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Santha Rama Rau's Fiction : A Sociological Approach

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Abstract :- The sociological approach to the study of literature focuses on the relationship between a literary work and the social framework in which it is created. The sociological approach to literature study defines and explains the relationship between man and society and focuses on sociology's subject matter and concept. The sociological approach to the study of literature gives a valuable description of the social issues, political issues, and economic issues and the view of the world and creativity of the writers. The sociology of the writer is an essential aspect of the sociology of literature. The Sociological Study of Santha Rama Rau's fictional works shows that her view or philosophy of life is the main issue deeply based on her contemporary socio-political situations. The target of Santha Rama Rau's fiction was western society, and she intended to present the growth of Indian liberalization and independence. In her influential writings, primarily travelogues, she exhibits the changing trends and accurate picture of Indian society. The present research paper attempts to discuss Santha Rama Rau's fiction from a sociological point of view. Sociology of literature focuses on the nature and possibility of the sociological approach and its relationship with literature.

Keywords : Sociological approach, Social Issues, Economic Issues, Indian Society.

The fiction of Santha Rama Rau is thematically comprehensive- ranging. Her major fictional concerns are social, economic, cultural, and historical. In each of her novels, she has taken up a new theme for exploration. East-West encounter, rural life, and traditional versus modernity are recurrent themes of her novels. Most of her fiction is concerned with arresting

the Indian mind in its conflict between the old and the new, the traditional values, and the urge for westernized modernity. Santha Rama Rau has a deep insight into the sociology of India, which she presents effectively and realistically. As a writer of fiction, Santha Rama Rau is a realist. The effect of realism always constitutes in her writings, whether it is *Remember the House* (1956) *The Adventuress* (1971), each one of them is an exercise in realism. She seeks to give a new way and idea to Indian society through her novels.

Remember the House is the debut novel of Santha Rama Rau, which deals with a conflict of values or attitudes, a cultural clash between tradition and modernity. This novel is based on Santha Rama Rau's problem of identity. The novel's central protagonist, Baba, spends her childhood in a small Indian village Jalnabad. She has learned all the traditional aspects from her grandmother, who is a faithful follower of the concept of traditional values. In this connection, B. R. Agrawal & M. P. Sinha say :

"Santha Rama Rau's novel depicts the central conflict of the adolescent protagonist between two ideals of life. Alix Nicoll, the narrator's American friend, represents life's Western values. The heroine's mother is an embodiment of truly Hindu values. Through the narrator, Baba is enamored of newly imbibed American ideals and values of success, enjoyment, and happiness. Yet, all the while, she is conscious of their incompatibility with Indian ways of life." (58)

In *Remember the House*, there is a direct conflict between the western-educated girl and her grandmother. Baba's character in this novel is

a slightly different character in the sense that she is not a poor village girl but a well-off city girl who comes to stay in the village after her schooling in England. We get a critical appraisal of village life and its folks through her character. We find that they are steeped in orthodox customs and superstitions, which prevent them from making the most of life even after the country has won political independence. Baba's grandmother is a good-hearted but orthodox older woman. She always expects Baba to behave and act like a traditional girl and devote herself entirely to the family's service. She encourages her to sing only devotional music. Baba's grandmother does not allow her to wear any makeup or Western slacks and shorts. But Baba feels comfortable in western slacks and shorts.

Baba feels very disappointed in her grandmother's house. Boredom slowly creeps into social life. Therefore, Baba turns towards her American friends Nicky and Alix, with whom she enjoys shopping, yachting, and beach parties. Baba's ideas about marriage, society, family relationships and way of thinking are undoubtedly western. In this novel, everybody presumes that Baba will marry Hari Joshi. But Baba never views her life partner, and when her grandmother asks her about Hari, Baba boldly says about the concept of marriage. As Baba explains:

"Why should we get married? Surely there should be something else? I don't really know you. I don't. . . I still think there should be more to life than just settling down. I wish I knew how to explain." (Rau 127- 128)

On the other hand, Hari belongs to a wealthy household and believes in society's traditional concepts. He always says that marriage is essential. Baba decides to marry Hari Joshi at the end of the novel, but she does not love him. The sharp tension starts between Baba and her mother-in-law, affecting Hari's relationship with her mother. The tension between Hari and his mother or Baba and her mother-in-law symbolizes the clash between

tradition and modernity, the old and the new outlooks in modern Indian society.

