in Honolulu. Bhattacharya has juxtaposed the timeless message of Vedanta and the modern scientific culture of the west as manifested in America in this novel. Through the stage is prepared for an encounter between East and West, it reveals the expatriate experience of an Indian yogi in Honolulu.

Kamala Markandaya in her novel *The No Where Man* describes the expatriate experience of an Indian who migrates to England. *The No Where Man* as the title indicates is a novel about a displaced Indian (a South Indian Brahmin) SrinivasSastry who settles down in England but unfortunately not fully accepted by the English community. Srinivas becomes a rootless, restless individual dispossessed of India and disowned by England. As Rangan observes “through the predominant theme of the novel is displacement and alienation and a search for identity in alien environs, it treats of larger human relationships as well as of the essential human loneliness”. Arun Joshi another Indian novelist reveals the expatriate experience in his novels. k.R. SrinivasIyyengar remarks " Arun Joshi's heroes - - - SindiOberoi, Billy, RatanSomasekhar - - - are all outsiders after a fashion making desperate attempts to silence the insidious bug within and reach a rapport with the world. One tries to flee himself, another his home and class, a third a shameless past and the fourth the furies within. With each novel the hero seems to get older and the novels are thus a single work in progress.

The Foreigner of Arun Joshi is thematically centered on motifs like alienation, friendship and east and west relationship. It is the story of SindiOberon, a rootless man who does not belong to any one of the countries in which he has lived. Sind acknowledges he belongs neither to Kenya nor London nor America nor India since he had a mixed parentage. He leaves India for the U.S.A. for doing his doctorate in philosophy and meets Juno. It is only after the demise of Juno, Sindhi realizes his mistake and yearns for attachment. It makes him feel that action with detachment is what yoga preaches and he is guilty of all that had happened. Sindi comes to India. He gains a sense of belonging at the end. He realizes the dialectical conflict between the human experience and response, Love and hate, action and inaction, possessiveness and renunciation in his expatriate experience. BalachandraRajan's *Too Long in the West* is a novel which is a fantasia woven around an eccentric assemblage of parents, suitors and rustics. It is flippant and ridiculous: "A spoof of the absurdities in Indian and American social codes of arranged marriages and of foibles and eccentricities of individuals". Sambasivan has sent his only daughter Nalini for higher studies to America. She returns home from Columbia University to Mudalur to face the problem of choosing a suitable husband. With the help of her American education, Nalini rules over the community in Mudalur. She is vivid, grave, vivacious and withdrawn, alive to her fingertips and self- contained. The new world has brought all her hitherto dormant qualities to light. It has taught her the difference between being herself, and the compromised

product of her family's pushes and pulls. Though she is enchanted by the new world; she has not forgotten her Indian origin and the purpose of her coming there. She learns the essence of the Indian philosophy from her American professor as well as Nalini is drawn to the broad mindedness of New York. She is free from her illusion and imitation. She has been liberated by her three years stay in America. She is too well balanced to be overthrown by her freedom. She is captivated by American myth of success. But this unprecedented paragon marries a rustic and leads a happy life.

Anita Desai has called her novel *Bye Bye Black Bird*, "the most rooted experience and the last literary in her derivation". This novel is built upon the theme of crisis or identity. The novelist focusses on the disturbing aspect of loss of identity that immigration necessarily involves. Anita Desai's account of Sarah's inner struggle is sympathetic to a high degree. Sarah an English girl is married to Adit Sen, an Indian. But she wishes to keep her Indian association a secret in the place where she works as the Head's Secretary at School. She has a quick quality of humour but because of the marriage she has become a high strung, nervous creature, unsure of herself in white society to which she feels, she could not belong. Sarah is notably a poor conversationalist, reserved, silent and dignified and self conscious. She never expresses her inner feelings. Her love of solitude perplexes Adit. She is schizophrenia in search of identity. Adit's final rejection of England and Dev's ultimate acceptance of his new milieu show significant moral and spiritual growth. Adit finally grows from the colonised into an individual and comes face to face with reality. Adit realizes what Sarah has realized long before "Little India in London". She readily yields to the sudden decision of Adit and makes a brave attempt to accompany him to India and merge in his life and surroundings. It is not too late for Adit to regain his roots and Sarah is young enough to strike roots in that new clime. With all her Oriental gentleness and submissiveness one hopes that Sarah would succeed in making India her new home. Another Indian novelist Ruth ParwarJabhwala describes the expatriate experience of Just in an exotic manner in the novel *The Backward Place*. She is an English woman and an expatriate in India.

