FICTIONALIZATION OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE NOVELS OF RAJA RAO

ABSTRACT

THESIS
SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
Doctor of Philosophy
IN
ENGLISH

BY
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Under the Supervision of
Dr. Kaniz Khwaja Ahmed

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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ABSTRACT

Raja Rao has been acknowledged as a writer with a mission. It will however be a misconception to regard him an ideologue or social reformer. Selecting the medium of fiction because of ready access, Rao wove into its fabric his metaphysical patterns of thought. The resultant product became so steeped in philosophy that critics were swept into labelling him a metaphysicist. An ardent believer in Indian culture and ethos Raja Rao considered novel writing as a personal and private endeavour. His novels embodied Rao's own journey into metaphysical regions of Truth, being and divinity. Aiming to combine together a probe into the singular human psyche; his own vital and significant contact with metaphysics; and the profound 'Indian experience', Rao sought a medium for communication. The fiction format offered him a suitable apparatus wherein he felt free to experiment with these preoccupations. The novel form and its components-theme, character, plot, dialogue, provided the essential structure into which Raja Rao wove his entire metaphysical principle of initiation, awareness, surrender, worship, perception, realisation and enlightenment. The flexibility of the genre
allowed him any amount of liberty. Hence characters were realised as thought processes, plots became negligible and themes supplied the vehicle for metaphysics. Situations, incidents, interrelationships, analogies, mythical patterns formed the human framework. Yet it would be incorrect to study Rao's novels from any one particular angle. Metaphysics and fiction narrative can therefore not be examined in isolation, excluding his personal and literary compulsions. The 'Indian experience' comprising of spirit, body, being, existence, male-female principle, illusion-reality, rituals, beliefs, multiple dieties, mentor-votaries, traditions, festivals, permeate the fabric of his work. Rao also lays bare the individual psyche through a pastiche of techniques, and matters of religion and spirit form the core or backbone. It is in this manner that Raja Rao fictionalizes philosophy. This thesis proposes to assess Rao and the corpus of his work with specific intention of establishing him in his rightful place as a writer of fiction. The novels chosen are interpreted in relation to his non-fictional piece - *The Meaning of India*. This particular work which is a collection of essays, articles and interviews delivered by Rao from time to time, contains the essential themes of his novels. It
can easily be treated as index to Raja Rao's fictional and metaphysical principle. The study consists of five chapters.

Chapter One has been devoted to an enumeration of prominent metaphysical motifs in Rao's fiction. The novels cannot be studied merely as works of literature because their ethos is deeply rooted in Indian culture, religion and Vedantic philosophy. Hence effort has been made to explain the significant religious preoccupations of Rao. The chapter takes note of Sankaracharya and Ramanuja schools of thought. Concepts of duality, maya, bhakti, sadhana, male and female principle also find mention. The primary source for these motifs has been Rao's *The Meaning of India* which has copious references to religious texts, Upanishads, Vedanta, Buddhist and Jainist scriptures, myths and philosophies. In addition to these, it is also a summary of the novelist's own deductions and probes into vital issues of existence. Thematic links can also be established between Rao's major novels and essays included in this book. For purpose of analysis, this thesis selects four novels.

*Kanthapura*, Rao's first major contribution to Indo-anglian fiction, deals with an individual and collective struggle to recognise the Self. The single individual whom Rao
christens Moorthy moves in and out of Rao's subsequent novels. He grows, develops perception and for purpose of identification gets new names. The revolutionary uprising against the British and the deification of Gandhi are Rao's significant metaphors. The novel traces the struggle between good and evil. It also displays the trauma of the common man. Kanthapura is Raja Rao's statement in nonconformism. It asserts the novelist's break with the traditional novel form and recreates the ambience of Indian vernacular tradition. Chapter two analyses this novel as experiment in the novel genre.

Comrade Kirillov becomes the subject of Chapter three. Rao wrote the novel in 1956 but its formal publication came only after The Cat and Shakespeare. Thematically therefore the novel remains an enigma. The unconventional nature of the novel extends to its hero and fiction technique. The oral tradition of Kanthapura is replaced by compounding of several methods, prominent being stream of consciousness. The thesis also aims at solving the 'essential paradox' of the novel so as to restore it to its rightful place as sequel to Kanthapura. The thesis aims at tackling the riddle of its central character who evades probe because of sheer ambiguity of delineation.
Chapter Four aims at an indepth study of character and theme-related issues in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Steeped in Indian metaphysics, the novel consciously and consistently strives to define the concepts of maya, duality and 'ardhanarishwara'. The protagonist who had travelled through ignorance, scepticism, indecision and moral dilemma in the earlier novels, becomes a 'sadhaka' by choice and after going through experiential reality decides to search for a mentor. He realises that the journey to Ultimate Reality can be accomplished with not just 'jnana'. Guidance from an enlightened guru is a necessary feature of sadhana. The novel reveals the multiple manifestations of maya and also asserts that right knowledge helps the quester to recognise its ephemeral status. *The Serpent and the Rope* is inconclusive and sweeping in its ambit and becomes a prologue to the last work of fiction chosen for attention.

*The Cat and Shakespeare* is perhaps the culmination of Rao's metaphysical principle. Picking up the thematic movement from the previous novel, it gradually uncovers the relationship between the realised guru and the inexperienced, though initiated 'sadhaka'. The formless vision of Gandhi seen by Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is finally given a shape and a name.
Govindan Nair, the charismatic enigma who combines the qualities of the 'Cat' and 'Shakespeare', becomes Rao's locus standi. He helps Pai, the protagonist of this work, to reach the threshold of enlightenment. After this there is a subtle shift of focus from the guru to the sadhaka. The study aims at relating the primary symbols to the novel's theme of bhakti yoga.

The thesis strives to simplify the ambiguity of Raja Rao's fictional exercise. It asserts that the metaphysical postulate which accounts for Raja Rao's abstruseness has been very successfully woven into a fictional framework. The unique nature of this support system imparts to Raja Rao's novels a remarkable freshness. The demands of his inspirational material required an unconventional expression. Hence each novel becomes a new experiment in fiction writing. It is to be hoped that this study will add significantly to the existing scholarship on Raja Rao.
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Dedicated
To
My Parents
Medha Sachdev has worked under my supervision for her doctoral thesis entitled Fictionalization of Indian Philosophy in the novels of Raja Rao. To the best of my knowledge the work is original and her own.

(Kaniz Khawaja Ahmed)
Supervisor
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Medha Sachdev
Introduction
Raja Rao, universally acknowledged as a novelist of philosophical consciousness, has intrigued critics in both India and abroad. The metaphysics in his novels which is generally construed to be Vedantic, led a number of scholars to interpret his work from an exclusively Vedantic point of view. Such readings tend to severely limit the range of a novelist's vision and genius. Though Rao believed in Indian culture and ethos, he regarded novel-writing as a private endeavour at exploring the human psyche. This study aims to probe into the profound 'Indian experience' which Rao converts into narrative, "fictionalizing" it, as it were, through the medium of his novels. The experience, as it unravels, is narrated as fiction. The term 'fictionalize' therefore, by no means, undermines the spiritual content of the experience. This study strives to discuss the body of Rao's work as narrative exercises in creating fiction. The work is found profoundly absorbed in essential tenets of metaphysics. However, Rao's novels remain literary pieces despite this depth and its strong current of ideological references. Explaining his literary impulse in choice of English as communicative medium in an article entitled "In Search of My Bride" in *The Meaning of India*, Raja Rao observes:

> English remained the one language with its great tradition... and its unexplored riches capable of catalysing my impulses and giving them a near native sound and structure... To stretch the English idiom to suit my needs seemed heroic enough for my urgent most demands.¹

Rao continues that he was trying to integrate Sanskrit tradition with contemporary intellectual heroism in terms of both language and structure.

The novelist has elicited a lot of critical response. There are prominent trends in Rao criticism from purely fictional, mythical and
metaphysical angles. Interest in the novelist picked up with the publication of Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* in 1962. Iyengar wants Rao bracketed with Anand and Narayan in contemporaneity and choice of themes, yet, marks Rao's prose as fresh and exclusively his own. Also that, though the action of his novel - *The Serpent and the Rope* extends to France and England, the roots of identity are effectively tethered to the strong, yet invisible bonds of traditional Hindu culture.\(^2\)

Iyengar's study of Rao's fiction set the trend for further critical appraisals, spearheaded by scholars such as Sharma, Shiva Niranjan, Paul Sharrad, Sudarshan Sharma, Esha Dey and Rama Jha. A spate of articles and books on varied aspects of Rao's fiction appeared. They dealt with themes, technique, metaphysics, influences, inter-relation between east and west and short stories. Notable critics such as Jha and Sharma trace the impact of Gandhian philosophy on Rao's fiction. Others such as Prasad, probe the novels from the point of view of Self. Rangra in an interview questioned Rao on subjects of love, relationship and Advaita Vedanta. Several others such as Mukherjee, Tikoo, Narsingh Srivastava contributed copiously to Rao scholarship. Probes are still continuing on subjects and areas of query related to Rao's fiction.

Novel as genre came to India with the British. The Indo-anglian form did not appear till the 1920's. Prose of a non-fictional variety motivated by extra literary impulses, political protests, social reforms, existed in abundance. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a number of writers, leaders, reformers, artists, saints and thinkers such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Manmohan
Ghose, Aurobindo Ghose, Sarojini Naidu and Vivekananda, emerged with innovative creative writing in English language. These writings were characterized by Victorian ideals and romantic diction. Novel as a genre started gaining ascendency in prominent Indian languages during this time.

Raja Rao began his career as writer of fiction in the 1930s. Along with other Indo-anglian novelists, he debunked the high-flown diction of the earlier writers and started experimenting with an Indo-English language capable of transmitting a flavour of the vernacular. His literary career began with the novel - Kanthapura in 1938. After nine years, the next book, a collection of short stories entitled - The Cow of the Barricades appeared. Again, there was an unusually long silence of over thirteen years. The Serpent and the Rope, his second significant novel brought him recognition for its novelty of content, nature and scope. It was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. This was followed by The Cat and Shakespeare which was termed as a "metaphysical comedy". There was a gap of five years between these two major works. The next novel - Comrade Kirillov was published after eleven years. A collection of short stories entitled - The Policeman and the Rose, followed. The first part of a trilogy - The Chessmaster and His Moves was completed in 1988 and the same year, Rao was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for literature. He was also elected a fellow of the Sahitya Akademi.

Raja Rao, a member of an orthodox brahmin family, was born in Mysore in 1909. Close association of his family to the Vedantin king of Mysore, Krishna Raja, gave him both his name and calling. He spent the formative years with a spiritually enlightened grandfather, Ramakrishna, who
taught Rao, the Upanishads and the Amara. Thus, in a way, he inherited both
the Vedanta and Indian philosophy from the elders of his family. Rao received
early education at Madrassa-Aliya, Hyderabad and Muslim University at
Aligarh. Desire to know Truth urged him to make intensive study of ancient
Indian philosophy and literature. In 1928, he left for France, with the
specific aim of researching on western mysticism. This deep reading of
Indian and western history and philosophy provided his fiction a sound base
and foundation. The short story collection - The Policeman and the Rose,
was completed when he was in France. The French literary scene at that time
was dominated by two prominent writers - Valery and Gide. Their influence
appears apparent in Rao's stories. Rao observes :

A South-Indian Brahmin, nineteen, spoon-fed on
English, with just enough Sanskrit to know I knew
little, with an indiscrete education in Kannada, my
mother-tongue, the French literary scene
overpowered me.

In a letter to Naik, Rao confesses :

I wanted to become a monk in France. I came under
the influence of a character, Alceste, in Moliere's
play Le Misanthrope. I thought France was the place
where people only spoke the truth. So I went there.
But it took me about a week to find out that it was
not so; I became Indian immediately afterwards, I
was such an orthodox Brahmin, though I went to a
Muslim Public School... I was also interested in
spiritual matters. I wanted to become a 'sanyasi'. So I
went to France.

The young Vedantin was influenced by several thinkers. Of them, Andre
Malraux finds mention in his The Meaning of India. Rao observes :

The only living writer who has influenced me is
Andre Malraux. Not merely his novels, important as
they are, but his aesthetic essays that have a metaphysical acuity and importance that will outlast most of what has appeared in our times.6

During this time, yet another well known public figure was creating waves because of personal charisma. Rao registered this impact and his interviews and articles are replete with references to the ideology of the demi - god of his times - Gandhi. Rao's first exposure to the teachings of Gandhi came through the reading of My Experiments with Truth which as he discloses :

......appeared week after week in the Young India.7

The Gandhi fever carried Rao to the ashram at Sevagram where he came in contact with the Indian leader. Certain significant radical principles of his ideology like 'satyagraha', 'ahimsa', 'Truth', 'non-conformism' attracted the novelist to such an extent that he used them not only as backdrops and motifs, but established their superiority over other modes of thought. During this stay in India, Raja Rao took part in various intellectual activities. In 1939, he co-edited an anthology of writings of modern Indian intellectuals including Raja Rammohan Roy and Jawaharlal Nehru.8 In 1964, he became an active member of a cultural organisation in South India9 which promoted the revival of ancient Indian culture. He also became a member of Chetana, a centre started by intellectuals and litterateurs at Bombay.10 The cultural centre gave training in classical dances and also published and sold books on hinduism. Later, Raja Rao launched a project on Gandhi which, he said, was going to be :

an exposition of the spiritual aspect of Gandhian thought.11

Rao was "associated with the underground activities of the young socialist
leaders" during the Quit India Movement. His literary career began in earnest under the influence of Gandhi. The impact of the ideologue is evident in his very first serious novel - *Kanthapura*. As Gandhi became part of twentieth century Indian sensibility, a host of other Indo-anglian novelists consciously or unconsciously registered it in their writings.

Indo-anglian fiction, in its nascent stage, developed in the form of historical romances. During the pre-independence period, the safest form of patriotism open to Indians was celebration of past glory. With the advent of twenties and thirties the novelist ceased to feel fascinated by heroes so far removed in time. Contemporary struggles and current agitations became backdrop for novels. Fiction concerning social realism was also inspired by political events as any desire to improve the condition of common man got inextricably linked to national issues. There was hardly any fiction of abiding value, even though preoccupation with the motherland continued. The post-independence era introduced new themes. The earlier interest in social reform waned, making way for a deeper probe into individual psyche and need for self-awareness.

Among Rao's contemporaries, both Anand and Narayan portray social realities in graphic detail. With profound concern for social problems, Anand championed the cause of the underdog in Indian society. He raised his powerful and recognised voice against exploitation of the poor and weak, scathingly criticising social institutions, temples, charity houses, government offices, laws and even religion. Anand is a historian and painter of his age and his novels cover the period before and after freedom struggle.
Narayan, also a contemporary of Rao, differs from Anand in choice of subject-matter and theme. He was neither a social reformer, nor a writer committed to metaphysics. His characters and settings were drawn from the urban middle class of south Indian towns. Critics feel that Malgudi, the real hero of Narayan's novels, was a fictional world created on the pattern of Hardy's legendary Wessex. It provided an ideal setting to the human drama which develops and unfolds through his novels. Like Jane Austen, he also stays within limited range of vision. Drawing only human beings in the context of personal relations, flavoured by his hallmark humour, Narayan made no attempt to depict man in relation to God, politics or abstract ideals.

Anita Desai and Arun Joshi were both concerned with the impact of modern values on traditional precepts and moral certitudes. The human being in their fictional world was threatened with the spectre of becoming lifeless automation or a robot. With gradual loss of religious faith, he was spiritually displaced, culturally uprooted, self-estranged and socially alienated. Both Desai and Joshi analyse the anguish of this disjuncted consciousness. Joshi admits that his novels deal with the sense of uprootedness of the contemporary Indian. Desai's writings also deal with the predicament of modern man. She explores modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease with its own self. Emphasizing the need for perceiving one's own individual truth, Desai's novels display this experience in every facet of human existence.

However, Raja Rao made a conscious choice to explore the deep recesses of human mind. The probe was neither rooted in psychology nor emotions. It instead selected a more subtle level of consciousness which pertained to the human spirit. Rao's novels examine aspects of the sensibility
which involved being, faith and belief. His writings invariably manifest his quest for Truth. The novelist observes:

I have abandoned literature for good and gone over to metaphysics.\(^{13}\)

The novelist realised that literature is also a spiritual experience as it is an extension of his sadhana. Therefore his writing stems from his total dedication to metaphysics. The writer, according to him, is essentially a man who strives for metaphysical experience. After spiritual realisation, the writer - sadhaka is compelled to express it and literature is created. Novel is written for the sake of the writer himself. Firmly committed to the task of fulfilling his sadhana through spiritual discipline, ardour and self-surrender, he does not practise writing as a profession. He attains sublimity through guidance from a guru capable of imparting 'drishti' to him - the sadhaka. Rao has confessed to Shiva Niranjan that his own guru had helped him glimpse spiritual glory:

If you mean sage in the sense that he has found the Truth, that would be correct. I think, I have. My 'Guru' has the compassion to show me the Truth - its naked beauty. But if you mean by that, I am ultimately there already, that is not quite true. I am trying to be what my 'Guru' taught me. So I think, the best thing would be to call me a 'sadhaka', a very serious 'sadhaka', of course.\(^{14}\)

Through personal experience, Rao discovered that the inner essence of man seeks Truth and strives for merger with the Ultimate Reality. The incessant search for the Absolute thus became the theme - song of Raja Rao's novels. Modelled on Indian epics, they are rooted in the Advaita Darshan of Sankaracharya.
Thought, philosophy, belief, felt-experience and diverse religious influences form the basic data of Rao's creative psyche where no boundaries exist. The traditional framework may be restrictive but Rao's genius penetrates through the apparent to grasp the inner core of reality. Truth being Truth remains the same despite its manifestations. Intensive readings, felt experiences were all Rao's voyages of discovery into the nature of Truth, differences between appearance and reality, existence, being and death related issues. Being a sadhaka by nature, Rao was insatiated in his appetite for knowledge. The resultant insight inspired greater cognizance.

Given this basic perception and inclination towards religion and philosophy, Rao could have become a model philosopher had he not chosen literature as a mode of expression. The novel form suited his purpose. The format of fiction readily provided Rao with framework for his philosophical probes. The components of the novel form - characters, situations, incidents, interrelationships and analogies supplied the human angle and each work became instrument, furthering his experiment with Truth. The novels provided structural framework for his innermost thoughts and belief patterns.

