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THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE: JOURNEY TOWARDS THE ULTIMATE REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The Cat and Shakespeare is another attempt at philosophical fiction, though in a new direction viz. metaphysical comedy. The author himself has called it 'a book of prayer'. There is haphazardness and the narrative mode is in consonance with the life and characters of the story. My effort in this paper is to look at the phases Ramkrishna Pai has gone through to achieve supreme knowledge. Ramkrishna Pai, thus passes through many phases in his journey towards the Supreme, ultimately reaches his goal. He is transformed from a *Sadhaka* to *bhakta* who is surrendered to the God, as a kitten to the Mother Cat. The seeker, when he confronts Reality, knows no fear. As Nachiketa was liberated and Yama ushered him into the nature of the Self, likewise Ramkrishna Pai, attains salvation. Here too, when the quester crosses the barrier of finite knowledge, there is an elevation in spirit. Even death could not frighten the aspirant at that point of time. The mystical experience permeates his being as he learns the lesson of renunciation. Ramkrishna Pai learns that the real understanding implies a merger of the self with the object of perception. He now gauges the importance of his Guru's acts and statements

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Introduction

The Serpent and the Rope followed by a novel of slender bulk, *The Cat and Shakespeare* [1965; an earlier version called 'The Cat' (1959)] is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*. The novel too deals with the theme of Metaphysical quest on a plane (from *karma* to *sadhana*, *sadhana* to *bhakti*) different from that of earlier novels. In Rao's own words, as Medha Sachdev has quoted,

The Cat and Shakespeare is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope* ... it takes up the theme of Metaphysical quest at the point at which Rama's story has carried it, and showed the next step in this quest. [Sachdev – 132]

With *The Cat and Shakespeare* Rao moves even further away from the protocols of realism and deeper into the difficult region of philosophical fiction. Written as a sort of conclusion to *The Serpent and the Rope* this novel purports to elaborate yet another stage in mythical self-understanding. Raja Rao wrote to a correspondent, as quoted by Srinivasa Iyengar,

I wanted to publish the book with about 300 blank pages at the end, to show that the real book is five hundred and odd pages and the reader must fill in the vacant spaces. [Iyengar – 406]

The Cat and Shakespeare is another attempt at philosophical fiction, though in a new direction viz. metaphysical comedy. The author himself has called it 'a book of prayer'. The reader has to infer a great deal between the lines, he has to weep and laugh at once and all the time; and he has to lose himself in prayer. The novel is stuffed with real – life situations, metaphysic, irony, fantasy and fact, digressions, tragic and comic situations. There is haphazardness and the narrative mode is in consonance with the life and characters of the story.

On the simple narrative level the novel is an uproariously funny story, but has a deep philosophical meaning. It is a story of Govindan Nair, a clerk in the Ration office and Ramkrishna Pai, also a clerk in the Revenue office; in Trivendrum, the capital city of Kerala. The story is set against the background of Kerala during the period of World-War II. Ramkrishna Pai, the narrator, is an innocuous little man, who loves the beautiful Shantha and dreams of building a big house; his neighbour Govindan Nair is a genial soul and a man built on a large scale, whose philosophy of life is that one should surrender oneself completely to the supreme energizing principle in the universe which he symbolically calls 'Mother Cat'.

The two clerks especially Nair – undergo several surrealist adventures including cat-worship in the corrupt rationing office where Nair works, the sudden death by heart-failure of his boss when the cat sits on the unfortunate man's head and the trial of the cat in a court of law. At the end, Nair is his old happy self, in spite of all that has happened (including the death of his son), while Ramkrishna Pai, fulfills his ambition of building his house; and in the symbolic end, he follows the cat up the stairs and is vouchsafed a mystic experience. We leave him listening to 'the music of marriage', i.e. in a state of illumination.

