

The Chess Master and his moves : The Mysterious and the inscrutable

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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao was an Indian writer of English language novels. Rao's wide – ranging body of work, Spanning a number of genres, is seen as varied and significant contribution to Indian English Literature, as well as world literature as a whole. In this novel, the chess master, the master player of chess, Symbolizes the absolute, the creator the universe, the Entire world is just like the game of chess which goes in consonance with his will, we human beings are just the chess- pieces on the board, and his moves indicate the inscrutable, mysterious way to god. The chess – master and his moves is almost ambitious novel and like –most of Raja Rao writing, rooted in Indian tradition , Thought and sensibility.

I INTRODUCTION

Raja Rao was an Indian writer of English Language novels. Raja Rao considerable achievements derives substantially from the uniquely Indian spirit and thrust his work. Most of the books of Raja Rao deals his artistic achievements cannot be ignored. He deviates from the traditional path and gives a new form of fiction writing. His innovation as a novelist are significant. Awarded with the **Neustadt prize for literature**, “The chess master his moves.” It was the first volume of trilogy expressed in a style. Rao tried to explain the game of chess with life.

Raja Rao has a very significant role in altering the scence of the modern Indian English novel. He has contributed a lot in highlighting the spiritual aspect in the life of man. The chess master and his moves is a most ambitious novel and like most of Raja Rao writing, rooted in Indian Tradition, Thought and sensibility.

The narrative technique used by Raja Rao enabled the author to fully present his theme convincingly and effectively. Though there are extremes when Rao almost defies india and eloquently praises her spirit, her wisdom and timelessness, yet he is very honest with the objectivity and the discipline of the historical sciences.

Raja Rao's fifth novel, *The chessmaster and his moves* is regarded his magnum opus which was published in 1988. The publication of this novel has won Raja Rao international fame as an outstanding novelist. It is a formidable collection of written matter with 708 pages of close print, accompanied by 25 pages of translations and glossary, presents a vast mosaic of narration , reminiscences, confession, allusions and above all, what he terms “Cogitation” generated by loosely associative principles revelving round a thematic center that is, the protagonist's quest for a lost age through encounters with men, women and himself.

Silverman, the central character of the novel, is absorbed in a quest for the Absolute, though this quest is marked by his work as research scholar of pure Mathematics and his relationship with various women.

Human beings have been likened to chess pieces in the game of chess whereas God (mysterious) is the chessmaster. The narrator who is highly meditative type of person in an interior monologue says :

“The stars, played games with us and behind the stars –

He, the chessmaster, rubbing his head in glee, he played for you, making you think he played for you, making you think he played for himself who is he anyway?”¹

Again the narrator; gives the concept of the chessmaster :

“The chessmaster’s moves, are so to say, subtle, magnanimous, sure. His hand is on your shoulder, not to tell you where to move , but to show the nature of essential movement, and movement itself is the play”².

The title of this novel is symbolic, the chessmaster is an emblem of God (Brahma or Creator) and the game of chess is symbolic of the world (Sansar). The moves made by the chessmaster are symbolic of the conduct of the drama of life (Lila). The novel is interspersed with references to chessmaster and the game of chess.

It is a well-known fact that the moves in the game of chess cannot be predicted. Likewise, the ways of the chessmaster (God) are mysterious and inscrutable i.e. beyond the rational understanding of man. It is not possible to describe the chessmaster. This vast earth is peopled by billions and billions of people but there is none who has ever seen him or known him.

The chessboard is a symbol of the playground of Destiny where the chessmaster plays with human beings, treating them as billions of chess –pieces. *The Chessmaster and his moves* is a novel about itself and as such, constantly reminds the reader that every happening is a play and even the much –idealized protagonist is only a chess piece whose actions are nothing but movements manipulated by a mysterious omnipotent master player who sometimes clad in Kerala- type dhoti, may resemble for a moment Rao’s own preceptor Sh. Atmanand the Guru.

Like his earlier novel. *The Chessmaster and his moves*, too has an epigram by Sh. Atmanand the Guru. “I am the light in the perception of the world” . The protagonist narrator who is meditative type of person, in a stream of consciousness, is reminded of what his Guru had said about life and death. The epigraph is very symbolic of the philosophy of Sankara.

“And I now know, in discrimination is wisdom, and knowledge, light that can see this light. There all doubts and all the jungle of the mind end. Pure as the Himalayan snow and unshakable, it tell us how, the Ganga is nothing but the snow melted by the sun and the wisdom not the stream or the river or the sea (which it will reach) , but just water; waves are nothing but water. So is the sea”¹.

Water is a symbol of pure consciousness which underlines the Brahmin as well as Jivas. The waves are ignorant of their identity with Brahmin. The Jiva's search for the Brahmin is as the waves seek the ocean. The fact is that waves and the ocean are one.

Thus those who understand this non-duality, are free from death. Being a mathematician, he is so much absorbed in the numbers, that he begins to think about life in terms of numbers. He entreats his spiritual Guru to help him in his quest for the absolute :

“I felt that afternoon I had become a chess piece, father: O Father, Father, my progenitor, bless me, and do not, I beg of you, leave me alone , I am lost, totally lost”.¹

He realizes that he is a pawn in the hands of God who governs all the acts of his life. He discovers that he is not different from God:

“I and this me, are not two me, but somewhere one and only one”.²

The events and the threads of the story present a unified plot with Sivarama Sastri at the center of the narrative. The narrative gives the growth of the protagonist's mind with a vedantic heritage, he is a typical Brahmin who wears a sacred thread, goes for ablutions many times a day and never eats anything before his bath. In his novels, Rao presents the protagonist Brahmins who are proud of their heritage. For him a Brahmin is a symbol of a person who is pure and underfield both physically and spiritually.

Thus, Brahmin for Siva is a symbol of “Illumination” because a true Brahmin aspires for salvation, in the nirvana through the attainment of knowledge . He develops an immense liking for Jayalakshmi because she possesses “Brahmin-like purity” and spiritual inclination. The novel has been rightly called “A saga of love” for it deals with Siva's relationship with three women, in his spiritual quest for truth. The narrator is Sivarama Shastri himself.

Raja Rao have used myths and symbols to convey their profound view of life, and have made them a part of the central frame work of their novels, as myths are timeless and eternal, the writer draws on myths and legends. Thus, myths and symbols emerge as a significant mode of technique to convey his view of human reality.

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