It is the intention of this thesis to explore, through detailed analysis, the fictional world of Rao in order to discover the manner in which he very successfully fictionalizes the philosophical leanings of his psyche. Four major novels have been chosen for analysis. The first chapter deals with the prominent philosophical motifs in Rao's fiction. For the purpose of inquiry and correlation, one major non-fictional work - *The Meaning of India* has been treated as virtual index. It was felt that the essence of each novel is
derived from essays and articles wherein Rao categorically explained metaphysical issues which serve as vital thematic preoccupations in the four novels. The placement of Comrade Kirillov within the framework of Rao's fiction chronology also needed attention. The thesis proposes to restore the novel to its correct place in the novelist's journey into Truth. The recent book The Chessmaster and His Moves has not been referred to for the simple reason that it is the first part of a trilogy which is still incomplete. Therefore the thesis should be read for its contribution to literature, particularly Indian writing in English. It explores the profound depths of Hindu philosophy. However, how the thought is converted into literature will need the reading of the dissertation itself.

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4. op.cit., p. xv.
10. op.cit.


Some Fundamental Indian Philosophical Motifs
Indian philosophy is no mere speculation into the nature of reality. It is a sublime and unique system based on mystic and spiritual experience or 'aparokshanubhuti'. Dealing as it does with the practical needs of man, it gives clear solutions to profound subtle problems of life and reveals the way to final emancipation. In the words of Sri Swami Krishnananda, a great philosopher saint,

Philosophy is the study of the ultimate nature of things. It is the investigation into the final cause or causes of all phenomena. Philosophy is not a theory but a vision of life (darsana). A philosopher is not concerned with human beings alone: his concern is with all creation. His thought has to reflect the 'total' import of existence in its togetherness. The function of philosophy is to go into the deeper roots of all human thought.\(^1\)

With intuitive perception in Truth, the rishis and sages of India founded certain philosophical systems. According to traditional classification of established schools of Indian philosophy, there are two sects: orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox system numbers six and signify the six 'ways of looking' at Truth. They are: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva-Mimamsa and Uttara-Mimamsa or Vedanta. This school manifests ultimate authority in Vedas. The heterodox system consists of Charvaka's materialistic school, Jainism and Buddhism namely presentationists or Vaibhashikas, representationists or Sautrantikas, idealists or Yogacharas and nihilists or Madhyamikas. Vedas do not figure as their reference point.
Philosophy permeating through Raja Rao's novels is generally held to be Vedantic in tone and temper. Being a Vedantin, he seeks Truth on the lines of 'Advaitavada' (the philosophy of Monism) and frequently refers to the precepts from the Upanishads. To him, writing is a visible expression of his deeply-felt spiritual experiences. Duly recognising man's deep need to seek and realize Truth, he endeavours to revive the traditional Indian quest with all its rigour. The Upanishads form the last section of the Vedas and hence, are called 'Vedanta'. Thus, Vedantic doctrines such as 'Advaita Vedanta' of Sankara, Nagarjuna's theory of Void and the hindu and Buddhist tantric overtones recurrently appear in Rao's writings. A study of Upanishad aids in attainment of knowledge and realization. 'Upa' means 'near' and 'shad' means 'to sit'. The medium of this exercise is the shared bond and closeness to the guru or spiritual preceptor. The whole edifice of the hindu mystic culture in India rests upon the Upanishads. They are the fountainhead of deep divine esoteric knowledge which provides freedom from earthly bondage. The practical hints and essential clues embodied within these metaphysical treatises throw abundant light on the path to self-realization. Knowledge of the Upanishads destroys ignorance and materialistic leanings present in the mind of the aspiring sadhaka. It helps him attain knowledge of Brahman, enfeebling the pain caused by births and rebirths. The sublime thought, fascinating form and delightful dialogue that characterise these Upanishads have ravished the minds and souls of even western thinkers. Schopenhauer, who read a translation of Upanishads, declared:

From every sentence deep, original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit ... In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so
beneficial and so elevating as that of 'Upanikhat'. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death.

Another German thinker, Deussen, underlined the importance of Upanishadic thought in the following words:

The sparks of philosophic light, appearing in the Rig-Veda, shine out brighter and brighter until at last in the Upanishads they burst into that bright flame which is able to light and warm us today.

The Advaita philosophy of Sankaracharya forms the core of Raja Rao's fictional world. The first exponent of Advaita was Gaudapada, the 'paramaguru' of Sri Sankara. Sankaracharya expounded the Advaita philosophy in its final form, imparting to it impeccable perfection. The quintessence of Sankaracharya's philosophy has been summed up by himself in half a verse thus:

'Brahma Satyam Jagan - Mithya
Jivo Brahmaiva Naparah'

Brahman (the Absolute) alone is real; this world is unreal; the Jiva or the individual soul is essentially non-different from Brahman.

Sankaracharya's Supreme Brahman is impersonal, 'nirguna' (above attributes), 'nirakara' (formless), 'nirvishesha' (with no need for special characteristics), immutable, eternal and 'akarta' (non-agent). Brahman being no 'object', is beyond the reach of the eyes (adrishya). Hence it is that the Upanishads declare: "'neti', 'neti' - not this, not this". This does not, however, imply that Brahman is a non-existent non-entity. It only suggests 'oneness'-non-duality. Sankaracharya said:

'Advayataiva Shiva'
Non-duality alone is auspicious.

3
In *Upadesha Sahasriyam*, he proclaimed:

As it is the self of everything, not different from anything, and not an object like a thing separate from it, the self cannot be accepted or rejected.⁴

To Acharya Sankara, the world is no illusion but relatively real (vyavaharika satta), while Brahman is absolutely real (paramarthika satta). The world is the product of maya or avidya which makes the unchanging Brahman manifest as the changing world. God, the conjurer, creates the world through magic and jugglery (maya). As an intrinsic power of God it cannot be distinguished from Him just as burning is inseparable from the power of fire. Maya is neither real nor unreal nor both (sadasadvilakshana). In order to make its conception more intelligible to ordinary mind, he gives the analogy of ‘sarpa-rajju-bhranti’. The superimposition of a snake-image on a rope does not in reality convert the rope into a reptile. Even so, we superimpose the world on Brahman through our nescience. No sooner is the darkness removed, than the object reveals the real identity. It is illusion which induces in us, belief in the world around us. ‘Avarana’ and ‘Vikshepa’ are the dual aspects of maya:

‘Saktidvayam hi mayaya
vikshepavratti rupakam’⁵

‘Avarana’ conceals reality, thus becoming its negative aspect and ‘vikshepa’, the positive aspect, projects the world on the Brahman substratum. Sankaracharya felt that belief in the apparent distances the believer from God. Perception into the true nature of appearance leads to realisation of the true reality of godhead.

Indian philosophy is essentially pantheistic in character. Along with it, there grew an empirical school which in 600 B.C. constituted the
foundation of two great unorthodox systems of thought, namely Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism is a religion of earnest, undaunted effort and faith in latent human powers. Buddha observes after his enlightenment thus:

Wide open are the gates of Immortality.
Ye that have ears to hear, release your faith.6

He preached the doctrine of love, compassion and 'ahimsa'. Rao remarks:

Buddhist peace has the quality of a river; it flows.7

The great monk attributed suffering, disharmony, discord and discontent to the impermanence of objects. The universal experience of sorrow or 'dukkha' influenced his thought. No pessimist, Buddha emphatically asserted that peace after any grief or sorrow lay within reach of every man. Avoiding the two extremes of self indulgence and self-mortification, he proclaimed:

There is a Middle Way, O recluses, avoiding these two extremes, discovered by the Tathagata - a path which opens the eyes and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana.8

The Middle Way or the 'noble eightfold path' ends all kinds of sufferings, bringing perfect everlasting peace, eternal bliss and Immortality. The great Buddhist sage Nagarjuna said that 'sunyata' or Void, in the truest sense, is the Ultimate Reality. Buddhism equates 'sunya' or Void with 'nirvana'. Void does not imply emptiness. Mahayana Buddhism states:

Void is not to be confused with nothingness, contentlessness, mere negation of existence.9

Sunya is constant, eternal, unchangeable and indestructible, hence 'nirvana'.10 It also indicates:

......all objects which we see around us, including
ourselves are Void, of Void, from Void, with Void, and in Void.\textsuperscript{11}

The Jain theory based on reason relies on the principle that God as Creator has no place in creation. The highest being in Jain philosophy is a person designated as 'tirthankara'. He is considered to be the liberated soul who, having burnt all his actions (karmas) in the fire of knowledge (jnana), has attained liberation from the whirligig of metempsychosis. The Jain philosophy bases its doctrine of Truth on absolute necessity of conquering base or dross. According to the practitioners, right faith, knowledge, conduct tempered with mercy constitute the path to nirvana. The doctrines of Jainism are best summed up in the maxim:

'\textit{Ahimsa paramo dharma}'

Non-violence to living beings is the highest religion.

Jains believe that man is born obscured by impressions of his previous births. To attain 'moksha', the individual strives to liberate himself from these traits. The free soul then ascends to the abode of 'siddhakshetra' at the top of this world.

'\textit{Live to acquire knowledge, do not acquire knowledge to live}' has been the aim of life of great thinkers of India since time immemorial. India has always been home to great seers and sages. Ideals that have shaped character of men, exalted tenets of ethics and morality that have elevated human mind to gigantic heights of divine splendour, sublime truths of spirituality that have made men divine and moulded the spiritual ideals of nations have originated in India. It goes to the credit of India, that at the dawn of civilisations, it has raised profound issues of life, questioned the limitations of human existence, and searched for solutions into realms of
Infinite Power. Answer to the riddle of existence, perception into quintessential nature and innate human destiny, knowledge of man's relation to men, universe, and the enigma of transcendence constitute the glorious heritage of India. Describing the divine glory of India, Max Muller wrote:

.... If I were asked under what sky the human mind 
..... has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life and had found solutions to some of them, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself... that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life - again I should point to India.12

The staunch faith of Indians in their gods and goddesses could be felt by Malraux who remarked:

For an Indian nothing seems impossible. The gods always worked for you.13

Remembering goddess Kali, he said:

..... goddess Kali, enormous and blood - red with the skulls.... around her waist, looking down with such terrifying benevolence at the world which she protects from every malady. One does not die in India because one has killed death.14

Indians have imposed upon themselves, disciplines that lead them to perfection. They have strictly adhered to the rhythms of the universal laws thereby discovering the road to success and achievement. Properties like simplicity of life, truth, devotion and submission to higher powers, eagerness to unfold the mysteries of life and death and curiosity to reach Ultimate Truth are all indivisible parts of the nature of Indian psyche. Subsequently they are manifested in every sphere of existence. Finding themselves more or less free from mundane worry, they concentrate and study problems of
good and evil in all aspects. They freely discuss questions of like and dislike and matter (jada) and spirit (chetana) - both within and outside themselves. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that the origin of philosophical ideas in India began with the dawn of thought at the beginning of creation. Indian wisdom, says Rao, is the purest, the highest. It is the state when “whereness is dissolved”.

Life is ‘yajna’ or sacrifice performed by the individual soul to attain unity with the Higher Soul. It includes all forms of self-abnegation and dedication. Rao believes a land civilised only when "the hearth of Agni is ever actively emergent and full of loving gifts". The culture of India is summed up in these words. As the sun dawns, the Indians commence their 'per diem' duties offering oblations to the sacred fire (Agni), the elevator of souls. Rao observed that the ritual of sacrifice is the "offering of holy objects... to a central symbol of annihilation". The external act of sacrifice reminds us that every object that is perceived with the eyes, is to be poured into the fire of knowledge - the immortal Being within us. In the masterly Purusha Sukta, the whole creation is compared to a ‘yajna’ of the Supreme Being who is above all, transcendent though immanent. It beautifully illustrates how everything came into being. Raja Rao translates from the Purusha Sukta:

The Primal man was there, indeed, even before beginning (agre) was. The devas, the gods came after him. He covered all of the become, (that is the universe) on every side, while he stayed firmly in the space, ten fingers above himself.

The universe is within Him. Nothing exists beyond Him (Purusha eva idam sarvam). It was very clear to the devotees of the Vedic age that meditation,
prayers, worship, rituals were the most efficacious means to achieve the higher goal of life. They knew how to link themselves to higher powers. "More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of", says Tennyson.

All actions thus are to be sacrificed at the altar of knowledge, the consciousness within. According to Ananda Coomaraswamy:

Sacrifice thus understood,... is no longer a matter of doing specifically sacred things only on particular occasions but of sacrificing (making sacred) all we do and all we are; a matter of sanctification of whatever is done naturally, by a reduction of all activities to their principles.20

Adhidharma Kosha (a Buddhist text) expounds that consciousness is metaphorically called self - the common factor between the seer and the seen. The fundamental nature of man is pure consciousness. Man's remoteness from God keeps him perpetually trapped in duality. He considers his body and the world around himself to be real and God as transcendental. But the moment intuitive knowledge dawns, he experiences the body to be nothing else but pure consciousness and the world to be unreal as the world. Then he perceives it as the expression of consciousness Itself and knows that God is not only transcendental consciousness but also immanent as Consciousness itself. The I-consciousness, the world-consciousness and God-Consciousness thus coalesce becoming one without a second. In the Kathopanishad, Lord Yama tells Nachiketas:

The knowing self is never born, nor does he die at any time. He sprang from nothing and nothing sprang from him. He is unborn, eternal, abiding and primaeval. He is not slain when the body is slain. Sitting, the self moves far, lying, he goes
The Self cannot be attained by scholarship, nor by clever casuistry. Only the Self can reveal the self.

(1.ii,23)

Thus the self alone is evident. The 'seeming' causality provides meaning to man's quotidian existence. The six senses make the world apparent to human eye. As the senses are sacrificed into the self, the world ceases to exist thereby revealing the Self alone. In other words, the light of the Self reveals itself when the external crust of the falsely imagined sense of doership and enjoyment is completely erased out. Denial of the multiplicity and duality of the universe alone can reveal the Atman. Rao says:

When the world is not the self, it becomes real, and becomes a nightmare; confusion is its very nature.\(^{21}\)

Human life is characterised by incessant change. The Bhagavadgita, refers to this world as 'anityam', 'asukham', 'dukhalayam', 'ashashvatam' - "Impermanent, unhappy, the abode of sorrow, transient". Indian philosophy perceives the whole universe as filled with the consciousness of divinity. Divinity here implies 'pratyagatman' or the inner self of oneself. The individual should be aware that the world is nothing more than a field of experience provided to him in order to move towards the Ultimate Truth.

The cycle of life and death, though endless, has to perorate for a realised soul. Knowledge of the Atman being identical with the Self liberates one from the cycle of births and deaths and bestows immortality. The highest aim of life and consequently of Indian philosophy is the achievement of bliss (ananda) because the world is full of miseries. Raja Rao says:

Man seeks Happiness. He may call it by many names, as Truth, Nirvana, God - the only impulse, biological
or philosophical in man, is this search for happiness. 22

No being in the universe can assert with confidence that there is no pain. Thus being tortured by the miseries of the world, the sufferer approaches the wise man and asks for the remedy to end his miseries. In this context, Rao observes:

......what man needs to reach harmony are the conditions in which this ‘essence’ of God could be made manifest, the city of God. The constructor to this city is the wise being, he the sage-king. Or what Plato calls the philosopher king. 23

The seeker is thus advised that the only way to achieve the end of miseries is the realisation of the Self. The ‘shruti’ also says:

‘Tameva viditvatimrityumeti
Nanyah pantha vidyateyanaya’

Yajurveda, 1.18

One could go beyond death only by knowing Him. No other path exists to achieve the Bliss.

The same authority also instructs the enquirer about the means to realise Truth as Yama teaches Nachiketas in the Kathopanishad:

The Self without sound, without touch and without form, is likewise without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great, abiding, by discerning That, one is freed from the face of Death. 24

The process of transcendence is termed change or death. Birth implies death and death insinuates rebirth. For Indians thus, death is no ‘swan-song’. “India”, says Rao, “is even ‘death’ to death”; it has killed death. It rejoices in the Self. The firm foundation of Indian culture has enabled it to withstand the rigours of political strifes and alien invasions. Temporary periods of
political bondage have not sullied the soul of India nor has the passage of
time diminished its glory.

Quoting from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Raja Rao says:

In the beginning there was only the self. Looking
around he saw nothing else than the self. He first
said “I am”. Therefore arose the name I.\textsuperscript{25}

All subjects and objects merge together in a state of universality in the
Supreme Being. The essential nature of man is Truth, happiness - the state of
non-duality where there is none other than oneself. The world manifests itself
through consciousness which is ever and ever 'one'. Though there is a
multitudinousness of objects, yet the knowing consciousness remains single.
It alone is responsible for the total experiences of the world. Rao states:

If the background of Consciousness were removed,
there would be no seeing and as such there would be
no form.\textsuperscript{29}

Consciousness or Atman becomes the repository of supreme unchangeable
bliss and the common factor between the seer and the seen. Pleasure
associated with perishable objects is constantly threatened. Change of
circumstances in life may alter love for objects. Still for Atman, love
persists because from the monistic standpoint, Atman alone exists in the
universe. Thus Yagnavalkya explains the nature of Brahman to Vsasta and
Kahola - that which breathes through the 'prana', that which moves downwards
through the 'apana', that which pervades through the 'vyana' and that which
goes out through the 'udana', is the "Atman which is within all".\textsuperscript{27} He further
adds that it is this realisation which makes one renounce the desire for a
son, wealth, even heaven, converting him into a mendicant.\textsuperscript{28} Yajnavalkya
instructs Maitreyi:
’Na va are Patyuh kamaya patih priyo bhavati,
atmanastu kamaya patih priyo bhavati’. 29

Know, it is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is dear but for the sake of Atman, (the Self) that the husband is dear.

Be it children, wealth, brahmin or the gods - all are loved for the sake of the Self. Saints and seers who have realized Brahman speak about Self. Duality makes one perceive the other, but in the divine splendour of Self, none other than Atman is seen. In this state, one transcends mind and senses.

Rao agrees with the fact that 'prakriti' is an illusory aspect of Brahman. God is only a witness - unconcerned and unattached. Prakriti derives its power of action from the proximity of Iswara. Lord Krishna expounds in the Bhagavadgita:

‘Mayadhyakshena prakritih
Suyate sacharacharam;
Hetunanena kaunteya
Jagadviparivartate’.

(9.10)

Because of my proximity, Prakriti produces all this, the moving and unmoving; the world therefore resolves, O son of Kunti.