Ramkrishna Pai, the narrator hero is just an average human male, an everyman as he says, "*I am not particularly tall or fair or good or bad. I am just a man.*" [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 22] Pai desires to receive grace – like the absent – minded hunter who, throwing leaves on the sunken image of Shiva, becomes blessed with the manifestation of the Lord himself. Ramkrishna Pai, the 'innocent' and 'ignorant' quester realizes that he is actually the mythical hunter who was blessed by the vision of Shiva. He too is unaware of where the leaves dropped. Ramkrishna Pai observes,

I am just like that hunter carelessly dropping '*bilva*' trees on some Shiva as yet unknown when this big creature Govindan Nair leaps across the wall.... The fact is to him all the world is just what he does. He does and so the world comes into being. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 11-12]

The *puranic* myth of a hunter having the vision of Lord Shiva, after accidentally dropping the leaves of bilva tree on the image of the Lord substantiates Pai's inner desire. While looking at the compound of his rented house, the myth of the hunter and the bilva tree and the grace of Shiva flashes on his consciousness. He wonders whether God will also bless him with a three-storeyed house, as Shiva blessed hunter with the vision. But his mist of doubts becomes clear through association with the guru, Govindan Nair. Each human being has a spark of the sublime which keeps him alive. But a few among them become capable of awakening the divinity. Only such persons belong to the category of tutor-saints and rise to the level of being called guru. In the words of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, as Medha Sachdev has quoted:

Divinity is without name and form. It has no dimensions in which to exist, it is total. But man cannot comprehend its formlessness, so the subtle and transcendental divinity incarnates out of its own good will and descends in a gross form so that man may understand it. These incarnations are known as *avatars* or prophets and to the disciples they are known as Guru or God. [Sachdev – 122]

Transition Of A Sadhak to Bhakta

Govindan Nair becomes such guru to Ramkrishna Pai who leads him to the Ultimate Reality. *The Cat and Shakespeare* mythologizes the transition of a *sadhaka* to a *bhakta*. A *sadhaka* searches for the Ultimate knowledge latent beneath the veil of maya and a *bhakta* believes in total surrender before God. Both aspire to reach the same destination adopting different modes. When the quester succeeds in attaining complete detachment through the medium of faith and worship, and his love becomes fully involved in reaching the

Supreme Being, he is transformed into a *bhakta*. The greatest hindrance in this cherished goal is man's ego. All systems of philosophy aim at rooting out the ego. Bhakti-marga is one such method of annihilating the consciousness of the independent, individual self.

Three stages of genuine *bhakti* may well be marked out:

1. Where the devotee feels that he belongs exclusively to the Lord.
2. Where he deems the Lord to belong to him alone: and
3. Where he experiences his identity with the Lord.

To realize the first stage the devotee surrenders himself to the Lord convinced that there is no other effective way to overcome the divine maya. Govindan Nair helps Ramkrishna Pai in his path from a *sadhaka* to a *bhakta*. Having recognized the impermanence and non-existence of *maya*, Ramkrishna Pai seeks help from a liberated stage – Govindan Nair. The rapport and deep bond between them enables this *sadhaka* to reach his aspired goal.

To communicate the ideal and total surrender to the will and grace of the cosmic mother, the philosophical analogy of cat and kitten is used by Govindan Nair. The philosophical analogy of cat and kitten is symbolic and alludes to Ramanujacharya's theory of *Vishistaadvaitavada*. Ramanujacharya's celebrated system is so called because it speaks about god with implied attributes. It is advaitic or non-dualism with qualifications. Sankara holds 'avidya' or ignorance responsible for not understanding the manifestation of God. The unreal appears real. Ramanujacharya regarded attributes as real and permanent but subject to the control of Brahman.

The 'Cat-hold' theory

Sankaracharya's *Advaitavada* and Ramanujacharya's *Vishistaadvaitavada* are different stages to the Ultimate Truth. They are not contradictory but complementary. After his death, Ramanujacharya's philosophy of modified non-dualism, according to which Man can save himself not through knowledge, but through self-surrender, came to be interpreted in two-different ways, called the 'monkey-theory' (*markata-nyaya*) and the 'cat-hold theory' (*marjara-nyaya*). According to the first, the human spirit should actively strive to seek union with god, like the young monkey dinging desperately to its mother, the second school holds that man's surrender is so total as to involve complete dependence on the Divine as in the case of the young kitten lifted by the scruff of the neck by the mother-cat.