From a study of the novels referred above one should agree with Lionel Trilling: "it is not possible to conceive of a person standing beyond culture. His culture has brought him into being in every respect except the physical has given him, his categories and habits of thought, his range of feeling his idiom and tones of speech. And this culture as I have tried to show cannot be separated from its environment. The writer achieves balance, comes into full possession of identity when he has explored that culture to that depths and found there the sources to sustain them."

Thus Experience of wandering has become a very important and prominent theme in Indo-Anglian fiction. Among the Indian expatriate novelist Raja Rao occupies a prominent place and his novels *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Chess master and His Moves* portray the expatriate experience of their protagonists Rammaswamy and Sivaramasastri respectively.

Raja Rao is from a South Indian orthodox Brahmin family in the princely state of Mysore. He was born in 1909. Right from his birth Raja Rao has been an exile linguistic, religious and cultural. He was the only Hindu pupil in the Muslim public school of Hyderabad. His higher education took place in the Muslim university of Aligarh in the British India. Prof. Eric Dickinson impressed Raja Rao "to love France" and to appreciate Michaelangelo and Santayana" After graduation, Raja Rao left India to study at Montpellier, France in 1929. Soon after his arrival, he married Camille Mouly, a highly educated French woman who taught at Lycée in Menton. A Brahmin's marriage with a foreigner happens to be in reality an act of rebellion against the Hindu Orthodoxy and Rao himself is the best Hindu orthodoxy and Rao himself is the best commentator in the regard. He says "we are Hoyasalas of Karnataka, we marry only among ourselves" and "I was the eldest son's. In the south, he has got a very special place, so I was chosen to continue the line. I was the specifically favoured one." It is a moot question how a Hoyasala of Karnataka married to a French woman can fulfil his brahminic commitment and this restlessness in Rao led to abandon the research project entitled "The influence of India on Irish Literature". He was very much influenced by *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *BrihastotraRatnakara*. In Rao's view man is a meta-physical entity, as his greatness lies in the process of transformation of this whole corpus of subjective experience into a sufficient art form. Raja Rao is an expatriate Indian in the fullest sense of the term because once he left India for his higher education in France; he has been practically outside India, making only occasional visits to his mother land. He taught philosophy at Texas, which accounts for the abundant philosophical and metaphysical concerns in his writings. Raja Rao is a real expatriate in his life time and Ramaswamy and Sivaramasastri the protagonists in the novels are the fictional selves of Raja Rao.

Ramaswamy, the protagonist in the novel *The Serpent and the Rope* is a South Indian Brahmin that hails from an orthodox family and he is a descendent of a medieval Vedantin. He is a research scholar in France, married to a French intellectual, Madeleine. Their first child dies of a lung complication and the shadow of death affects Rama no less than Madeleine. He feels at home only with his step mother and step sister in India, deriving from them the rapture of immortality. The relationship between Madeleine and Ramaswamy does not endure. Madeline as a wife in the spirit of "Sahadharmacharini" does not fit into the value system of Ramaswamy and in reality their marriage is a failure, if not a disaster. Madeleine represents the materialism of the West and Ramaswamy symbolizes the spiritualism of the East which are locked in a tough contest. The expatriate Ramaswamy conscious of his privileged position as a brahmin in the Hindu social hierarchy constantly aspires to realize the full metaphysical connotations of true brahmin- hood for " a Brahman is he who knows Brahman ". With that his quest starts and ends. The expatriate is a pilgrim of eternity and his identity has been split between the two opposite factors of Time and Eternity, of History and Tradition, the former always representing to him the modern Western existence and the latter the Indian Ethos.

In the novel *The Chess Master and His Moves* the protagonist SivaramaSastri is a Tamil Brahmin engaged in combining metaphysics with mathematics like Ramanujan. He falls in love with Suzanne a spiritually inclined French actress of the classical comedies. SivaramSastr's quest for a lost agethrough encounters forms the centrality of action. The outcome of the human interaction is the disintegration of the intercultural human bond accompanied by an arrogant declaration of the superiority of the Indian, SivaramSastri. SivaramSastri in the novel rejects the narrow concept of Nationalism and pitches his intent on the universal that is the transcendent making a reference to Shankara's famous declaration "that my native land is in the three worlds". We find the two world views which determined the two races of men "those that look horizontal way, the way of infinity. And those that look vertically and the vertical becomes Raja Rao's exclusive Platonic- Advaita- Indian belief in the novel.

2. CONCLUSION

Thus, it is an attempt has been made to distinguish between the Indian's attitude towards life and the westerner's. The Indians have the attitude of wandering from culture to culture for the prominent idea of Moksha or Mukti, with the westerners it is Dharma. As Dharma is based on work, the nature of Dharmika is constant performance of action. But the muktha, by constant repetition of the syllable wandering or expatriate from temple to temple or from god to god by meditating on its meaning obtains everything in life.

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