Prakriti constitutes three ‘gunas’ - ‘sattva’, ‘rajas’ and ‘tamas’. An equilibrium between these properties is the state called 'prakritisaya'. But this is not the final dissolution into the Absolute. It is only a process of evolution. The Vedanta proclaims that in the beginning there existed neither 'being' nor 'non-being' but there was an indescribable something called darkness. Even this darkness would have existence for its basis because without it, even darkness would not exist. Sage Patanjali also indicates in his aphorisms that ‘avyakta’ or the unmanifest prakriti is the cause of creation. But this is not
independent in itself. It is purely an instrument in the hands of Brahman. Maya as power is the same everywhere, but appears to be different due to difference in the intensity of the manifesting medium. Thus, it is neither independent nor the same as Brahman. It is ‘anirvachaniya’ which cannot be expressed in words nor thought by the mind, because language and thought are the expressions of maya itself. The faculty of understanding is only its reflection. Thus the mind has to rise intuitively to the stature of Brahman in order to gain knowledge of this power.

Quoting from Bhartrihari’s Vakyapadiya, Raja Rao illustrates Brahman as the one:

......who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word (sabda), who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world (seems to) proceed. Brahman is called Phoneme (akshara) because It is the cause of the phoneme.30

He is also designated as 'shabda-brahman' or the sound vibration ‘Om’. The experience of this vibration as infinite bliss and pure consciousness leads to attainment of the supreme goal.

According to Raja Rao, word as pure sound emerges from silence - to which man belongs. The Mandukya Upanishad elucidates:

'So' yamatma - adhyaksaram - Omkarah'  
(Mantra 8)

This identical Atman, or Self, in the realm of sound is the syllable OM.

Om or ‘Pranava’ is the ‘pratika’ or symbol for Brahman. It is the all comprehensive name designating the all - the Atman. The Taittiriya Upanishad expounds:
It is the matrix, as if, of all sounds. All names and forms constituting the world have originated from It. Raja Rao makes a mention of the four states of self - 'jagrita', 'svapna', 'sushupti' and 'turiya'. Out of these, the first three states are compared to the three syllables of Om - 'a', 'u', 'm', 'akara' (the vibration of sound 'a'), 'ukara' (the vibration of sound 'u') and 'makara' (the vibration of sound 'm') respectively. The first quarter - 'a' is the person in the waking state who perceives the gross material world. The next - 'u' is the individual in dream state who, like in the previous state, has "seven limbs" and "nineteen apertures" and enjoys objects internally. The third position, indicated by 'm' sound, refers to deep-sleep condition. In it, a "mass of consciousness" exists, along with a "discreet, resting ego". The final state is the transcendent state of 'Om' - beyond the three syllables. It is then only a vibration of being; neither a state of sound, nor any material content in its wake. All sounds and vibrations merge in this soundless state of 'pranava' or 'Om'. Rao opines that the word is vibrant silence compounded into a momentary act. He also adds that the force of the vocable should have the power to yield what it utters. Giving the example of the word 'Rama' he says that it is not mere 'ra' added to 'ma', but something beyond both the sounds which provides it the stature of a word. If it is enunciated in a correct manner, the speaker is able to convey the same feeling to the listener in which he wants it to be understood. The word in that condition seems to possess an unchanging nature. Right communication is possible only when the hearer has the eternal part awakened in him to feel the same thing as the
speaker experiences. Communication of the transient to the transient produces jangle but the imperishable speaking to the eternal makes right communication possible. The author thus has to be an ‘upasaka’ of the word and enjoy himself in himself in order to evoke the eternal aspect of the sound. Rao states:

Man faces himself when he seeks the word.\(^\text{32}\)

The word in his opinion, exists by itself. He further remarks:

The word is Alive..... The word has membranes. It is palpitant, breathful.\(^\text{33}\)

Describing the stages of its existence he says that each word has, in the beginning, a noumenal, followed by a cosmological and finally, a phonemological reality. The word reveals itself to its ‘upasaka’, as illustrated in the following verse:

'Uta tvah parayauna dadarsha vacham
Uta tvah shrinvana shrinotyenam;
Uta tvasmai tanvam bhvi sansre jaya
Iva patya ushati suvasah.'

Many a man who sees does not discover the word,
And many a man who hears does not hear it.
Yet for another it reveals itself like
A radiant bride to her husband.\(^\text{34}\)

Rao provides different similes in order to illustrate how words may come to a writer in different ways - sometimes they may come like a lion or a doe to be recognised; some may emerge from somewhere while the writer is engrossed in himself; some words have to be evoked or sought; some even approach the writer like quiet helpers and embrace him. The meaning and the word then coalesce into ‘one’. Raja Rao puts it thus:

The poem becomes the poet. The meaning becomes the word.\(^\text{35}\)
Regarding the process of the emergence of a word, Rao holds the view that originally the word seems to come in the form of an impulse from nowhere, then as a prehension followed by becoming less and less esoteric till it becomes more concrete and earthy. In its final stage, however, the word on being communicated, does not possess even a small fraction of the original ‘light’ from which it had originated. Rao defines the real writer as:

......who seeks back the common word to its origin of silence, that the manifest word become light.

Sound (sabda) is thus sought back to silence, the apparent duality remaining undivided. All words, hence dissolve into the light of Knowledge. But Raja Rao still inquires into the fact of the word becoming its own meaning. He concludes that as the word, coming out of light, is perceived eventually by the light itself, so the light alone is its meaning. Dissolution of the image or sound of the word alone can reveal the meaning. It is real knowledge. In this state, Raja Rao feels, there is "neither you nor I". He admits:

That is what I have been trying to achieve. That I become no one, that no one shine but It.... I would like to be completely nameless and just be that reality which is beyond all of us... that there be no one there but light.

The nature of man is generally to seek something beyond himself. He is engaged in the ceaseless quest for happiness. But the worldly happiness only drives one astray. Happiness, in actuality, is not contained in ephemeral objects. It only provides the experience of joy. True happiness can be had only in the infinite Brahman. Raja Rao equates this ‘divine’ happiness to Truth, ‘nirvana’, God. The senses have a natural tendency to move outwards to the objective universe. The externalisation dissipates the rays of the mind, weakens the intellect and blinds the eye of intuitive perception. Unity is thus
falsely represented as diversity; the untrue seems to be true; the evanescent is taken as permanent; pain appears to be pleasure and shadow becomes more attractive than the substance itself. This is the ‘preyas’ path (the pleasant) pursued by worldly men. But the real aspirant, desirous of perceiving the inner Atman, turns his gaze within. He withdraws the out-going tendencies of the mind and the senses like the limbs of a tortoise drawn into its shell. This path of ‘shreyas’ is tenaciously followed by a man of wisdom. Only he can probe into the manifestations of the objective world and realize ultimately that there is neither subject nor object in reality. Raja Rao remarks:

Experience is all.\(^{39}\)

The man of wisdom considers both failure and success alike. He attains the non-dual state of Truth by sacrificing his ego (entity) through transcendental meditation. According to Swami Sivananda:

The individual soul is deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the Supreme Soul. He is bewildered by the ego and so he grieves and is miserable and unhappy.\(^{40}\)

Once the ego is sacrificed into the Atman, one becomes a ‘jivanmukta’, liberated while alive. Raja Rao says that like a burning camphor one should live without leaving any trace behind. He further asserts:

When the ego is dissolved, who are you?  
There is no one there : Yet the “I” is there.  
The ego’s death is the revelation of the “I”.\(^{41}\)

The Meaning of India is a treatise in which Rao has summed up numerous metaphysical issues. Some of these experiences become core material for his novels. The need for awareness, discovery into the nature of self and Absolute Reality, moral dilemmas and scepticism, perception into
duality (maya), realisation of oneness - Brahman, and the necessity of a guide or mentor to lead the quester from ignorance into 'jnana' or knowledge - were Rao's themes. He has meticulously woven these thought patterns within the framework of the novels. With one primary theme serving as the unifying link, Rao created settings, characters, incidents and connected his four major novels into a single unit of experience. In addition to this totality individual novels stand as separate entities with distinct narrative styles. Beginning with Kanthapura as a 'sthala-purana' or legendary history, Rao accomplishes his task as an individualistic novelist with his self-desired blank pages of The Cat and Shakespeare.

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Kanthapura

The Quest for Self
Truth, the essential nature of man, is surrounded with an unfathomable illusory power (maya). It appears manifested with extreme regularity as transmigrating souls, trapped within the limitations of ignorance (ajnana). The gradual removal of this illusion through the light of knowledge results in the revelation of the Ultimate Truth. Longing for the Infinite is ingrained in the deepest recesses of every human being but only a few blessed souls possess a burning aspiration to achieve this goal. Among all the species of living beings upon earth, man alone is accorded the supreme privilege and ability to attain his essential nature. An individual who makes use of this prerogative proves his God-given supremacy over other creatures and justifies his human birth. Sankaracharya states:

"Durlabham Trayamevaitad
   Devanugrahahetukam;
Manushyatvam Mumukshutvam
   Mahapurusha Sanshrayah"

To be born as a human being, the quest for emancipation and the company of learned souls - all these are subject to the grace of Almighty God.

The seeker after Truth is bound to have many a query in his mind, Does God exist ? Is He compassionate ? Is He unconcerned or concerned about man ? Is He endowed with a form or is He formless ? Does He have attributes or not ? Whether He is immanent or transcendent or both? Is the universe real or unreal ? Does it exist outside man's mind or is it merely a product of imagination ? At which point of time did the universe originate ? Is God the universe or has He framed it as a watch ? Is the
universe a mere appearance superimposed upon the godhead through an inscrutable illusion like mirage upon a desert? For answers to these queries, the aspirant needs to possess six virtues, 'shat-sampat' - control of mind, control of senses, withdrawal of the senses from desire for objects, perseverance, complete faith in scriptures and the word of the Master, and equilibrium of mind. Without intense aspiration for godhead, all human efforts may be wasted. The Kathopanishad says:

'Kshurasya dhara nishita duratyaya'  
(I, iii, 14)

Like the sharp edge of a razor is the path of knowledge, difficult to cross and hard to tread.

The sadhaka must have a keen longing to realise God. The result of such an aspiration liberates the seeker from false sense-pleasures of the world. He becomes a 'jivan-mukta', transcending all pairs of opposites, pain and pleasure, merit and sin, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, external and internal, attaining the supreme state of Bliss. In that state, the identity of the knower gets absorbed in the 'known', ending all duality.

India is the birthplace of metaphysics and philosophy. The importance of inquiry into the nature of the Atman has been felt by many an Indo-anglian writer and has also changed their lives. Literature and philosophy have always worked hand in hand, the end of both being transcendence of the egocentric predicament of man. The difference, however, lies in the treatment. Philosophy adopts the mode of intellectual inquiry and literature does it through aesthetic means. In his non-fictional work - The Meaning of India, Rao has elaborated on crucial issues
pertaining to the essential nature of Indian metaphysics. Bringing together the cardinal principles of practising religions of India and the basic tenets of philosophy and ethics, Rao sought to redefine faith and belief in the context of contemporary thought. Kanthapura, his first novel, develops on the twin principle of individual search for betterment, self-knowledge, perception and the absolute necessity of sacrifice without which the quest is meaningless. The relationship between man and universe and its realization through word becomes the 'meaning in the meaning'. Quoting Bhartrihari from his Vakyapadiya in The Meaning of India, Rao elaborates:

The Brahman..........who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word (sabda), who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world (seems to) proceed.

The attainment of knowledge of the Absolute Reality behind this Cosmic Principle entails superhuman effort, trial and sacrifice. Rao maintains that knowledge of an object can only be possible when all aspects of the object are dissolved. This ritual dissolution or sacrifice is central to the annihilation of ego. It precipitates in a resultant individual achievement of subliminal awareness and greater perception.

Raja Rao declares:

The Indian novel can only be metaphysical in nature.

Considering writing as an extension of his spiritual leanings, Rao has rooted them inside philosophy. The basic conflict in Rao seems to be his inability to choose between a writer and a man, as he himself observes:
I had this conflict in me. Should a man be a writer first, then a man,.... or a man first and a writer afterwards?^5

The assumption that man is 'a metaphysical entity' prompted him to philosophise in his writing on subjects pertaining to life, destiny, being and existence. However, the demands of the novel form required semblances of imagination also. His remarkable achievement lies in the reconciliation of the fiction apparatus to the metaphysical demands, making philosophy adequate to the task of fictionalising. The reality he depicts in his novels seems to be multilayered so that the created characters, seemingly engaged in mundane or earthly activities, are elevated to a different plane altogether.^6 Though Rao admits that there are three constituents of a book, namely - the word, the author and the reader^7, yet he dispensed with the responsibility of communicating. Expressions like 'the reading public' or 'communication' bear no relevance for him because at the highest level of realization of the word or Absolute - 'sabda brahman', the distinction between the reader and the writer ceases to exist. He states :

It is my conviction (basing myself on my Indian background) that you cannot really communicate unless you have no desire to really communicate.^8

It is like a 'game' that Rao plays with his ideas. He says :

I enjoy the juxtaposition of ideas. I play. The end, I have been taught, is not a question of success or defeat, but the abolition of contradiction, of duality - and of the peace it should bring to one. I play the game knowing I am the game.^9

This accounts for the choice of Indian oral tradition as a narrative
technique in the novel as it freed the novelist to play with his metaphysics. The first novel, Kanthapura deals primarily with the non-violent freedom struggle of the pre-independence era under the impact of Mahatma Gandhi. The description of Kanthapura is based on Raja Rao's own village Harihalli or Hariharapura which is revitalized for the reader. The period covered in the novel is between Gandhi's Dandi movement in 1930 and Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931. Rao's work registers the impact of Gandhian tenets, such as, control over baser elements in human nature, purification, poverty of means and ends. They lend philosophical dimension to his patterns of thought. A great believer in action, Gandhi had related his philosophy to 'nishkama karmayoga' explained by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita. He declared selfless action to be an indispensable part of an individual's duty.

The multi-dimensional quality in the delineation of characters and themes provides Kanthapura a wide canvas. Unlike Eliot's use of the mythical technique in The Waste Land to criticise the present, Raja Rao's brilliant use of myths helps in glorification of the present, imparting to the novel - the dignity and status of a 'purana'. Kanthapura bears a "rich sthala-purana". Rao himself admits:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthala-purana, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village - Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate.
The novel transcends the barriers of time. Past, present and future are merely terms to divide the timeless into understandable and identifiable categories of communication and comprehension. In Rao, all past and future coalesce collapsing into the present. The great archetypal figures of India, Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Arjuna, Buddha walk in and out of its pages effortlessly mingling with the novelist's created characters, brightening the repertory of the story-teller. At the same time, they also impart a universal appeal to the novel, thus freeing him from the task of plot construction. Filtering through the narrator - participant's memory, the incidents of the past reach the reader as events performed in the present. The speaker Achakka, an old woman of the village, who has stood the test of time, continuing to live to behold the beginning of a new civilization, acts like a link similar to Tiresias in Eliot's The Waste Land. Achakka belongs to the past as well as the present. The pattern of interminable story - telling forms an essential part of the novel. The mingling of the tense, used as a stylistic device enhances the sense of continuity between the days of yore and the present, thereby rendering the contemporary moment - "a moment of eternity".

Though the structure of Kanthapura may apparently be episodic due to the choice of a narrator, it is in fact circular like a wheel with Moorthy forming the centre of 'present' action. It follows the age-old 'pauranic akkhyan' style involving breathless garrulity. Mentioning the great scriptures like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, Raja Rao says:

The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana, 48,000.... We have neither punctuation
nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us - we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought.14

Mentioning the quick thinking, talking and even moving qualities of the Indians, Raja Rao maintains that there must be 'something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on'.15

The pervading theme of the novel is not just a quest for individual self as mentioned by some of the prominent critics of Rao but also an incessant and collective search for identity. The struggle for independence provides a colourful motif, imparting a nationalistic flavour to the entire experience. As a consequence, when Moorthy, a brahmin, pursues his private journey into the regions of Truth and absolute reality, the people of Kanthapura (in addition to being significant separate groups) unite under the protective umbrella of 'one for one cause'. Outsiders like the coolies of the estate also get embraced with enthusiasm and the resultant is a mass movement with each unit contributing significantly to the total effect of a revolutionary struggle to bring about a change on the face of the earth. What was just a political occurrence, gets transformed into a cosmic phenomenon with social, political, economic, emotional and religious ramifications. Its scale permitted Rao to adopt the epic style of delineation. Kanthapura, in its totality, becomes a single entity engrossed in the massive struggle to overthrow the immoral, corrupt forces of exploitation which were equivalent and parallel to the forces of 'ajnana' or ignorance. On the individual level-as Moorthy and collective level-as
Kanthapura, the novel manifests a slow and gradual progress towards the discovery of the Ultimate Truth regarding being and existence which was one of Rao's prime preoccupations as a philosopher-novelist. It was a re-awakening of India's soul. Larson rightly points out:

It is the concern with the spirit, with the man's spiritual foundations that gives the group this power - the age-old teachings of the Hindu scriptures supply the impetus necessary to undertake the struggle for self-rule.16

Kanthapura, in the beginning, appears as a village lying dormant in some remote part of the country, deeply rooted in age-old traditions, superstitions and religious activities. Just as a country is divided into states, Kanthapura also has various quarters, the brahmin, the pariah quarter, the potter's quarter, the weaver's quarter and the sudra quarter. It is based on the principles of hindu 'varnashrama dharma', having four castes - 'brahmin', 'kshatriya', 'vaishya' and 'sudra'. 'Guna' (quality) and 'karma' (kind of work) determine the caste of a man. The Purusha Sukta (of the Rig-Veda) also refers to this class division:

'Brahmanah asya mukham asit
bahu rajanyah kritah
uru tadasya yad vaishyah
padbhyam shudro ajayata'

(Mantra 12)

The Brahmins came out of the mouth of the Lord, Kshatriyas from His arms, Vaishyas from His thighs, and the Sudras from His feet.