The divine Mother principle is represented by the central symbol of the cat. The 'Cat-hold' theory is expounded in the novel by Govindan Nair who displays absolute confidence in the mythical animal. In the words of Sridhar Rao,

The image of the mother cat carrying its kitten grows into a complex symbol embodying in itself the theme of the woman, and the theme of gradual surrender to experience which leads to a gradual realization of Truth. The knowledge of Truth provides a proper perspective by which one views the complex problems of life and death. [Rao Sridhar – 40]

In this connection M. K. Naik observes,

Both Pai and Nair are examples of the cat-hold theory in operation and Nair's career illustrates that extreme aspect of theory which holds that, the pardoning God loves the sinner even more than he does the pure. [Naik – 171]

Even Govindan Nair declares,

Have you ever seen a kitten fall? You could fall. I could fall. But the kitten walk on the wall. They are so deft. They are so young. They are so white. The mother can watch them. And when they are about to fall, there she is, her head in the air, and she picks you up by the scruff of your neck. You never know where she is (who has ever seen her? Nobody has). To know where she is, you have to be the mother's mother. And how could that be? Mother I worship you. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 68]

The 'kitten' in the story symbolizes the devout *bhakta* who submits himself to God. The mercy of God instills feelings of safety and security in him. Unafraid, he rejoices ecstatic in the divine power of the supreme. The kitten also stands for common man who is willing to seek the grace of the Guru but is uninitiated into the principle of self-surrender, faith and ardour. The cat-kitten theory can be linked to Krishna's incarnation in the

person. Soon after his birth, he was shifted to another place for security. Likewise, a kitten, after his birth, is moved by its mother to a bastined corner. As Govindan Nair says,

The kitten is being carried by the cat. We would all be kittens carried by the cat. Some who are lucky (like your hunter), will one day, know it. Others will live hearing 'meow-meow' I like being kitten. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 12]

Further in the very next page, Govindan Nair says,

Ah, the kitten when its neck is held by its mother, does it know anything else, but the joy of being held by its mother? ... I say the kitten is the safest thing in the world, the kitten held in the mouth of the mother cat. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 13]

Guru the torch bearer

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Raja Rao as a master of Indian English fiction is his keen perception and intense awareness of the guru principle operating in the Indian social psyche. The Guru-disciple relationship is a dominant shaping force of the hereditary mental disposition that may be termed Indianness or Indian ethos. Govindan Nair, in *The Cat and Shakespeare* is a guru figure who initiates Pai, into the world of Ultimate Truth. Janet Powers, as quoted by K. Unnikrishnan in his *Guru-Disciple Paradigm in Raja Rao*, compares characters, Kirillov and Govindan Nair, he says,

Inhabiting both fictional worlds are guru figures fascinate their respective narrators and attempt to initiate them into new world views. Pai, in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and 'R' in *Comrade Kirillov* are disciple followers of two extraordinary figures, Govindan Nair and Comrade Kirillov. [Unnikrishnan – 146]

According to Govindan Nair, the highest wisdom is the total surrender. *Sadhana* is the highest form of prayer. This makes him a moral. As a true guru, Nair removes the veil of *ajanana* covering the intellect of the aspirant and aids him in building a house with 'bricks'. He observes:

I tell you I will help you to build the house ... with bricks ... In dreams you can build it in gold. In the *Mahabharata* you build it in lacquer. I will build it for you in stone. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 31]

Ramkrishna Pai, throughout the novel seems to be mesmerized by the strange gestures of his neighbour. At one place in the novel he says,

Like a pirate on the high seas....is Govindan Nair. He can command a crew of ten Mophals and in any language you like. He could put a bark onto the sea and say: Sea, take it and the sea would leave and bear you to where the isles are. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 50]

