

# MAN/WOMAN RELATIONSHIP AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THE CHESSMASTER AND HIS MOVES

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Indian English Fiction which emerged as historical romance in 1930s under the impact of Indian nationalistic consciousness acquires narrative sophistication with varied complexities in nineteen sixties. The aesthetic richness that characterizes the writing of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao has lent originality and distinctive identity to Indian English Fiction. These novels reflect the author's direct involvement in the ethos and cultural milieu of India. Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan portray the social realities in graphic detail while Raja Rao is concerned with the metaphysical explorations in his fiction and introduced Indian Philosophy in Indian English Fiction. Regarding which Edwin Thumboo in *Encomium for Raja Rao* remarks:

Rao's greatest achievement, which I suspect only he can surpass, is the degree to which his works contain the insights, emblems, mantras, metaphors and other carriers of meaning and instruction that enable the individual to achieve, through his own meditations, a better understanding of self through Knowledge and Truth. (Thumboo 530)

Raja Rao has depicted a particular version of Advaita Vedanta in the novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves* which has many major sources. One is the philosophical practice of Sri Ramana Maharishi and other is the Sunyavada of the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. Raja Rao has gathered former from the philosophy of his Guru Shri Atmananda, while Nagarjuna's thought is derived from the Buddha. *The Chessmaster and His Moves* is a story of a Tamil Brahmin Sivaram Sastri, a mathematician and his quest for truth and absolute. The web of the story of the novel has its formation in the Sivaram's relation with other characters like Suzanne, Uma, Jayalakshmi, Mireille, Father, Jean-Pierre and Michel Girome. His relationship with women characters like Suzanne, Uma, Jayalakshmi and Mireille produces the feeling of alienation in him and enables us to analyze the psychic problematics of Sivaram because one relationship contributes in the growth and decay of the other relationship. The incompatibility pertaining in his relationship with Suzanne is due to the function of two irreconcilable cultural ethos. The steadfastness of the Sivaram-Jayalakshmi relationship and the impossibility of its consummation and his relation with his sister Uma and her inability to bear a child are those two relationships which provide the glue that keeps the novel together. In Sivaram's quest of absolute truth, other characters, mainly women characters play an important role. We find out that Sivaram's exploration of identity and autonomous never ends in the novel. In *The Chessmaster and His Moves* we find the depiction of a special position bestowed upon women in Hindu mythology. Later on this position becomes the foundation of man/woman relationship. Raja Rao has aptly

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depicted the need of woman counterpart in attaining salvation. Sivaram's belief in Advaita Vedanta leads him to consider the non-dual form of Brahma. In the context of man/woman relationship his conceptualization justifies the *Sankhya Doctrine* of Vedanta in which the feminine principle, *Prakriti* has to merge into *Purusa*, the masculine principle. Sivaram in his relation with Suzanne desires the ideal love relationship based on non-duality. His wish to see Suzanne in Indian clothes like a Hindu wife and completely mingled in his family structure and culture is symbolic of his conceptualization of love. Sivaram's notion of man/woman relationship can be understood in the light of Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi's relationship. Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi in *Brihadaranayka Upanishad* discuss the reality and completeness of the relation of husband and wife. Yajnavalkya says to Maitreyi, "a husband loves his wife not for her own sake, dear, but because the self lives in her" (Easwaran 100). He elaborates that in this relationship there is no separate self either of husband or of wife. He says, "as a lump of salt thrown in water dissolves and cannot be taken out again, though wherever we taste the water, it is salty, even so, beloved, the separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal" (Easwaran 102). Sivaram, thus wants to achieve the passionate relation and deny the other, the woman part. In sociological sphere, Sivaram wants to behold Suzanne as a typical Hindu wife completely mingled in his kinship structure of family and he admires her presence in his home as a woman without her independent identity. He elaborates his view in front of Suzanne as, "where there is no two, that is happiness, that is truth" (314), to which she simply interrogates, "How, Siv, can I give up my individuality" (314)? Suzanne is never ready to leave her individual identity thus the gap between lovers widens and they never get married. In the novel we have a glimpse of a movement of the male (*Purusha*) toward the female (*Prakriti*), of Sivaram toward Suzanne and Mireille and vice versa. This movement toward sexual opposite, seeking union has symbolically an unconscious meaning. Sivaram's sexual experience with both Suzanne and Mireille, at unconscious level, attempts to erase the duality of the masculine and feminine principles. The sexual act has an implication of rebirth at unconscious level. This rebirth leads towards Nirvana. Thus sexual act seems a solution to Sivaram for attaining Nirvana and salvation.