The qualities of a true brahmin consisted of serenity, self-
restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge, realisation and belief in God. The kshatriyas had prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, bravery, generosity and lordliness. Duties like agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade fell under the class category of vaishyas and action consisting of service were the lot of the sudras, all services being born from their respective natures. Kanthapurians strictly follow the rules laid down by the learned rishis. In this world of caste and class distinctions, the brahmins would not even look into the pariah or a sudra quarter and the narrator Achakka, a brahmin woman, was not certain about the exact number of huts in the pariah quarter. She admits it:

Of course you wouldn't expect me to go to the Pariah quarter, but I have seen from the street corner Beadle Timmayya's hut. It was in the middle, so - let me see - if there were four on this side and about six, seven, eight that side, that makes some fifteen or twenty huts in all.\textsuperscript{17}

The potters and the weavers belonged to the vaishya class. Chandrayya made pots for Gauri's festival while others occasionally went out to the neighbouring villages to help people make bricks. The brahmin quarter included corner-house Moorthy, Bhatta, Patel Range Gowda, Rangamma, Waterfall Venkamma and old Ramakrishnayya. True to his nature, Ramakrishnayya, the learned father of Rangamma delivered discourses on Vedanta. All brahmins gathered on the promontory of the Iswara's temple to listen to the 'Sankara Vijaya' read by him with "a calm, bell-metal voice". They also discussed 'maya-vada', the philosophy of maya. His daughter Rangamma was a well educated woman with progressive thinking. She occasionally sat with the illiterate villagers telling them about various
things like aeroplanes, wireless, the country of "the hammer and the sickle". An active member of the Congress, she became the medium for introducing urbanisation among the rural folk. It was Rangamma's 'brahminism' that imparted her strength and inspiration to give commentary on Vedic texts. The practice of 'pranayama' released 'sattvic' force, helping her in spiritual progress. Essentially a brahmin by birth, she possessed kshatriya characteristics too. Presenting the example of courageous women like Rani Lakshmi Bai and Padmini before the innocent, shy, meek and illiterate women of Kanthapura, she inspired them to build inner strength to face the blows of lathis "without moving a hair" as they were out to fight a non-violent war.

Kanthapura was not free from evil. There were self-centred acquisitive lascivious people like Bhatta, the Swami, Waterfall Venkamma who, with their thoroughly negative traits, disturbed the tranquil village world. They represented the potently evil forces which were constant deterrents in the path of the spiritual sadhaka and misled the innocent multitude. Bhatta's character, nature and temperament resembled that of Duryodhana, the kaurava prince from Mahabharata who was a conscious portrait of 'adharma', as he acknowledges:

'Janami dharmaṁ na cha me pravṛttih
janami adharmaṁ na cha me nivṛttih
kenapi devena hridi sansthitena
yatha niyuktosmi tatha karomi'.

(Garga Samhita)

I know the concept of right and wrong but I do as the god seated within me directs.
Prakriti is made up of three gunas - 'sattva', 'rajas' and 'tamas'. Of these, 'rajas' instils desire and goads a person into undertaking new projects. It engenders greed for sense objects-visible and invisible. The temperament predominant in a man indicates the 'guna' which he has preferred for himself. Bhatta, an embodiment of 'rajas', was drawn to the city on account of excessive greed. The apparent glitter of maya robbed him of understanding, honesty and righteousness. Evil remained the only available option. A money-lender by profession, he exploited the poor by confiscating land and adding it to his domain. His remarriage with Purnayya's daughter who brought "a thousand rupee cash, and five acres of wet land" in dowry, brought him great prosperity and he started behaving like a land-owner with a total of thirty seven acres of wet land and ninety acres of dry land in Kanthapura and its neighbouring villages. However, Bhatta was not always like this. There was a time when he participated in bhajans, explained the Gita and Gandhi's My Experiments with Truth to the people of the village. The 'sattvic' tendencies of his personality which were fostered by the calm and peaceful atmosphere of Kanthapura, suffocate in the wake of distractions from the city and thus a devotee of Gandhi slowly surrenders his psyche to become an adjunct of those very forces which were getting pinpointed for annihilation. He blurts out:

What is this Gandhi business? Nothing but weaving coarse hand-made cloth, not fit for a mop, and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans, and mixing with the pariahs.  

Infuriated with the knowledge that pariahs had attained the liberty to cross the temple door, Bhatta was afraid lest they would replace the brahmins
and start giving discourses on the Vedas. Neither could Bhatta let his community get "polluted" nor did he want the manes of the ancestors remain insatiated. His frequent visits to the city to meet the Swami who misdirected him because of his own favoured British, also accounted for the change in his attitude. Bhatta's love for power and status overpowered his mind. Post haste, he reaches Kashi when he comes to know that "for every hymn and hiccup, one gets a rupee". A brahmin by birth, Bhatta got constant invitations in the village for obsequial dinners. They brought him lots of money and rich food. "He munched and belched, drank water and munched again". Besides being a money-lender, he was adept in the science of astronomy as well as "preparing of grass-rings and leaf-cups for obsequial ceremony, such as one had never seen". The Swami remained in the background sending his instructions either through his agent or Bhatta. His corrupt nature finds a parallel in Chaucer's pardon in The Pardoner's Tale who exploited the innocent gullible laity by extracting money on false pretexts. He used to fool them by giving them 'pardons' for sins and permissions into heaven in exchange for gold, thus establishing himself as the representative of God. The Swami was a hypocrite of a similar kind. He pretended to be the custodian of Truth, dharma and righteousness but favoured an alien government to satiate his greed for money. He occasionally sent his agent to Kanthapura to brainwash the innocent villagers. The recurrent myth of Rama and Ravana was inversely used by his agent who equated foreign rule to 'Rama-Rajya' and Indian government to "the rule of the ten-headed Ravana". Addressing the audience, he spoke thus:
.... if the white men shall leave us tomorrow, it will not be Rama-Rajya we shall have, but the rule of the ten-headed Ravana.... the British came and they came to protect us, our bones and our dharma.... For hath not the Lord said in the Gita, Whenevsoever there is ignorance and corruption I come, for I, says Krishna, am the defender of dharma, and the British came to protect our dharma.20

The Swami favoured only those who respected ancient hindu customs, not people like Gandhi who did not believe in caste or creed and considered all as equals. Saxena opines:

They are all against the pariah business and the Gandhi bhajans not because they go against Hindu dharma but because they come in conflict with their vested interests.21

Waterfall Venkamma, as her name signified, was in the habit of frequent rambling. She had a jealous, cunning and quarrelsome nature which did not allow anyone peace because of constant interference. The entire village was familiar with her harsh temperament. These characters are typical representatives of Kali-yuga and adharma. Swami, Bhatta and Venkamma together symbolise the forces of ignorance, unhealthy obsession with self, greed, corruption, exploitation, hypocrisy and the machiavellian doctrine of 'the end justifies the means'. The two former mentioned equivocated in the name of God. Signifying partially the internal psyche of an afflicted Kanthapura, they add to the forces of evil - manifested in the Skeffington Coffee Estate and the red man who cruelly imposed their will on the helpless villagers. Hence the need of the hour was a purification of the land and a similar purging of the individual. The Gandhian move to resist
the corrupt forces provided the Kanthapurians - the reason and the manifest cause to accomplish the impossible by eradicating the low, base, animal instinct in themselves, coupled with a simultaneous awakening and perception to achieve 'nirvana'. In this context, Mukherjee states:

.... Kanthapura is the history of a revolution where the different characters are not important as individuals but as parts of a greater whole.\textsuperscript{22}

The people of Kanthapura were bound together through the strong bond of religion which guided the mode of their lives. Religious ceremonies punctuated their existences. The appearance of the Shiva-linga woke Kanthapura from its deep slumber of apathy to leap into the prevalent political arena with a conscious awakening of its importance as a representative Indian village. The unearthing of the holy linga appears as a blessing in disguise conferred upon the Kanthapurians by the omnipotent lord of the cosmos. It is said that gods incarnate themselves only in the holy land of India - a truth in this particular context. Rao aptly states in this connection:

One thinks one searches for the Truth, but in India we say Truth itself seeks you.\textsuperscript{23}

After the consecration ceremony of the holy linga, it got converted into little Kanthapurishwari's temple-becoming the sole centre of their lives. It further led to the celebration of rituals and religious ceremonies. Harikathas blended with politics made the villagers aware of their slavery. Henceforth, meetings in Kanthapura began with lighting camphor in front of gods, ringing bells, singing bhajans. Sometimes religious and political slogans like 'Vande mataram', 'Inquilab zindabad', 'Satyanarayan maharaj ki
jai' and 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' were heard together. Festivals like 'Sankara jayanthi' or 'Ganesh jayanthi' rejuvenated their lives. Achakka beautifully recounts the experience after the 'Sankara jayanthi':

There used to be bhajan. Trumpet Lingayya with his silver trumpet was always there, and once the music was over, we stayed till the camphor was lit, and throwing a last glance at the god, we went home to sleep, with the god's face framed within our eyes. It was beautiful, I tell you-day after day we spent as though the whole village was having a marriage party.24

The Kanthapurians regarded all this as 'Kenchamma's grace' which made them solemnize such festive occasions. The villagers had an unflinching faith in their village deity who was "great and bounteous". There was a prevalent myth that many years ago she slayed a demon who had "come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives". Sage Tripura's tough penances to make the goddess descend on earth bore fruit and she fought the battle with the demon. The blood shed during the battle got soaked into the earth and made the Kenchamma hill red in colour. Thus all queries and grievances were taken to her. If it stopped raining, they prostrated before her and prayed for rains. Their love and faith in the goddess made them visualise her smiling on them, opening her eyes wide. This vision only strengthened their faith and belief in the certitude of her mercy and that very night, it started raining. In times of smallpox, they 'walked the holy fire' on the annual fair and when it was cholera, they offered a sari and a gold trinklet to the goddess to be rid of the epidemic. They promised to offer the first yield of rice and fruit crop, saris, bodice cloth to ensure protection against death, despair, disease, birth and
Kanthapura gained its lustre from the various festivals that the villagers celebrated. Kartik was considered to be "the month of lights". During this season, everything gleamed in spectra lights. Decorated and attractive images of gods were carried out in procession making it "a month of the gods". The innocent imagination of the villagers beheld the gods walking by lighted streets in "transparent flesh", having steeds "white as foam" for their chariots. Kartik was followed by Vaisakh, the month of ploughing. Furrowing under the 'rohini' star was considered to be auspicious. Everyone in the village came to the temple grove to seek the blessings of Kenchamma. Village priest Rangappa bathed and adorned the goddess while the villagers waited anxiously for their deity to "show her face". Their physical gestures before they beheld the goddess, are remarkably narrated thus:

.... they tremble and press against each other, and when the legs itch they do not scratch, when the waters drip they do not shake, and then suddenly the curtain is drawn, and Mother Kenchamma is there straight, bright and benign, and the candelabras weave their lights around her, and they say, 'Maybe, she has passed a good night!'

Rolling down of flowers from the face of Kenchamma's idol was an indication of her blessings. The appearance of the holy eagle and its circumambulation round the temple men and the bulls, was also considered to be auspicious. After breaking a coconut on the rock, the farmer owning the youngest bulls started ploughing the land and the others threw puffed rice at each other. Each person then offered a nickel coin to the priest
who threw a handful of holy water in all the eight directions, thus sanctifying the land for tilling.

Religion had always been a motivating factor in the lives of Indian people. The Kanthapurians were no exception. Devotion to the mythical archetypes, the legendary gods of Hindu religion sustained their faith. In this context of fundamental beliefs, Rao gradually introduced the subject of individual and mass political awakening. The medium chosen was faith and the object aimed for - was a perception of individual rights, freedom from bondage, comprehension of the degree of exploitation in the name of religion and existence. Gradually the day-to-day scenario of the Kanthapura village undergoes a change. The ceremonies earlier conducted just for purposes of faith and religion - become tempered with an undercurrent. The people are first puzzled. Then they start to enjoy the added dimension of understanding.

Kanthapura is thus India in microcosm. According to Srivastava, Kanthapura is:

...a garrulous account of primitive religious, political, economic and social activities of rural people. It is India in miniature.  

During the nineteen thirties, the country was passing through an arduous phase of struggle under the British rule. Raja Rao, a close witness to this, chose national struggle as a motif for his novel - providing it an 'arena' in the form of the village - Kanthapura. Rao observes in The Meaning of India:

India was a goddess like Sita, and prisoner of
Ravana again and again, and Pandit Nehru was not like Sri Rama, but rather like Bharatha, because Gandhiji was Sri Rama of course.....

Considering India as a perspective rather than a geographical entity or locale, Raja Rao states:

India is not a country ('desa'); it is a perspective ('darsana'); it is not a climate but a mood ('rasa') in the play of the Absolute - it is not the Indian who makes India but "India" makes the Indian, and this India is in all: it is that centre of awareness wherein one's self dips again and again in the hearth of Agni, as the sacrifice is made.

Kanthapura, thus, is a perspective where an individual's life moves constantly in search of the Self. The people of Kanthapura were inordinately led into the path of political struggle for attaining freedom. This ultimately culminated in the freedom for Self. Struggle is an objective correlative made to operate at various levels. At the humblest level, it is the struggle in the individual's own self. Jayaramchar's 'harikatha' about Gandhi's birth greatly annoyed Venkatalakshamma and the conflict with her established faith in religion made her blurt out, "When I go to the temple I want to hear about Rama and Krishna and Mahadeva and not all this city nonsense". The news of threatened excommunication of her son put Narsamma under great mental strain. Leaving her home, she rushed down to the river. She spat on pariah Bedayya and shouted at him for not standing aside to let her pass by. She considered this the fault of her son and decided to leave for Benares to die a "holy death". But no sooner did she come to the river, she started banging her clothes upon the stone and soon forgot everything. After reaching home, she cooked her
food waiting for Moorthy to return:

But where was Moorthy? He would come. He was only at Rangamma's house. Oh, he was no wicked child to leave the village without telling her. Oh, the fool that she was to have been so angry with him! Age brings anger. It is just a passing rage. She sat down to meditate but her uneasy mind made her behold the gods, the royal sacred flame, the flowers and even the walls as "angry and empty". The anti-Gandhi lobbyists repeatedly disturbed Narsamma, accumulating complaints against her son's 'so-called' forbidden activities. The subsequent news of her son's excommunication from Kanthapura becomes the proverbial straw on the camel's back. The very thought of being restrained from going to temples, obsequial dinners, marriage parties or hair-cutting ceremonies weighed upon her soul. Unable to face the recriminations and accusations of fellow villagers, she escaped into the darkness of the night. The fear of ghosts, spirits and shadows of night made her shudder and she fell unconscious on the ground. The chill of night pierced her very soul and the next morning she was found dead. It may be concluded that the clash between her responsibility as a mother and as a member of the village community killed Narsamma.

A similar instance of self-struggle becomes evident in the character of Moorthy. He undergoes a decided transformation while listening to the preachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His orthodox brahminism made it hard for him to shed the age-old traditions and break the barrier between different castes in order to view the entire human race on the same platform. Earlier, in an illustrative instance, when his entry into the
Skeffington Coffee Estate was obstructed by Bade Khan and the anger of the coolies led to violence, this young quester understood the responsibility of resolving the crisis by subjugating his ego. Religion had educated him to do this through penance, observance and abstinence. At yet another place in the novel, he had to struggle with his ego when asked by a pariah woman to enter her house. When offered some milk, he felt the need of holding his holy thread tightly. This act revealed his insecurity, fear, and loss of confidence in his own religion. He was not able to experience peace till he took a spoonful of the Ganges water. His reactions are described thus:

.... and taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him, and lest anyone should ask about his new adventure, he goes to the riverside after dinner to sit and think and pray.30

After being excommunicated by the Swami, he was not able to attend the marriage party of Venkamma's daughter. Wandering along the river-side for the whole day, he pondered over the vital question on "how is one an outcaste". Towards the conclusion of the novel, Moorthy is depicted vacillating from the stance of an extreme idealist to a dabbler in socialism. It also reveals the fact that the struggle in his self to reach his destination was inconclusive.

The motif of struggle, from the plane of individual self, graduates into the metaphor of society in transition. Ratna's widowhood prompted her struggle against the narrow-minded society of the village. Her insistence on retaining her jewellery and the confidence with which she continued to live life despite widowhood, were condemned as 'modern
ways' by the conservatives of the village. But an undaunted spirit helped her endure it calmly. The local guardians of religion tried to dissuade Rangamma also. She was ordered to leave the company of Gandhi-men because they encouraged a pollution of castes by readily mixing with pariahs. But Rangamma's firm answer was:

Has the Mahatma approved it? I don't think so. He always says let the castes exist, let the separate-eating exist, let not one community marry with the other...."^31

Rangamma's struggle with such irrational people further paved the way for her own individual spiritual advancement.

The Skeffington Coffee Estate represented the cruel British regime in miniature where the coolies were made to bear the atrocities of the foreign government. For the labourers, it symbolised a centre of exploitation where they were forced to endure mental and physical torture which started as soon as they left their homes and were brought to the Estate by the maistri. This explains the fact that miseries of all kinds increase hundredfold when one is away from the motherland. The individual becomes rootless. The master who had previously offered a dreamland vision of the Estate, now exploited them mercilessly. He tortured them physically for no fault of theirs, making them work incessantly. They were forbidden from communicating and associating with the others and were denied rest. It was dire need for money and food which brought them to the Skeffington Coffee Estate. Fate and other elements only added to their distress which never showed signs of alleviation. The struggle in nature is an objective correlative for the pain
and suffering of this hapless multitude which had unsuspectingly walked into their doom. Their work entailed exposure to the hot and scorching sun. The experience has been described by Rao:

But the afternoon sun is heavy and piercing and as each axe splits the wood or as each pick tears the earth, from head and armpit and waist the perspiration flows down the body....

But the next moment, it started raining heavily. It

....swishes round and pours, beating against the tree tops, grinding by the tree-trunks and racing down the waving paths, and then there is but one downpour, one steady, full, ungrudging pour.

The bad weather brought in its wake ill-health for children. They caught chill and collapsed under "flaming fever". Several of them suffered from stomach ailments, dysentry and cough. After the rain-storm, the coolies were confronted with wind-storm. The north-east wind

....blew and blew until the thatches were torn away and the walls felled, and then it dripped, fine, endless, unflooding rain, whilst the fevers still came and went.

The persisting fever sent a number of coolies into the pit of death. They were like helpless and dejected prisoners in the Estate, a place about which it was generally believed that

.....nobody who sets foot ever leaves it.

With the departure of the old Sahib, his nephew took over the management with worse results. He exploited women sexually creating terror in the estate. The coolies suffered financially too. Forced to spend their entire earnings in the toddy booths, the coolies were whipped and caned into
marching forward and walking over the protesting satyagrahis who lay on
the ground to prevent the coolies from entering the toddy shops. The
helpless men were thus exhorted to fight against those fellow countrymen
who came to help and save them from exploitation. The coolies moving
towards Boranna's toddy booth "to drink and to beat the drum and to clap
hands and sing" appeared like soulless, spiritless, lifeless automations.
Their pathetic condition has been described in the novel:

...... one coolie and two coolies and three coolies
come out, their faces dark as mops and their blue
skin black under the clouded heavens, and
perspiration flows down their bodies and their
eyes seem fixed to the earth......