Like Mother Cat, the guru possesses a rare insight into the reality of things. His buoyant spirit, cheerful nature reflect his kitten-like confidence in divinity. Similar to a growing kitten, his all too frequent jaunts on the wall liberate the soul from the restrains and bondages of earthly existence. The protagonist's unspoken wish to build a three – storeyed house is no secret to the Guru who assures him:

You are an innocent, I tell you God will build you a house of three stories-note, please, I say three stories – here, just where you sit. It's already there. You've just to look and see, look deep and see. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 13]

The statement appears significant in this particular context. The house or building, as referred to earlier, does not imply a material house but pertains to the state of spiritual realization. The master initiates the pupil into the importance of the self. According to him, a person need not go anywhere to attain liberation. The divine state of supreme bliss can be attained "just where you sit". In this regard, Raphael points out:

Man has to seek his salvation within himself. Experience is the source of all religious perception, and it is the final court of authority. He must learn to live intensely, feel sympathetically, think cosmically and then work out his salvation as a cosmic necessity. [Raphael – 157]

Realization is not the process of 'search' or 'identification'. The vision granted to Pai by the Guru, Govindan Nair demands self-surrender,

Let the mother cat hold you by neck. Suppose I were for a moment to show you the mother cat. [The Cat and Shakespeare – 13]

Nair appears at a very significant juncture in the novel. As Ramkrishna Pai is looking, at the bilva tree, he is reminded of 'wicked' hunter and wonders whether he too can 'build a big house'. Peeping through the leaves, *jivan-mukta* appears at this moment as a divine ambassador. Sharing a spiritual kinship with Pai, he gives voice to those unuttered thoughts which Pai was unable to formulate in his mind.

The term *jivan-mukta* is used to denote the Sage who lives in the body even after God-realization. The *jivan-mukta*, in other words, is man – become – God, a window opening on the infinite, being of God, a living synthesis of saint and mystic. Drawing the characteristics of *jivan-mukta*, Warriar Krishna quotes *The Bhagvata Gita*:

People do not shrink from him; nor does he shrink from them. He is free from the passing moods of elation, resentment, fear and indignation. He is autonomous, *anapeksa*, renouncing both good and evil (Therefore) he is the same to friend and foe alike, unmoved by honour and dishonor. Content with whatever comes his way, he has no fixed abode. (However) his mind is steadfast. Above all he is a lover, loving all with the love of god. [Warriar – 208-209]

Govindan Nair is such *jivan-mukta* who is endowed with magnanimity. He combines in him – the vastness, serenity and depth of the sea, wisdom of the cat, surrender of the kitten, glory like the bilva tree, reasoning and creativity. His presence alone holds the power to radically transform souls bringing them untold peace. Illustration is provided in the novel through the encounter of Govindan Nair with Lakshmi in the clinic of Shiva Shankar Pillai. Through selfless actions inspired by love and purity and the sublime as motivation, he succeeds in attaining total unification with the supreme. The difference between him and Pai lies in their mode of perception. While the latter's actions suffer from a feeling of attachment, the former wins through detachment, initiating his disciple into the secret world of the self.

The stage of Pai's spiritual development is through the Female Principle i.e. Shantha; the second stage is the protective motherhood as embodied in the cat. Feline grace help Pai to realize the Ultimate Reality. For Boothlingam Iyer, the boss and other clerks, the rats exist and cat is only a 'meow-meow' business. It simply implies that they live in a world of illusion and miserably fail to appreciate the grace of the cat. The novel focuses on the cat, an apotheosis of the Female Principle. The Mother-Cat, Shantha, Lakshmi and even Usha are the embodiments of the Female Principle. In them there is a woman in the form of a mother, beloved, sister and daughter. Pai is thrilled to discover this principle:

Man is protected. You could not be without a mother. You are always a child. The wife is she who makes you the child. That is why our children resemble us men. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 33]

Pai builds a house and passes through a mystic experience and is blessed with grace. The middle category between the initiated one, Govindan Nair and the uninitiated one, Ramkrishna Pai, is that of Shantha and Usha. With their feminine wisdom, which is close to the feline, they understand Nair to some extent. Believing in whole hearted surrender, Shantha's capitulation towards Pai is total and 'complete'. Like a true member of the Nair community, she 'worships' her man. She is a combination of mother-wife and devotee for Pai. Parameswaran observes,