In the novel *Remember the House*, the extramarital relationship between Jay and Sundribai destroyed the married life of Jay's wife. Jay is a rich Zamindar and marries the daughter of a wealthy household, but he keeps a mistress in his house. Jay considers that marriage is only about producing an heir, not even having intimacy. All these events destroyed the husband-wife relationship.

Santha Rama Rau views husband-and-wife interactions from a traditional perspective. There are highs and lows in this relationship. Progressive policies and socio-economic transformation are responsible for the discord between husband and wife. On the other side, contemporary education is also responsible for most of the bitterness in this relationship. It has developed in both men and women a spirit of self-reliance. Baba and Shalini are two female characters who are attempting to live independently. In their quest for independence, they reject established moral standards, causing misery for themselves and others. Santha Rama Rau is a social conservative who only values the fusion of both cultures. She believes that the synthesis of cultures is essential for the progress of a society.

Santha Rama Rau's second novel, *The Adventuress*, is a perfect example of maintaining her intrinsic Indianness. However, the themes and background are based on the Second World War. Kay is the central female protagonist of the novel. This novel is about a young woman who is very helpless and a victim of World War second. Santha Rama Rau has written this novel in the manner of John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*. *The Adventuress* is divided into four parts, and each part is based on the adventurous life of Kay. It was written in 1971.

Wealth is essential for one's physical comfort, but its irrational pursuit is laden with danger. Material wealth is useless if basic

morality and sympathy are gone and if one's perspective toward accumulating wealth is selfish and single. Kay, the female protagonist who shows the way, is found everywhere. Kay's specific and selfish desire for wealth becomes a tragic flaw in her character. In pursuit of wealth, she adopts immoral means. Kay tells a life to the American economist Charles Beaver, who wants to help Kay. Kay always conceals and tells a lie to her family members. Kay is a knowledgeable and courageous lady, and she handles the situation effectively. She also has self-control over her mind as we see that Kay makes acquaintance with Beaver, who is very fascinated by her manners and behavior. They visit several places in Tokyo and spend a lot of money lavishly. Santa Rama Rau shows her keen poetic sensibility when she describes the seaside visited by Kay and Beaver :

"They explored further, driving one weekend along with the coast of the Izu peninsula, like a shoreline scalloped with coves, painted in the familiar design of Japanese landscapes, the angular, tormented pine trees growing from dark seamed boulders against the greyish glitter of the sea." (Rau 48)

Santha Rama Rau diverts our attention from the main story and introduces the character of a kind-hearted lady Madame Dona Luisa. Dona Luisa is a childless woman, and she wants to adopt Kay as her daughter, but Kay's face betrays her, and her dream to become the heir of the house of Dona Luisa is shattered. The last part of the novel describes the scene of poverty and misery in Shanghai. Kay and Jeremy reach this city. Kay stays in the Place Hotel and hands over the smuggled money to Old Wong, the bartender of the International Club in Manila. Through the character of Kay, Santha Rama Rau describes the materialist attitudes of the people of the society. They can perform several evil deeds in the pursuit of money.

Thus, the sociological interpretation of Santha Rama Rau's novels provides an accurate picture of society. Everything old is not rotten, and everything new is not always good. Only our

positive attitude of mind, sincerity of purpose, and our penchant for mutual understanding can lead us to our cherished goals. Santha Rama Rau's novels do need to constitute an affirmation of life.

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