The toddy booths were instruments for spiritual and human abuse. The
money earned by the helpless lot went back to the British government
because toddy trees were "government trees" and were deliberately and
strategically planted to exploit "the poor and the unhappy". The tribulations
faced by these people symbolised the struggle of the masses, striving
unflinchingly despite adversities to liberate themselves from the foreign
yolk. The Kanthapurians also suffered exploitation at the hands of the
British, but unknowingly. Cotton and rice grown in their own country was
sent to foreign land. The ignorant and illiterate villagers purchased it at
raised price after it was processed in huge mills in foreign countries and
brought back to their native land for sale.

In such a political, social, cultural and religious scenario, Raja
Rao planted his protagonist Moorthy, who represents the hopes,
aspirations, expectations, prospects and above all, the quest of all the
villagers. He has been presented in the image of a seeker unaware of the purpose of his quest and combines in himself - the sensitivity of a sufferer, the aspirations of an idealist, an archetype of the common man as well as the multiple deities mentioned by Rao from time to time in the course of the novel. In the beginning, Moorthy appears an extremely ordinary young man aimlessly drifting along in life. He resembles the lost wanderer about whom Sage Uddalaka instructs his son Shvetaketu:

.... just as when a man has his eyes bandaged, and he, the man, is from the country of Gandhara, and he is left far from his home, and he does not know whether to go east or north, and shouts, "Where shall I go now, how shall I reach my home?" and someone comes along, the Teacher, and in his compassion, takes off the bandages, and tells the man, "That way, Sir, is Gandhara", and then the man starts knowing his direction and goes from village to village, and arrives finally reaching his country - his home. That home, beloved, is the Self.37

A gradual contact with the current bearings and ideologies at the time incite a curiosity in his psyche to know, learn and discover more. The most fashionable philosophy of the time was Gandhism. Sudarshan Sharma maintains in this context that the voluntary conversion of young people into Gandhites became a historical fact as thousands of students all over the country had started responding to Gandhi's call.38 Moorthy's mission made him abandon university and city life to return to his roots - a phenomenon which runs counter to the pattern noticed earlier in Bhatta and the others who rejected the land of their birth to seek betterment in the city.

Being the youngest son, Moorthy was loved most by Narsamma because:
the youngest is always the holy bull.\textsuperscript{39}

His extraordinary "wondrous looks, deferential ways" and intelligence led his mother to visualize him as a sub-collector some day in future. Even at the tender age of sixteen, people came asking for his horoscope. But Moorthy, having the propensity of a probing curiosity, had unintentionally developed the rare quality of discrimination and dispassion and was not willing to get shackled by the demands of a married life. While studying in college, Moorthy was blessed by a "mighty and God beaming" image of Mahatma Gandhi. He envisioned himself going on to the platform where the Mahatma was seated and fanned him for a while. He could feel a positive, radiant, "mellowed" and bright force which the Mahatma's skin seemed to radiate out. The Mahatma's "deep and stirring" voice seemed to enter into his limbs making him shiver. His speech, "There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all" made a tremendous impact on his inquiring psyche. Not being able to stand this involuntary transformation taking place within him, he shivered and groped for some kind of enlightenment. Owing to the large crowd around him, he could not move out. Sitting on the platform, he wept softly and felt lighter. He, thereby, discovered and concluded that his real place was at the feet of the visionary deity and surrendered himself to him asking for his commands. Gandhi's reply that he did not give commands:

\[\ldots\text{save to seek Truth}\textsuperscript{40}\]

triggered the metamorphosis in him. The arousal of nationalistic feeling in
his heart made him burn his foreign clothes and books. The Mahatma's touch acted like a philosopher's stone, transforming base metal into gold. Moorthy, thus, realized the immortality of the Atman. Jha says:

He is shown to be experiencing in Gandhi a force that releases him from the age-old shackles of ritualistic brahminism and turns him into a humanist and social reformer of the Gandhian order.41

Leaving his studies, he came back to the village and started following his preceptor's footprints.

It is quite interesting that the hero's 'god' does not appear in person in the novel. He is considered to be an incarnation descended on earth to relieve Indians from the slavery of the red man. Throughout the novel, the invisible presence of the Mahatma is felt. In the chapter, entitled "Mahatma Gandhi: Saint or Politician" in The Meaning of India, Rao has categorically stated that Gandhi was an avatar, a god in human form, selfless like the saint who can work miracles and the politician who makes the world wholesome. The articles of this book are replete with reference to visionary archetype of the Indian leader. Rao feels that the liberated sage is one who transcends the ego and the world. Moorthy's conversion (from a simple university student into a non-violent revolutionary fighting for India's freedom) was the result of this vision. Gandhi's image and his preachings awaken him spiritually. Moorthy is an unconscious quester who sought Truth - not for himself, but for the welfare and spiritual upliftment of common man. He was familiar with the psychology of the village folk whose lives were permeated with religion.
Their faith could not be separated from their day-to-day existence. Hence, in order to arouse them politically, he invited from the city, the famous 'harikatha' man, Jayaramchar, whose 'harikatha' blended religion with politics. The narrator described it thus:

'Today', he says, 'it will be the story of Siva and Parvati'. And Parvati in penance becomes the country and Siva becomes heaven knows what! 'Siva is the three-eyed' and 'Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar'. And then he talks of Damayanti and Sakunthala and Yasodha and everywhere there is something about our country and something about Swaraj. Never had we heard 'Harikathas' like this.^^

A 'harikatha', not about the deities but about 'the birth of Gandhi' astonished them. In it, Jayaramchar stated how sage Valmiki requested Brahma to send one of the gods to incarnate on earth and free India from the cruel clutches of the English. Brahma assured him that Shiva himself will appear on earth to make India independent. In Gandhi, is also manifested, Lord Krishna's might to decimate the evil forces, promoting the victory of good. In the beginning of the novel, Moorthy is projected as the apostle of Gandhi in the village. Like the Mahatma, he too preaches the doctrines of non-violence, love, equality, dispassion and truth. While collecting money to celebrate festivals, he visits the pariah quarter - an unheard, unexpected deed which, when on the one hand, brings him closer to his preceptor's ideology of equality among classes, on the other, also lands him with a community boycott. The narrow-minded society of Kanthapura was too unforgiving and considered association with pariahs as condemning as a mortal sin. To the Kanthapurians, radical things such as
interaction with the low caste or marriage to a widow were acts requiring penance and their close-knit society strictly adhering to its conservative beliefs, punished all dissenters. Moorthy had to pay heavy prices for his experiments with truth. His excommunication as well as the sad demise of his mother did not deter him from his purpose of reforming the society. Even when (before her death), Narsamma stopped all contact with her son and treated him as an untouchable, the protagonist did not desist from mixing with the pariahs. It was spirituality that imparted to him a remarkable fortitude to face the consequences. Moreover, his aim of freedom from the foreign yolk demanded an arousal of the people of Kanthapura to the call of time and the launch of a mass movement against the red man's government. He went to every corner of the village - distributing free spinning wheels to people on behalf of the Congress and inspiring them to spin daily so that the money earned may remain in their own country. Aware of the exploitation of his countrymen in the name of business, he encouraged them to spin for self-purification in the name of the Mahatma. Earlier, the name and ideology of Gandhi was introduced through the medium of the 'harikathas', as religion and its details found immediate reciprocation even in illiterate minds. With the familiarity to his mentor, gaining ground among the Kanthapurians, Moorthy ventured to deliberately dilute the concept of the 'swadeshi'. Gandhi had, by that point of time, become a god incarnate for the people of the small village and all activity associated with this name proved to be a mere extension of their religion.
The young leader's response to the call from the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate finds a close parallel in the Champaran incident of 1916 when Shukla, a representative of the coolies of the Indigo plantations persuaded Gandhi (then in Bombay), to visit Champaran, Bihar. Restrained from entry by Bade Khan, the resultant violence both angered and saddened him and he pleaded for 'ahimsa' for the sake of the Mahatma. The silent suffering of the multitude left an indelible mark on the young man's psyche and shaped the determination to provide the requisite platform of protest. He began his 'don't touch-the-government' campaign. Gandhi's 'ahimsa' has been described as a weapon of matchless potency. It is the 'summum bonum of life'. An attribute of the brave, it is, in fact, their supreme belief. It is no lifeless dogma, but a living and life-giving force, a special attribute or the 'dharma of the soul'. Gandhi also considered 'ahimsa' - the sovereign weapon for attaining freedom and maintained that non-violence was the law of the human race while violence - the language of the brute. He believed in resistance against a powerful government through legal, moral and above all, spiritual means. Raja Rao explains Gandhism as:

....a technique of revolutionary activity composed, and used, not for a political but a metaphysical change.\(^{43}\)

Hence, beset by guilt, because he attributed the violence to himself, Moorthy decides to go on fast for three days. He informs Rangamma:

The fault of others, Rangamma, is the fruit of one's own disharmony.\(^{44}\)
The exercise was one of the Gandhian principles for annihilating the ego. His penance is reminiscent of Jesus Christ's suffering for the sins of others. The Gandhi - prototype of this novel also endeavours to purify his soul through penance. ^{45} Rao in *The Meaning of India*, mentions a similar silence and immobility in the Mahatma - an absence of all sensation. Rao felt himself become part of a timeless moment in the presence of the leader. Moorthy also sinks deep into meditation. All efforts made by waterfall Venkamma to disturb his peace and insult him become incentives to shed hatred and spread love and brotherhood among mankind. Moorthy consciously chooses people whose sole interest in life is its disruption. His education consisted of inviting these misguided people within the fold of Gandhism. Bearing no animosity to them, he had to studiously learn to pardon them as 'they knew not what they did'. It was in this fashion that he had to educate himself in lessons of humility and modesty. Holding his breath, he muttered to himself:

I shall love even my enemies. The Mahatma says we should love even our enemies....^{46}

He again slipped back into deep meditation. The serenity of his heart made him delve still deeper into his self and "spontaneously emit rays of love in all directions". Though he became 'love-incarnate', Moorthy found himself unable to understand how he could rise so much. He explained to Seenu thus:

Why was it he could meditate so deeply? Thoughts seemed to ebb away to the darkened shores and leave the illumined consciousness to rise up into the back of the brain,...... Light seemed to rise from the far horizon, converge and creep over
hills and fields and trees, and rising up the Promontory, infuse itself through his very toes and finger-tips and rise to the sun-centre of his heart. There was a vital softness about it he had hardly ever felt.  

Having received a glimpse of "that primordial radiance", Rao's hero unexpectedly conquered his senses to a great extent. This became the primary reason why even Ratna's presence did not deviate him from his ideal. He asked her to join him in prayers in order to cleanse the sins of others. The increasing inner purity supplied him with an insight into his own follies. Like Gandhi, he told Rangamma:

> The great enemy is in us, Rangamma, .....hatred is in us. If only we could not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm affection towards our fellow men, we would be stronger, and not only would the enemy yield, but he would be converted.  

He even talked of loving the hated Bade Khan because love only could convert the external and internal enemy. Gandhi had observed and voiced a similar sentiment on one occasion:

> We can only win over the opponent by love, never by hate. Hate is the subtlest form of violence. We cannot be really non-violent and yet have hate in us.  

Later in the novel, the protagonist spoke to Range Gowda, echoing the typically Gandhian philosophy:

> Every enemy you create is like pulling out a lantana bush in your backyard. The more you pull out, the wider you spread the seeds, and the thicker becomes the lantana growth. But every friend you create is like a jasmine hedge.  

The young Gandhite's fast becomes crowded with mystical and legendary
associations. Seated once by the river in the calm serenity of vernal surroundings, Moorthy, with closed eyes, experienced mystical union with Prahlada and Krishna. With the growing divine consciousness of the omnipresence of Hari, he became oblivious to noises around him and witnessed "a dark burning light in the heart of the sanctum". Entering the temple with recognition of his own puny worth, he looked fearfully at the holy idol, only to be swept away by a flood tide which permeated his very being. In his reverie, he silently "sank" into it and like child Krishna, safely floated away on the pipal leaf. After opening his eyes, he is reported to have said to his mother:

Mother, now you can throw me down the mountains,..... because Hari will fly down and hold me in his arms as I roll down the mountains. And if you send elephants to kill me, the elephants will stand by and say, "This is Hari's child", and lift me up with their trunks and seat me on their backs and throw a garland round my neck. And the poison you will give me in the cup of death will become the water of flowers, for, Mother, I have seen Hari....

The narrator relates yet another spiritual experience in the life of the central character. When floods had inundated Kanthapura, Moorthy, seated by the river, addressed the river:

I may be drowned, but I shall not rise, Mother Himavathy, till thy waters are sunk down to thy daily shores.

Surprisingly and astonishingly, the waters receded the same evening. It was strong will-power and rock-like determination which coerced Moorthy to challenge the river.
The decision of starting a Congress group in Kanthapura was a step further in the attainment of his ideal. He went to the weaver's elder Ramayya, potter's elder Siddayya and also to the pariah quarter to ask whether they would become members of the All India Panchayat. Moorthy always spoke to the pariahs from the gutter-slab. But the invitation extended by Rachanna's wife to come inside as he was "one of us" disconcerts him. It must be noted here that though Moorthy may be modelled on Gandhi, yet he was not Gandhi. He was an innocent beginner, still in the process of conquering his senses. In the later novel, The Cat and Shakespeare, Govindan Nair is developed to an extent of not being troubled by his senses, as he was a jivan-mukta. In Kanthapura, Raja Rao invests Moorthy with some weakness of character in order to present him as an ordinary mortal rather than as an 'ideal'. While his mentor always wished to be with pariahs, whom he called 'harijans' (men of God), the disciple is 'made to' converse with them from a distance. Mukherjee states:

When he first went to the house of an untouchable and drank milk there, it was in order to test his own capacity to rise above narrow prejudices. But breaking an age-old belief was a difficult ordeal.... He still needs the external aid of Ganga water and sacred thread to make him feel clean again. After a visit to an untouchable's home, "taking the Ganges water he feels a fresher breath flowing through him" (p. 107).

The conditions for becoming a member of the Congress demanded a strict practise of 'ahimsa', speaking truth and spinning at least two thousand yards of yarn each year. The Congress Panchayat Committee of Kanthapura included Moorthy, Range Gowda, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu. Being
the unacknowledged Congress leader in Kanthapura, he was arrested. Seeing their master thus imprisoned, Rachanna and others protested and shouted slogans like "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" which enraged the policemen and led to further violence. The ideal of non-violence reached its pinnacle when Moorthy restrained his followers from resorting to violent ways at the time of his seizure. He said:

Brothers, in the name of the Mahatma, let there be peace and love and order. As long as there is a God in Heaven and purity in our hearts evil cannot touch us. We hide nothing. We hurt none. And if these gentlemen want to arrest us, let them. Give yourself up to them. That is the true spirit of the Satyagrahi.\textsuperscript{54}

His simple reply to the pleadings of the advocates and barristers is:

That is not for me. Between Truth and me none shall come.\textsuperscript{55}

He adheres to his ideal of truth even when Sadhu Narayan, the hermit practising meditation on the banks of Himavathy, endeavours to convince him of defence from evil. The hero-philosopher of the novel derives moral strength from Sankar, the secretary of the Karwar Congress Committee. An advocate by profession, he inspires Moorthy into believing that a satyagrahi needs no pleaders, "He is his own advocate".

After his arrest, along with other satyagrahis, power comes into the hands of the women, making it their movement. They respond wholeheartedly to the Mahatma's call, readily participating in political mass-movements, picketing toddy booths, facing lathi charges, bayonets and bullets without caring for their lives. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, a worthy representative of women of the Gandhian era, puts it thus:
Women with pale eyes and blushing cheeks, they who had been gently nurtured behind silken curtains, women who had never looked upon a crowded street, never beheld a strange face... flung themselves into the blinding glare of a day, unshaded and unprotected... They faced perils and privations with a happy light in their eyes and a spring in their limbs. Almost overnight their narrow domestic walls had given away to open a new wide world in which they had a high place.\textsuperscript{56}

Behind the spirit of sacrificing everything and bearing the atrocities of the red man, there is an unflinching conviction in the Mahatma being an incarnation of Lord Shiva himself. Towards the end of the novel, Kanthapura is destroyed completely. Men are arrested and women flee to Kashipura for safety. Though it may seem that they appear utterly frustrated, yet, it is not so. Inspite of having lost everything, including their houses and husbands, the political experience contributed to their spiritual re-awakening. The narrator, Achakka, explains:

No, sister, no, nothing can ever be the same again. You will say we have lost this, you will say we have lost that. Kenchamma forgive us, but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night....\textsuperscript{57}

This is in accordance to Mahatma Gandhi's statement that "satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment".\textsuperscript{58} The shift in Moorthy's attitude from Gandhism may partially be due to the non-fulfilment of his inner quest and also because of his frustration at the failure of the non-cooperation movement. From the Gandhian way of an idealist, he became a 'socialist' as he found it more worthwhile to eradicate social inequality advocated by Jawaharlal Nehru. After his release from the prison, the young quester
wrote a letter to Ratna:

And yet, what is the goal? Independence? Swaraj? Is there not Swaraj in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? Oh no, Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires, there will always be pariahs and poverty. Ratna, things must change... Jawaharlal will change it. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharatha to the Mahatma,... And he calls himself an 'equal-distributionist', and I am with him and his men.59

His conversion is explained by Raja Rao:

Moorthy was a young man who felt dissatisfied after he suffered a defeat. His faith in Gandhi was shaken for a moment.... At best you can say that Moorthy was a deviating Gandhian. Nehru, too, was a deviating Gandhian... Moorthy and Nehru are alike.60

Raja Rao's novels always present a saintly figure in the role of the leading character. Moorthy's figure corresponds to this ideal. He represents a person much above the 'common' average man. The Kanthapurians envision him as the local 'avatar' just as Moorthy himself establishes Gandhi in the same image. It is nearly impossible to find an ideal realized in real life. But literature enjoys the liberty to "create a credible individual by the complete realisation of all the fragmentary attributes one sees in different human beings".61 The 'local mahatma' of the Kanthapurians is a storehouse of such qualities as selfless dedication, chastity, non-attachment, conquest of senses, altruistic love for humanity, large-heartedness. The only trait in his character, restricting him from
achieving his goal, is his self-consciousness. Though he never boasts of being a brahmin (like Ramaswamy sometimes does in The Serpent and the Rope), yet at certain places in the novel, he seems to be weakened by caste-consciousness, the fear of being polluted on entering a pariah's house, the need to take a bath and have "a spoonful" of Ganges water each time he touched them. He tries to tread the path of his master's teachings but fails in the end. This may, however, be attributed to lack of faith in his preceptor. Had he totally immersed his self in Gandhi, he would have succeeded in fulfilling his 'divine pilgrimage'. The process of associating himself with the archetypes, accepting them and again deviating from them, constantly plagued his mind. Rao quotes Gandhi from My Experiments with Truth: "Tradition declares, he only could be liberated, established in the Truth, who has met his Guru... True knowledge is impossible without the Guru." Aspiring unintentionally to become an archetype, Moorthy fails on account of the flaw in his character. On the other hand, Kanthapura re-awakens itself, completely burning its individuality. It was reduced to ashes which, in turn, provided it with a sense of self-fulfilment. It was immense love and total faith in the avatar - Gandhi, which led them (the village people) to achieve the state of self-enlightenment. The collective hope of 'Rama-Rajya' filled their hearts. They found their god in the local archetype, Moorthy and worshipped him wholeheartedly.