... a devotee, who has all the attributes of *Shakti* what is she but a goddess? Woman worships her man. *Shakti* always worships Shiva. Here Pai, like Rama, becomes Shiva and worthy of worship because the woman makes him so. [Parameswaran – 169]

Shantha becomes instrumental in leading Pai to salvation. Like Govindan Nair, the lady becomes instrumental in the hero's perception of Reality. It is Shantha who convinces him to his love for cats. Like Maitreyi, the learned wife of sage Yagnyavalkya, she instructs him into the realm of knowledge and liberates him from the constraints of particularity.

The title *The Cat and Shakespeare* is symbolic. As mentioned earlier the story first appeared under the title 'The Cat' in Chelsa Review New York (No.5 summer 1959). 'Shakespeare' was added later and the story was published under the new title *The Cat and Shakespeare* in 1965. The use of 'Shakespeare' in the title has raised a controversy among critics.

Significance of the title *The Cat and Shakespeare*

If one looks into the highly complex metaphysical nature of the composition of the book, it may not be difficult to connect the 'Cat' and 'Shakespeare' or to trace the relationship of the absolute symbolized by the mother cat with the sage (as *sadhaka*) symbolized by Shakespeare. Divine grace, which is the pivotal theme of this novel, has kinship to the several themes employed by Shakespeare in his last plays, more especially in *The Tempest*. The inclusion of Shakespeare in the title can be justified in more than one way. The use of Shakespeare as a symbol finds an added justification in the suggestion that like a cat, he also is a great mystery. This is echoed in the enigmatic personality of Govindan Nair whose comments and declarations often are ambiguous. Nair's profound knowledge is at par with the philosophy embodied in the plays of the dramatist. According to M. K. Naik,

The addition of Shakespeare to the title was an afterthought but several significant suggestions such as 'the Mousetrap' in *Hamlet*, Nair's parody of the 'To be or not to be', soliloquy and his style which is described as a mixture of *The Vicar of Wakefield and Shakespeare* and the general Shakespeare enigma of which Arnold's 'Other abode the question: Thou art free' is an effective statement link up the cat and the Bard. [Naik -172]

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Pai's journey towards the Ultimate Reality, his progress and achievement of the destined goal is presented through many symbols. Rajesh K. Pallan remarks,

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* the myths, and symbols emerge as the creative mode of his technique to convey. *Advaita – Vedanta* – the total surrender and resignation to the will of god to achieve the ideal of knowledge. [Pallan – 62]

Pai's illness "an unknown phenomenon of physiological eruption" appears as strange boils all over his body, burst like 'country eggs'. Govindan Nair calls them 'British boils' which significantly implies deeper truth. As the omniscient guide in Indian philosophy, he is supposed to be familiar with every detail of both past and present lives of his disciple. Starting from the *Kanthapura* – world, the west has always been a symbol of evil for Rao. Moorthy viewed the British as powerful symbols of hatred and hypocrisy. The boy attempted to annihilate ego in order to love the enemy, as directed by the Mahatma.

In the next book, Ramaswamy is trapped in the chimera of the west-born Madeleine. A conscious – sustained effort to transport him to the pristine purity of his culture resulted in the eruption of evil. Signifying an external manifestation of the inner dross, it assumed the form of British boils. According to Yogavashishtha, the twin ways of transcending the mind are *yoga* and *jnana*. Yoga envisages the withholding of all individual functions and directing the entire energy to the apperception of consciousness and an evolution from the finite to infinite. Experiences of several future lives get compressed into the least possible number of births of this process is consciously and deliberately followed.

Ramaswamy has to bear the pain of tuberculosis and later, the eruption of British buboes afflicts Ramkrishna Pai. The ailment, in this case, is internal. The hero perceives it externalized. Exterminating his evil, the disease purifies him of the dross. He gets easily cured as his neighbour, who believes in fighting evil through evil, applies 'horse-dung medicine' Moreover it demonstrates Pai's unperturbed awareness that in the journey to the Absolute, pain is an inescapable stage for purgation of individual body and mind. This education provides him stamina to bear the suffering serenely.