On the other hand, the affinity between Sivaram and Jayalakshmi is emblematic of non-dual intellectual relationship as suggested in *Jnanamudra* mode of Buddhist Tantrism. In Buddhist Tantrism, there is a complex situation of true interaction and intimacy between man and woman, that is termed as *Karmamudra* and *Jnanamudra*, the one referring to the 'without' and other to the 'within', each of them representing an encounter that changes both partners. *Karmamudra* is denoted as an encounter with a physical woman, which in the context of the psychological realm gives only a self-defeating pleasure. On the other hand *Jnanamudra* is an inward encounter of lovers, where they intellectually unite with each other and man realizes his spiritual essence through an interaction with woman. *Jnanamudra* is the creation of one's own mind. In the company of Jayalakshmi, Sivaram obtains his jiffies of gay and mirth which clarifies him that Truth is happiness. The lovers spiritualize their love and they reside on the myths of Siva and Parvati, Radha and Krishna, Sita and Ram, Satyavan and Savithri and Tristan and Isuelt myth of troubadours.

It is as though Raja Rao is convinced that the heterosexual relationship is essential to the truth seeker and he has explored various ways of defining and delineating how the masculine and feminine principles work in man's search for the oneness with Brahman. In the novel we

find two forces of the universe, Siva and Shakti. Siva is essence and Shakti is the power that gives form to the essence. They are complementary and indispensable to each other. At the anthropomorphic level, Siva and Shakti have become man and woman – i.e. male and female genders. Sivaram asserts that female relationships are crucial to his self-awareness, maturing sensibility and search for truth: “The woman is the miracle. She subsumes you with her presence and makes you know yourself. She gives not only bone and blood to your abstractions, but the sense of the real”(44-45). Man and woman need each other in different ways but that which brings the miracle of completion is ultimately the most important: “Woman and man rose out of the concept of extension and dissolution, hence inversely it is the woman which receives being, there where she lies, and man prolongs himself for birth of becoming where he is truly and wholly become”(48).

In the novel we always find Sivaram in the company of one or another woman. Jayalakshmi, the only woman he loves is already married, so his love remains unfulfilled. Suzanne and Mireille provide relief both sexual and emotional, from the torment of love to Sivaram. With Uma, the sister who adores him, he is neither here nor there. The four women only heighten Sivaram’s sense of isolation. In a way, Suzanne and Mireille are objects of sexual gratification for Sivaram. They remain objects made for the satisfaction of the masculine principle. Simone de Beauvoir in the Introduction to *The Second Sex* condemns the idea of woman being a source of male’s sexual needs. She says “a woman is called ‘the sex’ by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being” (Beauvoir xvi). Sivaram commodifies the woman body when he thinks of Suzzane as “a big loaf of bread, French bread. It smelt rich, and a little garlicy, and ready for being taken” (163) and he calls Mireille’s breasts “goblets of Shiraz” (359). He considers both of them to be consumable goods, to Suzanne’s body he compares with an “apple from Normandy” and Mireille’s as “a melon from the deserts of Africa” (362). Suzanne and Mireille are only substitutes of Jayalakshmi for Sivaram. He asserts it true that both women give him pleasure and peace in his solitude. He too loves them because of their Indianness and devotion they pay him. But they are incapable of providing fulfillment because they are not Indian.

*The Chessmaster and His Moves* shows a classification of women characters. Hindu women Jayalakshmi and Uma are considered superior in their attitude towards life. They are shown very submissive in their patriarchal society. Though they have knowledge of extra-marital affairs of their husbands yet they pay unquestioning devotion to their husbands because their society taught them to live under the command of respective male member of the family. In their lives they assume it their destiny and never raise their voice for their rights. Jayalakshmi starts living in a separate room of the palace when she comes to know about the interest of her husband in a maid servant. On the contrary, Uma’s knowledge of her husband’s interest in a dancer leaves her in a psychological unfitness. Contrary to both of them are Suzanne and Mireille who are never ready to camouflage their very existences in the kinship structure of Sivaram’s family. Suzanne loses her temper when Sivaram suggests her to submerge in his existence leaving her own. Mireille finds it better to maintain a distance from Sivaram because his demands are metaphysical which terrifies her existence. Thus Raja Rao has presented a distinct picture of women characters in the novel. He has shown a difference between the intellectual belongings of French and Indian women. French women, though they present Indian and Hindu intimacy in their relationship with Sivaram yet they hold their individual identity in life which they never ready to leave. The other side

of the coin is the depiction of Indian women characters by Raja Rao that are shown living in complete surrender and submission. Raja Rao has vividly highlighted the higher position of women in Hindu mythology but at the same time they suffer in male dominating society in one or another way.

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