The delineation of the young satyagrahi's character by Rao, is more on the level of thought than reality. He is a human being, a divine ambassador, a prototype, an ideal and an objective correlative at the same
time. It certainly lends ambiguity to his character. He represents the quest of the Kanthapurians. They succeed in the attainment of the goal which Moorthy aspired for. Moorthy's approach towards the desired goal is misdirected. Not fully aware of the ideologies of Gandhi, he leaps straight into the burning fire of nationalism. The young man imitates Gandhi, without grasping the spiritual significance of his teachings. The experiences which he comes across on account of the innate purity of his heart, make him pursue this particular course. His disappearance from the scene towards the end reveals his dissatisfaction with the ways which he was following. Conversion from a Gandhian into a Nehru-man paves the way towards a new destiny, giving him, at the same time, the chance to gain experience - the aspect in which he was lacking to a great extent.

Raja Rao's earliest protagonist has the good fortune to peep into an experience which could only be achieved through rigorous 'sadhana' and total dispassion. It was the ultimate realisation of an age-spent pursuing the spiritual ideal. The primary requirement for the attainment for this closeness or oneness with the divine was shedding of all the dross, mortal, ignorant, ego and intellect-oriented inclinations to become as innocent as the new born babe. Moorthy is one such babe who is totally unaware of the immensity of spiritual disclosures and the extent of his own moral responsibility. He emulates the Mahatma merely as a fashionable creed - not realising the true import of his chosen role. He is a sadhaka, unaware of the true nature of his 'sadhana'.
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Comrade Kirillov
An Essential Paradox
Comrade Kirillov was originally written in English. It was not published. It first appeared in 1965 in George Fradier's French translation. In 1976, the English version also appeared. Rao, in a personal letter to M.K. Naik, writes that he had framed the text during the fifties. This was several years before The Serpent and the Rope. The novelist mentions in the Postface that he "worked again and again on the novel, and this is the definitive version of the text". As for theme, the period during which Comrade Kirillov was written, has much significance. Rao confesses that after finishing Kanthapura, he experienced a phase of confusion and despair. It was only a chance meeting with an enlightened and charismatic guru, Swami Atmananda that set him at peace and paved the way for mental clarity and broadening of spiritual vision. It was an extraordinary event and proved the inspiration for The Serpent and the Rope. However, till the advent of the Swami, the mental trauma was unbearable. For Kirillov, this was the inspiration. Also, the exceptionally long gap of twenty two years between the two novels had helped the author experiment with various techniques, fiction-ideas and forms. These constant endeavours gave Comrade Kirillov its structure. According to Shiva Niranjan, Comrade Kirillov also expressed the novelist's disapproval and dismay with the forceful upsurge of communism during the final phase of the Indian freedom struggle. Providing glimpses of the novelist's temporary association with the underground activities of the Young India Socialist Movement, it depicted his consequent frustration with these extremist activities. The disillusionment led to
rejection of the communist mode and a firm commitment to the Vedantic way of life. Comrade Kirillov should be placed after Kanthapura in chronology if a probe is made to trace the novelist's preoccupation with patriotic and political ideologies before his final pilgrimage in the realm of Truth. For some unknown reason, the novel was published after The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare. Possibly, the form as well as the context took time to emerge, perception being at a turmoil, and structure also at perpetual experiment. However, thematically, it can be linked to both Kanthapura as well as The Cat and Shakespeare.

Viewed as a sequel to The Cat and Shakespeare, the novel presents a subtle deviation from ideological norms. While the former explicitly expounds the philosophy of 'bhakti', Comrade Kirillov on the contrary, presents the protagonist's initial preoccupations with Marxism, graduating to a comparison between Indian metaphysics and the philosophy of the west. It finally establishes the superiority of 'Advaitavada' over all other schools of thought. The shifting belief, the state of doubt, delusion and uncertainty are made evident in the novel as the hero does not adhere to any single philosophy. Frequently rejecting his own favoured precepts, he ventures into newer pastures. The elimination, conscious or unconscious, results in an assertion of the superiority of the canons to which he was born. The thematic similarity between the two novels rests in the perception of 'darkness' which the principal characters share. While Kirillov's experience is a meandering through mazes of ideologies, the cognition of Pai is singularly different. When a seeker presumes a particular state of experience as a finale, he suffers setback. The character protagonist of The Cat and Shakespeare, in
premising his divine experience as the final reality, trapped himself in abysmal doubt. It signifies that the state of 'sattva' has also to be transcended by the spiritual seeker before self-realization. Standing aloof, this supreme divinity is 'nirguna' and 'nirvishesha'. Assimilation with such a force dispels all doubts. Still, the quester, in his journey, may have to encounter invisible and unfamiliar forces. If his sadhana is incomplete and without direction, there is a strong possibility that the seeker may, instead of reaching salvation, become drowned into the pit of oblivion. And the danger of such an eventuality remains despite an occasional visionary experience. The protagonist in The Cat and Shakespeare who, though blessed by a spiritual guru, experienced similar reverses through lack of self-effort. He had the vision of the Immutable, yet, there are no manifest signs of his own self merging into Brahman. Pai remained a detached spectator to some extent. Lack of further sadhana accounted for this misdirection. Incertitude and perplexity displaced knowledge, resulting in momentary delusion. Rao perhaps wishes to convey the truth that nothing except Brahman is the final reality in this transient world. The ultimate goal can only be attained after the disappearance of all duality.

The highest aim of philosophy - 'Absolute Monism' - cannot be achieved through 'devotion' or 'karma' alone. Worship in the guise of act or 'bhava' can lead to knowledge but not the final reality. A true devotee may find divinity within reach but fail to realize that Supreme Power without Knowledge. "Rite jnanan na muktih" - declare the Upanishads, implying that without Knowledge, there is no liberation possible. Thus, if a connection is to be established between the two novels, the quester of The Cat and
Shakespeare, journeying in his search for the definite consummation, misdirects himself through scepticism. This period of dilemma was akin to the paradoxes to be witnessed in Comrade Kirillov.

Comrade Kirillov can also be placed immediately after Kanthapura, that is chronologically, thoughtwise. Towards the novel's conclusion, the village-people, despite the great loss of men, land and property, achieved a strange sense of fulfilment. Yet, Moorthy, the protagonist, remains dissatisfied by the social conditions of the times and shifts allegiance from the idealism of Gandhi to the kind of socialism, propounded by Nehru. This conscious choice of his deviant predecessor is also exhibited in the spirit of Kirillov. Perhaps he too felt that the new system (communism) may alleviate poverty and change the then-prevailing social conditions. If Kirillov be regarded as Moorthy's successor, there is ample justification of his shifting loyalties to diverse ideologies. The crisis of faith in the character of Moorthy gets perpetuated in Kirillov who too is disillusioned with the lost and dwindling religio-cultural heritage of India. The freedom struggle in Kanthapura becomes the Russian revolution in Comrade Kirillov. In the beginning of the book, freedom and independence are still distant dreams. The truth remains that the struggle was not yet complete. But as the protagonist in Comrade Kirillov ventures abroad, the political scenario in India and its struggle for independence recedes into the background. In its place, the influence of Russian and French revolutions and the impact of the Labour Party gain predominance. The psyche of the hero does not remain unaffected by these prominent ideologies. In Kanthapura, the freedom struggle was employed as an objective correlative by the
novelist. A very similar experimentation in terms of fictional technique was adopted by Rao when he uses the Russian and French revolutions as analogies. The correspondence in both instances concretise the physical, emotional, and spiritual struggle of a nation, society, community and individual human being. Constant references in the book to revolutions, movements, conflicts, philosophies and concepts show the excruciating effort at the level of mind and thought.

The phase of scepticism begins from the very beginning, i.e., Kanthapura and continues up to The Serpent and the Rope. Moorthy, the chosen initiate, plummets headlong into the gateway of the Self. The vision of the Mahatma appeared to his nascent and immature mind when it was too infirm to appreciate the actual significance of the 'revelation'. The non-understanding of this esoteric experience led to disenchantment with Gandhi, the ideologue and his teachings. The trend of cynicism continues in Comrade Kirillov. Its protagonist, a deluded and spiritually lost individual, also aimlessly wanders in and out of diverse beliefs, enroute his search for a goal which he ultimately discovers in his own country. The novel is an assertion of human scepticism. It is a statement which testifies the humanness and fallible nature of the human being. The novel displays autobiographic parallels also. The author and Kirillov share a lot of common qualities. Brahmins by birth, both are in search of the Ultimate Reality. This provides a close encounter with Indian as well as European schools of thought, basics and their values. Like Rao, Kirillov too is deeply influenced by eastern and western patterns of literature and life. Both are sensitive individuals and expatriates. Kirillov's doubt is, in fact, the doubting-self of Raja Rao.
himself. The novel which is an expression of doubt in the life of Kirillov, reflects the dilemma in the life of the novelist also.

The dark world of the novel and the dilemma of the hero get exhibited through a singular technique of splitting the identity of the protagonist into three disjuncts - Rama, Padmanabhan and Kirillov. Among these, Rama acts as the eternal spectator, a "Gandhian, a Vedantin and an Indian". Padmanabhan is the "believing self" who represents faith in Indian values and becomes the alter ego of Rao. The Rama persona is familiar with the Padmanabhan stance of the protagonist. He is also aware that Kirillov, the counterpoint, is that mask of reason and logic which camouflages the brahminic self and hides the real personality of the seeker. Rama maintains that he "first met communism in Kirillov", not in Padmanabhan. The statement is significant as the creed of communism is counter to the beliefs of a true brahmin. Communism is thus practised in the guise of Kirillov, not as Padmanabhan. It is Kirillov, not Iyer, who gets deluded. The narrator in this novel is:

......a thirsty soul pining for the attainment of the higher truths and is given to meditations and serious thinking. 

Reflecting the period of doubt in Rao's own journey towards Truth, he represents in essence, all protagonists. The assertion of doubt in the personality and spirit of Kirillov is a factor which leads to oneness because doubt is an assertion of faith, maintains the author. Had Pai reached the final destination, Rao's quest would also have ended. Only an individual who perceives duality can hope to reach non-duality. The quest which began with
Moorthy, continues and Comrade Kirillov also proceeds on a parallel course of doubt and scepticism to reach the final state of 'oneness'. He tests his faith against many ideologies which becomes a necessary feature in his search.

The split identity of the hero also reveals the mien of illusion and reality. Kirillov, the separated self, cannot be allowed to live because all appearances are impermanent. Padmanabhan, on the other hand, represents that reality which perpetuates itself as a continuous presence in the background and allows the apparent to maintain temporary dominance on the scene. The deceptive mask is merely a superimposition. And as maya is a product and an extension of Reality itself, the actual inner self becomes momentarily shrouded. The life accorded to maya or illusion or the Kirillov counterpoint is, therefore, not a lasting one.

Originally recognised as Padmanabhan Iyer, the protagonist gets his identity deliberately converted to Comrade Kirillov. Apparently dissatisfied with the socio-political conditions of India, he dreams of creating a new Benares city in America. The alteration in name helps him in propagating his ideas with greater freedom in the west. Even though Kirillov loved his country "with a noble, delicate un-reasoned love", his communist mask is a cover designed to suit his logical and reason-oriented self. His sentiment towards the land of his birth could only be gauged when he lays bare his essential self of a south-Indian brahmin. Like a genuine orthodox believer with immense knowledge of Sanskrit and scriptures, brought up in total conservatism, provided with a training into the culture and beliefs of
the Indian ethos, Kirillov represents a genuine paradox in being. Rama observes:

To hear him recite Sanscrit verse was like listening to a Pandit from Tanjore. His sincerity, his enthusiasm, his learning, were all alike - of one sovereign made.\(^8\)

The communist-oriented rational intellect prompts him to a sincere concern for the future of his motherland. The young nationalist in him is also distressed by the malaise suffered by the Indian multitude under the British yolk. The miserable plight of labourers and untouchables torments him excruciatingly. A sensitive Indian brahmin, he cannot tolerate the sight of an untouchable leaping the fence in order to accommodate the caste complexes of a brahmin, or the brutal treatment meted out to the peasants. He feels:

Was this indeed the India that had to be? Where aerial chariots, pulled by heavenly horses and bedecked with many unearthly precious stones, should move, the thin-legged Indian drove his miserable bullock, its sides flagging for want of fodder, and its bones speaking the chemistry of death.\(^9\)

Being "learned, uninnocent and brilliant of mind", he elects to move ahead with his twin agenda for Truth and an improvement in the plight of his exploited and hungry countrymen. In his mission concerning Truth, the hero disjunct initially encounters theosophy. Meditation on different "chakras" and the Cosmic mystery which formed a unit of theosophical magic, fascinate and attract him. He says:

The destiny of India was deeply bound with the outcome of theosophy and Mrs. Annie Besant was
the great Indian patriot, whose peregrinations across the thundering world would cause India to emerge out of the mess of Anglo-Saxon devilry and create double movement of freedom and of prophetic dominion. The wicked English would go, the great Master of the human race, now born, and already being prepared for his historic mission, would reveal the real India to be.\textsuperscript{10}

But on closer contact, he concluded that the theosophical adventure was inadequate to make any improvement in the lot of his underprivileged countrymen. The disenchantment occurred on account of a realization that theosophy, with all its promised comforts, was insufficient and did not carry the panacea for the suffering of the Indian masses. Apprehending the futility of this enterprise, his sensibility turns towards Marxism. By no means an accidental mischance, the choice, in both cases, was consequent to his own rationalistic answer-seeking approach. The quester and national hero from the land of Kanthapura, Moorthy, now shapes up as Padmanabhan-R.- and Kirillov. His journey to Truth moves through acquaintances with other theories and ideologies which temporarily lead him astray. When finally he emerges as Comrade Kirillov, the transition towards these practices is "more a matter of expedience than of any emotional conviction".

The colour problem in America and the simple difficulty of "existence" propels him towards socialism propounded by Marx. Kirillov feels that the Messiah for India can only be born in a "steel furnace", for, the success of the Russian revolution enthrals him and he observes:

\begin{quote}
The Russian Revolution was a remarkable experiment - it was the only historic revelation of the modern world. The Messiah was not only born -
\end{quote}
he worked, and his land was called the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, and maybe a new Ganges flowed there...\textsuperscript{11}

Padmanabhan recedes and re-incarnates as the Comrade Kirillov - persona which thereafter occupies centre-stage. Marxist beliefs churn its essence. The drastic metamorphosis in his inner self is the result of deep philosophical thinking. Rama, the narrator notices:

Marxism had given a strange ascetic incision to his brahminic manners and his sweetness had that unction, the theological compassion, of a catholic priest.\textsuperscript{12}

Preaching Marxism as a way of life above all theories, Kirillov observes thus:

The communist, the true Marxist, is above all a realist. For him, the fact speaks in terms of its history. And its meaning is in terms of itself - like in any experiment in a laboratory.\textsuperscript{13}

Though his language gets tempered by communist terminology, the discourses appear hollow and meaningless. They lack the ring of basic sincerity. The Marxist world may have fascinated him, yet it de-humanizes his essential identity and bewildered, he blurts to Rama:

Anonymous my name,....... Logic my religion, Communism my motherland.\textsuperscript{14}

Kirillov, with assumed identity, appears a communist monk. Having temporarily lost his bearing, he becomes oblivious to the real identity of Padmanabhan. This results in an incessant tussle between his emotions and adopted beliefs and a meaningless abyss divides his thought and action. The disjunct surrenders his heart to his assumed theory and begins abusing Indian nationalists and leaders. Prompted by ideology, he
launches almost a tirade against Gandhi, whom he had revered and respected as a divine archetype. The projected mask of Kirillov downgrades his hero as a "friend and fool of the poor, the Sadhu reactionary who still believed in caste and creed and such categories, and whose birth in this world had set history many centuries backwards". His dwindling faith condemns non-violence as a "biological lie" and Indian politics as a "good Masala". Gandhi now appears to his prejudiced vision, the sole enemy of Marxism. He warns everyone against Gandhi:

More insidious than Hitler is this intellectual venom that is spreading over vast and ignorant humanity. Beware!  

He abuses his "god":

Besides, .....your Gandhi is a kleptomaniac. You know what kleptomaniac is. It is the instinct for stealing money from others.

The dislike becomes increasingly virulent:

Your Gandhi morality, fattening itself on the 'marwari' - capitalist, and speaking a brother-brother language! It is nothing but the plainest of vulgarity.