THE THREE GUNAS (ATTRIBUTES) KNOWN AS SATTVA, RAJAS AND TAMAS.

The three stories of the house are symbolic of the three *gunas* (attributes) known as *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The first is suggestive of flawless purity that helps man achieve self-identification and urges man to real happiness and wisdom. *Rajas* is suggestive of cupidity and attachment. *Tamas* is suggestive of ignorance, error, sloth, inactivity and sleep. Those who are able to triumph over *Rajas* and *Tamas* are established in *Sattva* and they rise to higher regions i.e. heaven. People of *Rajasic* nature stay in the middle (i.e. mortal world) and persons of *Tamasic* nature are rooted in beast like terror and sloth. It is through the triumph of *Sattva* over *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* forces that a man can think of realizing the ultimate Reality. Pai's house building activity on the spiritual level indicates Pai's journey towards the Ultimate Reality after crossing the stages of *Rajas* and

Tamas. The name of his house 'Kamla Bhavan' is symbolic of purity. Kamla and Saraswati are two consorts of Lord Vishnu, Preserver of the Universe.

The storey in the structure may be linked to two stages of metaphysical evolution in man's life. Ramkrishna Pai is, with the help of Govindan Nair and Shantha, able to construct two storeys which can be equated to the two ways of realizing the Ultimate Reality or *Brahman* who is both *Sagun* (having attributes) and *Nirguna* (attributers) i.e. one who can be explained in relation to the sensuous world and the other who cannot be perceived world and the other who cannot be perceived through senses.

In the case of Ramkrishna Pai, the narrator, he has to pass through the two stages, viz., the feminine wisdom embodied in Shantha and Feline Wisdom embodied in Mother Cat. It is Shantha (the feminine wisdom), that makes him realize that without her it is impossible to understand the Ultimate Reality. Shantha for Pai represents the first stage of building a house, symbolic of the quest of self-knowledge. Pai's love for Shantha is symbolic of *Sagun* stage and through this he can comprehend the Ultimate Reality i.e. Mother Cat (*Nirguna* Ultimate Reality).

The 'tree' standing by the wall represents the 'cosmic tree'. Existing as a benediction in disguise for the devotee, the trefoil leaves indicates divine trinity in Hinduism: Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Shiva (the Destroyer). Like other symbols in the novel this also carries several layers of meanings. The falling of the trefoil leaves indicates the bestowal of grace on Pai. Simultaneously, the tree stands for birth, growth and death. Pregnant Shantha, Usha and Shridhar are occasionally seen standing beneath this very tree.

The 'wall' is significant motif. Standing for the veil of maya or illusion, demarcating appearance from reality, it divides the house of Ramkrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. Those who succeed in crossing it, attain the vision of the Beatitude. Rao emphasized that by 'jumping over it' reality can be attained because by doing it, the illusion of the apparent evident wall is transcended. In other words, the counterpoint to maya exists within itself. The wall becomes a positive as well as negative symbol. Regarded as an exigent obstruction, the barrier negatively epitomizes the ignorance which impedes the worshipper's progress. But Govindan Nair's perception of this hindrance as non-existent cancels its importance as an object which retards progress. Ambivalent feelings towards this structure perplex even the protagonist of the novel who says:

What a will-o'-the-wisp of wall it is, going from nowhere to nowhere, tile-covered, bulging, and obstreperous, it seems like the sound heard and not the word understood. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 14]

Sustained effort is therefore required for the *sadhaka* to overcome this particular deterrent. The sincere *bhakta* has to consciously make effort to get blessings from divine power invested in the symbolic animal. This highlights benevolence, compassion and generosity of mother cat which encourages seekers of knowledge with grace and magnanimity.

Pai is imparted the realization quite accidentally. The vision of the cat carrying its kittens one by one draws him towards it and he crosses the wall. He says:

That was the first time I went across the wall. I found a garden all rosy and gentle. There were bowers and many sweet-smelling herbs, there were pools and many orchids that smelled from distance. There were old men with beards as long as their knees, and they talked to no one. Young men were in green turbans and others, children and women, sang or danced to no time but to the tune of trees... The air was so like a mirror you just walked toward yourself. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 100]

Supreme Knowledge

He has a vision of the supreme stage of self-realization. His destiny being guided by the Mother Cat, he is conducted into 'eternity' and this seeker views life anew wherein all contradictions got dissolved. Ramkrishna Pai's experience becomes similar to Nair's as they both attain mental compatibility with the cosmic mind, putting an end to all diversities. This mystic glimpse is an onward development in the spiritual pilgrimage of the quester. The journey may not literally be associated with physicality. It is a state of mind which the seeker achieves. In this respect, he resembles Nachiketas, the son of sage Vajashravasa Gautama who, on his father's command, unhesitatingly proceeded to the abode of Yama. Nachiketas reached his

destination in spirit and was imparted Supreme Knowledge by the God after much deliberation. Raja Rao explains the episode thus:

... Nachiketas begged: "Tell me tell me, Sir, what is Death ... Yama could not answer such an august, terribly occult question ... How could he reveal himself? What then would remain of the world?" [*The Meaning of India* – 182]

This bestowal of grace upon the uninitiated disciple in a prelude to a richer vision follows, when Pai walks behind the Mother Cat like a mesmerized kitten. Similar to the mythical lad – Nachiketas – the hero in the novel, too, is a willing recipient. Led by Shakti, he ascends the staircase to behold the 'divine'.

I saw nose (not the nose) and eyes seeing eyes, I saw ears curved to make sound visible, and face and limbs rising in perfection of perfection, for form was it. I saw love yet knew not its name but heard it as sound. I saw truth not as fact but as ignition.... Where was I? Death said it had died. I had killed death. When you see death as death, you kill it. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 101]

Ramkrishna Pai's shift from house to the garden constitutes the significance of the pilgrim's progress from Time to Eternity. Pai, led by the mother cat, arrives at the garden and is blessed with the vision of the Supreme.

Conclusion

Ramkrishna Pai, thus passes through many phases in his journey towards the Supreme, ultimately reaches his goal. He is transformed from a *Sadhaka* to *bhakta* who is surrendered to the God, as a kitten to the Mother Cat. The seeker, when he confronts Reality, knows no fear. As Nachiketas was liberated and Yama ushered him into the nature of the Self, likewise Ramkrishna Pai, attains salvation. Here too, when the quester crosses the barrier of finite knowledge, there is an elevation in spirit. Even death could not frighten the aspirant at that point of time. The mystical experience permeates his being as he learns the lesson of renunciation. Ramkrishna Pai learns that the real understanding implies a merger of the self with the object of perception. He now gauges the importance of his Guru's acts and statements. As he says,

This was that Govindan Nair meant. This is what Usha meant when she said she saw Shridhar. [*The Cat and Shakespeare* – 101]

It is significant that Ramkrishna Pai does not leap across the wall voluntarily; he is 'carried away', like Govindan Nair, by his destiny, "as a kitten is by a cat".

The Cat and Shakespeare probes the Guru – disciple paradigm in the best manner. The Guru, Nair instructs the disciple into the subtle understanding of life through humour and equipoise of psyche. To sum up the discussion of quest of Pai in *The Cat and Shakespeare* it would be ideal to quote Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who too sums up his discussion of the novel thus,

Finally *The Cat and Shakespeare* is a metaphysical comedy even as Dante's 'Paradise' is the conclusion of his *Divine Comedy*. If there are glimpses of Inferno's circles in *Kanthapura* and of Purgatory's slopes in *The Serpent and the Rope*, in *The Cat and Shakespeare* we are whirled up by winged words and shown of 'death of death' and the efflorescence of the perfect perfection of Love, Truth and Harmony in Ramkrishna Pai's beautiful vision. [Iyengar – 411]

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