However, it is essentially a concern for his country that prompts him into criticism of its leaders and their working policies. The Kirillov counterpoint aspires for a classless society to replace the caste-ridden, graded and divided polity of India, where no man will be "master of another", and instead of wandering in search of metaphysics, the individual will enjoy himself "sitting on some lone hilltop and write beautiful books". Marxism instils confidence in him and with full faith in its ideological beliefs, Kirillov mentally carves diverse and clear-cut policies. Despite this, his speech echoes with Gandhi
mannerisms and though a communist, Kirillov exclaims with sadhu zeal:

I know only one God, and that is the common man. I know only one worship and that is the Party meeting. I know only one morality, and that is a classless society.\(^{18}\)

But, howsoever Kirillov praises communism, he retains his Indian essence and on occasion, this essential core reasserts itself, and Indianness re-emerges "as an indestructible force".\(^{19}\) The Marxist-vedantin now recites verses from Sanskrit texts and occasionally resorts to native "hindustani". At times, he becomes nostalgic about his motherland and says:

Unlike Europe, it is not sincerity that goes a-begging in India - we are not yet that corrupt. But we shall soon reach the requisite standards. We are human like all. But one thing I felt sorry for when I was in India - the neglect of our classics. I forgot my politics for a time and jumped into the classics. It was such a joy to go back to Uttarrama Charita, and to Kalidasa.\(^{20}\)

An ambiguous creation, Kirillov witholds himself and like a true communist, does not divulge the "secret of his mind" to anyone, not even to his wife - Irene. He develops a kind of withdrawl or "indrawnness" reflected by his exterior or outer dress. Outward appearance mirror one's inner self, one's nature, ideology, thought and psyche. Despite the disjunct's best effort to remain an enigma, Rama easily penetrates through the defences of his flimsy exterior, reaching the depth of his thoughts, motivations and actions. He knows the sheer "invalidity" of communism in Kirillov's life and accuses him of hypocrisy. Rama, the eternal observer, recognizes the disparity between his speech and thoughts. Kirillov, he says, "brags about Islam and
communism" and yet calls his son - Kamal Dev - instead of giving him a communist name like Stephanovich. This divorced self of the protagonist is certain that Kirillov continues his daily prayers and morning ritual in accordance with observances done in India. Seemingly a believer in "progress", his spirit has remained essentially Indian. Just as it was difficult for the protagonist to kill the mask of Kirillov, similarly, the removal of Indian roots from his personality is an uphill-task. However, the Kirillov-dilemma could be breached only when the individual perceived the "discipline" and the "superior metaphysics" hidden inside the mask of reason and logic. It becomes a formidable task for a spectator to gauge the reality of Kirillov's studied transformation into Padmanabhan. Elimination of negative intellect thus became a necessary adjunct to shattering of the Kirillov persona. By committing his soul to Marxism, Kirillov had virtually executed himself. Being an Indian, the protagonist is bound to return to his roots. Rao's novel exhibits the intense and acute magnetism in the spirit of India which unflinchingly draws its natives. This is no mere idle fascination for the mysteries of India but a sustained and genuine interest in its essence.

During the Second World War, the rise of Hitler and Stalin enthused Kirillov with a new hope of drastic change in the world map. Kirillov had conviction that Stalin's order to the Indian Communist Party would be based on "a definite logical conclusion". But to his utter dismay, the strategy of war was changed by a directive to "toe the British line". He waited in the 'dark night of the soul' to comprehend the new directions that history was contemplating. Consequent to his disillusionment, the protagonist lapsed into profound meditation, "seeking the meaning of event
and statistic to their dialectical finality". The altered circumstances appeared almost to change his "skin" and he surfaced as Padmanabhan Iyer. Hidden sincerity to the land of his nativity motivate him into an anonymous participation in the Second World War. The narrator proclaimed that with the revolution of 1942, India was lost to the British. The non-violent principle of Gandhi had finally emerged victorious. This triumph was not unexpected for Iyer knew the power and strength of India. Faith in India and its leaders gets restored. A brilliant manuscript entitled "India and our struggle", containing the "history of the Indian movement" with Tilak, Gandhi as principal actors and motivators, re-establishes belief. While explaining to Irene, the significance of a wife in the east, he states that all traditions originated first in India, his motherland:

Who does not know... that from the airplane to the latest theories of democracy, passing through medicine and mathematics, all had one, and only one, origin - Holy India.21

The hero disjunct explains to her the Buddhist origin of the Albegensian heresy which is chosen by his successor Ramaswamy for research in The Serpent and the Rope. In her diary, Irene records her husband's deep knowledge about "Mantra-Sastra" - "the science of the holy word - of the creative syllable", which was explained to her by him earlier. It unfolds her husband's awareness and brahminic preferences.

At a certain place in the novel, Rama equates Kirillov with Buddha, an echo from the Bodhisattva of The Meaning of India. Marxism is compared to Mara. Just as in Kanthapura, the British - the red people or 'rakshas' symbolised evil, in this novel - Russia becomes the wicked one. It
is the monster, Mara, who tempted Buddha and discouraged him from reaching his goal. Unlike the saint who did not yield, Kirillov gets trapped in the temptations of theosophy, Marxism and communism. But the Rama counterpoint believes in his ability to transcend Mara and reach the final destination like Buddha. At one place in the novel, he humiliates and rebukes evil:

Go, go, Mara,...... I know of your doings. I know the dialectic of Feurbach, and the State and the Revolution of Lenin..... Go, you many-mouthed, many-armed, you multiple monster, Mara!22

The Indian brahmin who perceives the "intrinsic reason behind all meditation is destined to discover the glory of his native land. The lost Kirillov has to recognize his real identity as Padmanabhan Iyer. Rama, the spectator, maintains:

I told you Kirillov was an Indian - and his Indianhood would break through every communist chain.23

The conclusion depicts the Kirillov mask thoroughly dejected, confused and muddled. Though in essence, he recognizes his culture, yet the strong pulls from both orthodoxy and modernism leave him confounded. Niranjan points out:

Kirillov knows that the greatest virtue on earth is Truth and Truth is the only substance that India can offer to the materialistic West, and that Truth has no history, yet like any other communist he, too, seeks historical evidence in everything. This pathetic state of his being ultimately leaves him a thoroughly confused fellow..... neither a communist nor a patriotic Indian.24

Consequent to the Second World War, two divergent attitudes emerged on the world scene - modern pragmatism which conformed to
current demands and traditional values of authority and principles. Through the medium of the novel Rao exposes the deplorable plight of countless young people who were dismayed and perplexed by these conditions. Like Kirillov, they too were searching for moorings and support.

Rama, the transparently ceaseless spectator, realises that the Kirillov - logic is very different from his own. The disjunct's rationale may help him in his quest but all this could fall short of the final goal. The writer maintains:

Vedanta alone has the courage of the ultimate - it..... asks for more enquiry into your biological, psychological, and psychic self, delimiting you bit by bit into acute dissolution, when, intensified in your desperate anonymity, you surrender yourself to that which is ever your "I".26

The narrator knows the value and importance of Vedanta. He perceives that "sacrifice is an act of dissolution and reduction of the ego investiture of true beauty". Breaking the Kirillov paradox, he points: "were Kirillov capable of free thinking and not tied to a dogma", he definitely would not have experienced intellectual choking. In his article, "Look, The Universe is Burning", Rao philosophises:

Logic comes to an end by its own suicide. For if you lead logic by logic it reaches a dead end.27

In his pursuit for panacea to the socio-political problems of India, Kirillov (who is mature Moorthy) comes in contact with a Czech girl and weds her in a "flush of enthusiasm". It should not be forgotten that the women characters of Rao's novels cherish India for its culture. Irene agrees to marry him as Padmanabhan - its cultural ambassador. She writes in her diary:
I met P., after all, in my Indian enthusiasm. Tiger and all that aside, India's pattern of man seemed deeply satisfying.  

It is ironical that the misguided Kirillov, an Indian, failed to appreciate the ethos and deep-rooted civilization of his country and Irene, a foreigner, accepts him for the grandeur and cultural diversity of this same land. However, after the flush of enthusiasm for India wanes, Irene experiences gradual estrangement and fear. She senses her husband's fanatic obsession with the origin country, so much so that he fails in duties of an "ideal husband". The schism between eastern beliefs and western sensibility grows wide with time. Evidence of this encounter is available in both Comrade Kirillov and The Serpent and the Rope.

Women characters in Rao's novels are endowed with sensitivity, intelligence and perceptiveness. They possess profound insight and are deeply devoted to their husbands or lovers. Irene also remains fully faithful to her husband and wholeheartedly supports him in his communist party enterprises. But the introvert and eccentric Kirillov does not allow her proximity into his own thoughts. His spiritual bewilderment prevents Irene's christening into Indian ways and life. She is rarely encouraged to participate in discussions on India. Whenever the lady tries to defend his country, Kirillov censures and silences her with - "What do you know Irene?" Birth allowed him claim on India and hers was a right by adoption. Despite such restrictive impediments and lack of encouragement, she learns "hindustani" and could even recite verses in Sanskrit. As an "inspiring force, her attraction towards India is almost sentimental". She says:
The India I seek is the India of the austere, the purposeful, something of Gandhi but in gracious flowering.\(^{30}\)

The fear, earlier mentioned in her case, also becomes self-explanatory, as it threatens her married life with added possibility of total estrangement. When fascination and charm for India is lost, proximity becomes "the greatest cause of misery" and mistrust turns into hatred. She feels thus:

I hope I shall never have to settle in India. I have grown afraid of India. P. is completely an Indian. Will I ever recognize him there?........ No, no, I will not go to India. I almost begin to hate it.\(^{31}\)

Increasing alienation leads to incompatibility between them. Unable to divine and share his complex and obscure ideas, she becomes conscious of the widening distance between them. The breakdown of communication and interaction between Irene and the Kirillov-disjunct suppresses the woman in her. She is alarmed by his total lack of response. Her earlier feelings towards both—her husband and India, which are now bracketed together, surface in deep distrust. In such circumstances, the only outlet for her is the diary which is both a confessional and also provides answers to her queries. It is an expression of Irene's apprehension and India phobia as well as the unrewarded effort she made to know her husband. The manuscript dating from July 4, 1944 to January 4, 1949, becomes her confidante. The written pages record views which she found difficult to share with her husband. The book accomplishes yet another subtle task. The real purpose of the diary is to acquaint readers with the essential self of Kirillov. Intrinsically an Indian, he is possessive of his heritage and has no desire to share it with his wife. Aware of this secretiveness and reticence and stung by his lack of response,
Irene's repressed emotions, needs and wishes find the written word a convenient medium. She insists on maintaining it even though it appears 'bourgeois'. The pages reveal her hidden dread and extreme loneliness and her inner struggle with herself. She is perplexed, afraid and finds herself unable and ill-equipped to tackle the very obscure and occult world symbolised by the man she married. The mysterious in India finds its objective correlative in Kirillov. Both of them are beyond her comprehension. Kirillov is quintessentially an Indian and his mask of west only enhances the paradox in his personality. Gradually, the Kirillov-illusion disintegrates and makes way for her memoirs. Already aware of the paradox in his character, she does not approve of his "double standards" and records it in her diary:

I don't like the way P. speaks of Mahatma Gandhi-now full of national pride-he, the greatest of the epoch, with Lenin, etc., but now and again so virulent in attack, so lacking in proportion and sometimes in taste.32

Other than Rama, it is Irene who is aware of the duality in Kirillov's mind. She once told him:

At heart Gandhi is your God. You tremble when you speak of him sometimes. I once saw even a tear, one long tear, it was there when you spoke of Gandhi to S.33

Irene knows very well that Kirillov "cannot bear any European, bourgeois, or even communist, speak against Congress or Gandhi". Even she is reprimanded occasionally and treated as an enemy. Even though she makes effort to grasp the essence of the east and strives to establish her own private relationship,
Kirillov fails to unravel its mystery to her. He was unaware that the latent divinity in womanhood needs appreciation. Insecure and frightened, she explains:

India is now my enemy. It will eat up P. His Indianness will rise up once he touches the soil of his land, and all this Occidental veneer will scuttle into European hatred.  

Irene had cognizance of the "strange mixture" that constituted his persona with paradoxes such as western identity and also professed hatred for Europe and internationalism; a deliberate escape from his native land and yet intense love for India. Though Irene is sure that she will never visit India, she hopes to send her son Kamal for an acquaintance with its culture, religion and philosophy. She realises that "he must know his country's classics". But the woman in Irene is unable to reveal the disquiet that her child may get sucked into the vortex of India's esoteric mysteries and get estranged from her. A spectre looms large before Irene. Rao allows her to finally move out of the scene during the birth of the second child. This document is also a medium of appreciation of her husband. In an ironically revelatory fashion, the text displays her approval for Kirillov's superior intelligence. Proud of association and relation with him, she says:

What joy in life to have met this dear, this deeply sensitive, this magnanimous soul.  

Even though interaction with him was difficult, yet she thanks God for "what he is" and loves Padmanabhan for his very Indianness, orthodoxy and rigid religious faith. These predilections vouchsafe his basic honesty as an individual whom Irene considers worthy of emulation.
Kamal, the first son of Irene and Kirillov, lives. He is given an Indian name in preference to a western identity of Stephanovich just because his skin was "dark". Kirillov hoped that his son's corporeal body would be "proud" of this oriental heritage. Kamal is dispatched to India with the clear intention of promoting a deeper knowledge and kinship with his roots and its ancient civilization as Kirillov does not wish his dilemma to be perpetuated in his progeny. The hero allows his Rama persona to accompany Kamal for the very reason that it personifies uncorrupted and superior intelligence. Intricate and complex issues of faith and belief require adherence to norms and certitude which the Kirillov-disjunct had destroyed through disbelief and scepticism. Logic is the truest enemy of faith. Hence Kamal, who was to be initiated, accompanies Rama to the south of India - Kanyakumari. India is seen embodied in Parvati - the Kanyakumari, an eternal and holy virgin, waiting for her bridegroom - Shiva. She represents the glory and intrinsic "Meaning of India". The story of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati is narrated to the young boy so that he may imbibe the essential spirit of the country. Kanyakumari, the soul of the nation, is India in miniature with beauty, magnificence, prosperity and splendour. Gupta points out:

The myth of Parvati and Lord Shiva of Kailas is introduced in the novel as a story told by the narrator to Kamal. The story is narrated not only in an interesting manner, capturing the total attention of Kamal, but also with the purpose of emphasizing the spirit for which India stands to the narrator Comrade Kirillov and to Kamal to whom the story is narrated.36

Goddess Parvati who exhibits endurance and dedication to her lord, enhances the glory of Mother Shakti who is the other half of Lord Shiva. Together,
they constitute the 'Ardhanarishwara', a myth solely Indian in origin. Wealth and prosperity are believed to be complements of this Shakti principle.

Rama has been presented as a Vedantin in the novel. His vast knowledge and brahminic manners astonish even his Kirillov persona and Irene. It is the Kirillov-self that allows Irene to peep into this occult brahminic counterpoint. He tells her:

You will like R. .... He has your love of Tagore and Shakuntala ... He is poetic, without being a poet.... His stronghold is metaphysics - there he beats you down wickedly. He floats in metaphysics as I float in figures ... He is straight and simple as a child, and like most Indians magniloquent.\(^{37}\)

Rama's love for India is incomprehensible and even the communist Kirillov sometimes feels envious:

He will madden me with his aesthetics and Sanscrit, and make me feel ten years younger and an undergraduate.\(^{38}\)

His indianness seems "unconvincing" to Irene. The depth of knowledge and magnanimity of this man astonishes her and she feels bewildered by his Vedic knowledge.

The instant novel introduces for the first time, into Rao's fictional world, a thematic preoccupation which he allows to develop in his later novel - The Serpent and the Rope. The introduction of Irene and the background of Comrade Kirillov are both of singular significance as they are recognizable manifestations of the west against which Rao pits his own eastern world and metaphysics. It becomes evident in the title - 'Comrade Kirillov' - a western name with a distinct Russian identity. The protagonist's name is Padmanabhan.
Iyer and for reasons best known to himself, he gets deliberately christened Kirillov. Both selves connote antithetical ideologies and cultures. The east-west contention is evident in the very personality of the protagonist and also in his relationship with his wife. They frequent two separate ideological worlds. Their thought-processes and responses differ. Though the marriage is not a failure, yet nowhere in the novel does their relationship appear normal.

Indians are nurtured with concepts of renunciation. They have an inborn tendency towards self-abnegation. Ironically, in a fit of enthusiasm, the deluded Kirillov rejects his own values, getting trapped in a shallow world of materialism, glitter, sparkle, lustre and passion of the west. Raja Rao himself respected women and in all his novels, he depicted them as incarnations of Shakti. He maintains that "a woman is a woman, and feminine psychology does not change with the Party Card". Irene represented true womanhood. However, as a character of fiction, she appears unconvincing. Irene is west to Padmanabhan's east in the novel. Rao's novel depicts the tremendous capacity in the east to draw attention to its occult quintessential mysteries and influence the entire world. It is a land of Truth, virtuosity and devotion. Concepts of metaphysics, rebirth, transmigration, 'nirvana' appear novel and singular to the westerners.

The cultures of east and the west display divergent polarities. In Comrade Kirillov, the principal characters get attracted to each other primarily because of the radical difference in the partner's milieu. Possibly they have not understood their own heritage. Persons removed from their
native land generally suffer because support system and props of culture and faith are essential moorings. In their absence, the individual is reduced to a state of a rootless wanderer. Efforts to grasp and embrace a foreign culture is bound to result in misery. Native culture, milieu, ethos, tradition, heritage provide the fulcrum for a person to lean on and dig into in time of need.

This appears to be Rao's intention in each of his novels. They reiterate the need of understanding the different world culture. Rao wishes to state that people foolishly rush into experiences for novelty. It is this lack of familiarity that results in disillusion. People from the west lack insight and fail to grasp the essence of the east. Indians, on the other hand, are over-enthusiastic and lack reserve. They fall prey to surface glamour and sham artificiality of the west. Kipling maintains, "The east is east and the west is west and the twain shall never meet". However, the orient has always displayed ability to assimilate all cultures and yet retain its own innate dignity and individuality. This trait in Rao's protagonists attracts foreigners. The flavour, novelty and originality of the Indian experience is vital for them. When the west revelled in superficial knowledge and new discoveries, Indians held on to roots and moorings which were profound and absorbing. This makes the Indian ethos esoteric and the Indian mentality, an enigma.

The novel also reveals India's immense affection for its children. Despite aberration, the wayward inconsistent progeny get admitted again and again. Padmanabhan's Kirillov - mask too (though he leaves his country in disillusionment), remains lost and puzzled by the confusing mass of western philosophy till he returns back to his motherland. True strength from his native soil and its heritage recall and sustain him. He recognises the folly of
illusion and discovers the worth of India which is not just a mother to its own people but a maternal principle to the entire world. Rao considers India a country which has the capacity to transform "defeat into victory". It is said:

She (India) loves her children too much - and as long as Lord Siva is in Kailash and the holy Ganga flows from His hair, Indians will not betray their land....

For an Indian specifically, the mother (the country) is larger than any political creed or philosophy. Erring Kirillov could also not deign to betray this land. In times of need, the spirit of India stood steadfast as a pillar to him as well as to the other protagonists in Rao's novels. They all derive immense strength and sustenance from it.

The hero of the instant novel too, like Moorthy, remains unaware of the significance of a spiritual mentor. The arduous struggle in *The Serpent and the Rope* necessitates a spiritual guide, without whom life would remain an endless journey of birth and death. Seeds of spirituality are present in Moorthy. And Kirillov also craves for a higher vision of life. Being a brahmin, he cannot betray his Indian roots. He possesses deep knowledge about the orient but no reference is made to a guru in *Comrade Kirillov*. The concept of a spiritual mentor is primarily occidental. West does not recognize these views. The fact that the protagonist moves west, accounts for change in his thinking process also. Misguided, Kirillov might have adopted Hitler or Stalin or any other communist leader as a guru, but his Indian spirit is unwilling to accept their creeds. He is aware that the real
mentor is not bound by any beliefs. His chief purpose is to admit the sadhaka into the kingdom of God. Had he remained 'Padmanabhan', the need for a mentor would have arisen in his being.

Rao deals with the aspect of illusion and reality in a dualistic fashion - firstly, on the level of characters and secondly, as the enigmatic titles of the novels. In this particular novel, the characters fail to recognise the twin aspects of appearance and reality. The hero adopts an illusory name and hides his identity beneath a concealing mask. Lack of discrimination impedes his progress and he is unable to distinguish illusion from reality or Truth. The young brahmin mistakenly assumes that by remaining 'Padmanabhan Iyer', he may not be able to complete his mission. The adopted name only heightens the paradox in his personality.

Kirillov - an illusion, gets attracted to Irene whom he mistakenly visualizes as reality. The magnetism between them is based on the polar difference between illusion (maya) and reality. On coming closer, Kirillov discovers that Irene is not truth or reality but an image of the same, and he too is not fact, but a reflection of the same. The two do not have separate existences and hence bonding and compatibility between them is not possible. Like illusion, they are bound to perish.

Irene gets trapped in her own illusory conception of the east. She marries 'Padmanabhan' because he belongs to the country she "loved". However, it is not her fault that she remains ignorant about India's real essence. Though she tries to become an Indian, lack of encouragement from Kirillov kills her enthusiasm. Nevertheless, she recognizes the hidden
Indianness in her husband. Nowhere in the novel does she call him - Kirillov. To her, he is always "P." - Padmanabhan, because it reminds her of the east. Though P. may convert his name, still he remains essentially an Indian husband for Irene.

The titles of Rao's novels are original and singular. The sheer ambiguity and the deep implicit philosophy make them even more piquant. They project Rao's interest in yet another aspect of illusion and reality. Though there is no apparent obscurity in the first title - Kanthapura, yet, a careful reading of the text discloses the preponderence with the theme. Kanthapura does not indicate only a small village. It represents the entire nation. The canvas is not so small as is apparent. The freedom struggle is a metaphor for the strife in which the entire nation is involved. And it is not just this because destruction of the village has implication beyond the apparent. The focus is on the spirit to rebuild. The reality, therefore, lies beyond the fight for freedom. Moorthy's small personal rebellion surfacing in the later novel as a deviant in the guise of Kirillov is also one such example. The appearance in the novel is supplied by three prominent metaphors - the village - Kanthapura, the struggle and Moorthy's own war with himself. The reality was rooted in these motifs but is removed from them also.

Likewise, Comrade Kirillov is not a novel about Kirillov - the man. It, in fact, tells the story of a certain Padmanabhan Iyer who gets deluded in the course of his sadhana. Kirillov is only an outer projection of the bewildered and muddled psychology of Padmanabhan. Being
impermanent, a fantasy or maya, it is bound to vanish in the light of Padmanabhan's brahminic intellect. Had the title been only Padmanabhan and not Comrade Kirillov, it would have lost its essential charm, beauty and ambiguity. The replacement of Comrade Kirillov by Padmanabhan would have toned down the inherent scepticism which forms the core of the persona. Comrade Kirillov reflects disillusion, doubt, distrust, lack of confidence and Marxist leanings. It enforces the novelist's own staunch honesty to Vedantism. An indepth reading of the book reveals that Marxism is only an outer mask introduced in the life of Padmanabhan to make him recognize the real importance of Vedantism and realize the essence of his country. The deviation from the regular route makes him perceive its actual importance.

In the delineation of characters, Rao veers from the conventional practice. He allows them to develop on the level of thought. Kirillov's character in the novel is not built upon concrete imagery. His external appearance which is described in the beginning of the novel, is primarily a framework or externalization used to probe the working inside his mind. The physical is merely a shell to provide a correlative to the human being. The text graphically presents the inner confusion and paradox in the mind of the protagonist, though never through conventional narration. Moreover, as his image is divided into fractions - Padmanabhan and Kirillov, it becomes difficult to imagine him as a real human being. He is merely a disjunct from out of a personality split into three by the novelist. As Kirillov - he doubts, as Padmanabhan - he believes and as R. - he observes. Nowhere do any one of these three selves merge or become complete beings. They serve as
counterpoints to each other. By according importance to Kirillov, the writer wishes to emphasize the dilemma of the human mind in search for something. The strangeness of the name imparts further mystery to the mask of scepticism because of its closeness to socialist ideologies. Kirillov is not the only one who, though physical, is formless. The others also suffer from a similar fate. His qualities and weaknesses detract from the concretisation of his being and marriage to Irene is also showed with the purpose of revealing the inner confusion of his mind.

Irene makes her appearance as the wife of Kirillov, yet, does not surface as a life-blood woman. She exists as an idea and more as a product of Kirillov's mind. Her description in the novel in terms of physical attributes through the mouth of the Kirillov-disjunct do not allow her to appear as an independent entity - leaving her merely as an abstract reality. Though the entries in her diary prove her presence, yet these are merely Rao's attempts to disclose Kirillov's character rather than add to the physicality of Irene. Rao resorts to the device of witness-narrator technique in this novel. Having divided the protagonist's identity into three, Rao makes two of them - Rama and Padmanabhan - spectators to the third - Kirillov. Like R. (Rama) and Padmanabhan, there is yet another strong witness of Kirillov's mind - Irene. Her diary is testimony and it authentically enumerates the "private life" of Kirillov, to which even R. had no access. The Kirillov counterpoint which is the projection of doubt, is given semblance of authenticity by the narrator.

It is difficult to pinpoint Rao's singular technique in Comrade Kirillov because he simultaneously employs several devices. At one place, it
reflects the stream-of-consciousness manner of opening the mind and psychology of the protagonist for the perusal of the readers. At another, it displays the use of witness-narrator. But the latter device functions on various levels. The novel employs not just one but multiple witness-narrators. This conclusion is counter to Sharma's theory of two witness-narrators. Though Rama acts as the principal narrator, yet the other two characters probe into his mind with striking similitude. The principal witness is Rama. He is well acquainted with Padmanabhan as well as Kirillov, his misguided self. Similarly P. is also witness to his Kirillov-counterpoint. Irene acts as an essential key to the witness probe into the mind of Kirillov. The written manuscript sums up her observations. The 'fiction' argument in the novel is based upon multiple perspectives of a single individual. They do not correspond to one single meaning of life. All the characters and their alter-egos maintain their individual points of view, temperaments, faiths and intellectual mindsets. Rama, a staunch Vedantin, speaks about Vedantism with an expression of precision, depth and sublimity of Sanskrit language. Padmanabhan, an Indian, remembers India with a "delicate, unreasoned love". Kirillov, the deluded self of Padmanabhan, brags about communism. He becomes "discursive, voluble, satirical and polemical" in his discourse. Rao, thus, experimented with different styles in *Comrade Kirillov*. He tried to find a proper medium to express his thoughts and ideas. The use of this new technique and style lend the book its essential complexity and ambiguity.

The novelty of fictional technique is not its only singularity. The author adds to its ambiguity by employing unique symbols. The clusters and
their associations lend complexity and serve to supplement the regular connotations. Different from conventional symbols, they are objectified as correlatives and also used as motifs. The primary symbol, 'comrade', is suggestive of western values and implies an acceptance of Russian ideology and reverence for renowned leaders like Marx, Lenin and Stalin. The word is reminiscent of the Russian revolution, the bourgeois uprising and a consequent reaction against monarchy and the uplift of the working class aiming at a classless society. In the novel, the use of the word 'comrade' first appears in its title which is misleading. Seemingly, it is a statement of communism with a protagonist as a staunch believer. The truth is not the Kirillov of the title but the sceptical Padmanabhan. Like Marx and Lenin, Kirillov was merely aiming at reconstructing a classless society.

The 'necktie', yet another suggestive word, also represents the western knot, constricting Padmanabhan by its illusory grip and alienating him from his roots. Esha Dey maintains that it is the most valuable key to the presentation of reality in the novel. The tie does not only symbolise a "knot", but it first signifies the 'other world', secondly - the change in the protagonist's life and finally - the delusion which converts Padmanabhan, a south-Indian into an "inverted brahmin". It is the shaping principle of the life of the hero and reveals the depth to which the narrator says:

Kirillov's real name was Padmanabha Iyer, but his necktie had such a praterplusparenthetical curve, as though much concrete philosophy had gone into its making....

The tie divides Padmanabhan's essential self into two halves and reveals the
paradox in his life. Whereas his inner personality is dedicated to Indian Vedantism, the Kirillov-psyche makes him appear a communist. The folds and curves indicate the dilemma and distractions of his mind. It transforms him into Kirillov. Rao, at one place, compares the coil of this object on the protagonist's body to that of a "serpent". He states:

..... the tie coils itself on the belly, with the swiftness of the juggler's serpent. 44

Rama, in the novel, notices the "absurd invalidity" of Marxist thoughts in Kirillov's "emotional life" and disapproves of it. The 'serpentine - knot' around Kirillov's neck paves way for the protagonist's journey from the point of Padmanabhan to the counterpoint - Kirillov. It is as much a part of the west, as the 'dhoti' is of the east. The former represents Marxism which becomes an inevitable part in the life of the hero. The narrator discloses the value of this "grey-green stuff" in his life:

..... it was his boon companion, his poetry, his sole possession. How fondly he might have folded it night after night, and whispered, "You, you, my noble, secret friend, you lie in the faithfulness of my scholarly solitude. O, go not away from my habitation, for what shall my desitny be without your contiguous presence. 45

This symbol is also a reflection of his inner psyche. Caught in the unrevealed illusion of the necktie, the mystified Kirillov completely forgets his noble birth. The vedantin Rama gauges the truth behind the "assurance", the "intimacy" and the "obstinacy" of the tie.

The next noticeable symbol is the 'pistol'. It is, in fact, the medium with which he prepares his communist-manifesto. The destructive implication
of the word implies the truth that communism can mean only self-mortification for an Indian, as Dey points out:

> By calling Padmanabha Kirillov, it is made quite obvious that communism can mean only suicide for an Indian. Hence Padmanabha's pen with which he writes his communist thesis is compared to a revolver.\(^46\)

Rama, in the novel, recognizes the negativity of the hero's pen. In using it, he moves against his roots, because it diminishes his brahminic recognition, reinforcing and strengthening his Kirillov-disjunct. The narrator's deep concern makes him say:

> But, being a Gandhian and a Vedantin and an Indian, I would rush to his rescue, pull the pistol out of his trembling, tired hands and, seating him on the bulging barrel, give him a glass of fresh, sugared buttermilk.\(^47\)

It is ironical that Padmanabhan's deluded counterpoint does not realize the paradox within his own self.

The word 'red' in the novel is symbolic of the spirit of socialism. It also denotes passion, anger and energy. The colour helps in the revelation of Irene's nature who is described as a lady with "red blood" and "red hair". The communist brahmin gets attracted towards this characteristic trait. Already entrapped in the dialectics of communist ideology, the colour of Irene's hair appears as a stimulant to his obsession for the west. Irene's "red blood" indicates her enthusiasm and passion, as well as her commitment to Marxism. It also reflects her readiness to assist her husband, promoting his political affiliations.
Rao's use of allusions and myths are also significant. The myths employed by the novelist include Benares, Buddha, Mara, Shiva and Parvati, and India. Benares connotes the quintessential India. Supposed to be a city meant for the emancipation of depraved souls, the use of this particular myth is recurrent in each novel. Kirillov's effort to bring a drastic and improbable change in a foreign land by creating a new Benares city evidently results in failure because Benaras is not only a particular point on the map of India. It denotes the culture and ethos of a country and symbolizes peace and purity. Benares is a spiritual experience and a particular "mood" which cannot be obviously transferred to another geographical locale. Though the specialities may be imitated in California, yet it is unlikely that a new Benares can be created in America. A land of Shiva and Parvati, it represents the eternal myth of 'Ardhanarishwara'. The sacred soil of this earth possesses a sanctifying quality. It is significant that Ramaswamy, the successor of Kirillov in the next book, maintains that "all brides be Benares born". He is aware that the soil of this land possesses the rare quality of embodying the spirit of 'Ardhanarishwara'. And the ladies of Benares are all equipped with this trait. As separate individuals, these women regard themselves as incomplete. They gain totality or completion on marriage. This is the reason why they pray to Mother goddess to make their lives happy and peaceful. Benares is a static symbol, not a growing one. It represents certain fixed values, ideology and faith. India is a land of gods. Hence, an experiment to transfer the sacred mood to the western soil is bound to be a disaster.

The author compares Kirillov to Buddha who sought enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. Rama's Indian spirit creates the persona of Kirillov on
the lines of Buddha. Imagining Kirillov meditating and pining for liberation from the world of sorrow and pain, he observes:

.... Kirillov walks up to the lonely Bo-tree and sits looking at his navel. "Until that be found, I shall not arise". Such would be his Indian decision.

Being a Vedantin, Rama could not have compared Kirillov to the 'monk' unless he probed deep into his psyche. He is aware that P.'s converted self has an Indian soul. Thus it is inevitable that he will attain realization one day.

The myth of Mara is the evil force which prevented Buddha from attaining his goal. It is a symbol of temptation in Buddhist legends. In the text, communism appears as Mara acting as a hindrance in the path of Padmanabhan. In the Buddhist legend, the great monk was able to transcend this evil and attain 'nirvana'. In Comrade Kirillov, the protagonist gets trapped in communism, yet it is believed that like Buddha, he too will succeed in overcoming this evil and reach his goal of indianhood.

The myth of Shiva and Parvati is beautifully narrated through the legend of Virgin Parvati. According to it, goddess Parvati went to south India and immersed herself there in the beauty of the "phenomenal reality". There, she found "beautiful fruits, flowers, perfumes, medicinal herbs, precious stones, sweet water to drink". Having decided to stay there, she waited for her Lord to come and marry her. But Lord Shiva, lost in meditation, failed to arrive at the auspicious time. Parvati refused to move from that place and decided to stay there forever. Since then the "Kanya" Parvati eternally waits for her bridegroom Shiva. In the novel, Parvati represents India. According to a critic, "the axis of the novel's structure - Indianness - is ultimately bared
to the readers as the legend of the Eternal Virgin, which Kamal, the son of Irene and Padmanabhan finds in the temple of Kanyakumari". There is no apparent clue in the novel as to who Lord Shiva is. However, the narrative hints at the "failure of Indian communists to join the Gandhian national upsurge". And as Parvati is India, the indifferent Shiva may be the "recalcitrant" Indian marxist - Kirillov. In the novel, Kirillov moves away to Peking and it is his son - Kamal who recognizes the essence and culture of India. In both, the novel - Comrade Kirillov and The Meaning of India, Rao has explained his philosophy of sound. Dividing the 'vak' into four states, namely, 'vaikhari' or word as we have it in use, 'madhyama' which is minute sound to be grasped by the intellect as it is audible only to the innate power of hearing; 'pashyanti' which can be attainable only by the 'yogis' and 'para' which is beyond comprehension, Raja Rao considered word as an eternal fact beyond sounds. He further observes in "The Writer and the Word" :

...he who says the word enunciates the word and he who hears it has to have the eternal part awakened in him so that there could be right communication... If the eternal, the unchanging, speaks to the unchanging, ...... we have one language.49

Rao's present novel is based on his deductions of sound and word. The Kirillov psyche understood as the 'Arjuna-vishada yoga' or 'the grief of Arjuna', vacillates between the four components of 'vak'. Through intellect and understanding, he reaches 'madhyama'. But the unchanging language of the eternal cannot be attained without intervention from an initiated mentor.

Comrade Kirillov is thus a stage in the development of the novelist. It presents all the basic elements in Rao's thought process -
Gandhian ideology, Vedanta, Buddhism, Marxism. The novel depicts the 'dark night of the soul' where the troubled human consciousness flits from one uneasy support to another in search of a proper anchor. The sadhaka or the searcher is unable to divine his own intrinsic privation. With the penchant to be sceptical of the entire world of metaphysics, he gets lost in the maze, occasionally surfacing as P. or Rama. His troubled sensibility has to learn to assemble the three disjuncts into a single self. The discord in his own confused pneuma needs harmony. This becomes a primary requirement because only concord between them can lead him out of the 'dark period' of doubt and scepticism that plagues him throughout the novel - Comrade Kirillov. Kirillov is the link between the sensibilities of Moorthy and Ramaswamy. The dilemma is resolved later in The Serpent and the Rope when its protagonist perceives the need of a mentor or guru to lead and guide him to enlightenment.

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The Serpent and the Rope
Appearance and Reality
CHAPTER-4

The doctrine of maya occupies a pivotal position in Advaita. It forms the basic foundation of Acharya Sankara's philosophy of Vedanta in which Brahman alone is real and all else beside Him is unreal. The ultimate and absolute truth is the Self, which appears in multiple traits in different individuals. It is said to be the beginningless Cosmic Principle:

which hides reality from the vision of man.

Truth is the perennial cause of the world. It can be experienced through name and form. Sri Sankara's preceptor, Gaudapada felt that all things that appear compounded are in fact dreams (svapna) and illusion (maya). Brahman is the only reality and maya creates distinction to give rise to duality. Brahman is not only the instrumental cause or 'nimitta-karana' of the world, as a potter who makes a pot, but also the material cause, 'upadana-karana', as clay of which the pot is made. Material cause can be sub-divided into: 'arambhaka', 'parinama' and 'vivarta'. 'Arambhaka-upadana' is the material principle distinguishable from its effect. The woven cloth differs from the thread used for it even though the latter is material cause for the former. 'Parinama-upadana' signifies transformation from one existing form into another, like milk becoming curd. 'Vivarta-upadana' displays itself as an effect without undergoing any change in itself. The manifest is distinct, like a rope appearing as a snake. Similarly, this world is an appearance made possible due to a power or 'shakti' called 'maya'. The Mandukya-Karika bhashya defines maya as:

......that which does not exist; it is the name of the non-existent.

(iv, 58)
Little difference exists between cause and effect for effect is an illusory imposition upon cause, a mere illusion of name and form. Clay moulded into plates and jugs remains the same despite the difference of names. The transformation into plates and jugs is only an appearance of name and form - 'namarupa'. Hence the world being just an effect imposed on Brahman is only phenomenally existent - 'vyavaharika' as objects of name and form. Brahman exists as the only supreme reality or 'paramarthika-satta'. Appearance has no existence of its own. Its illusory reality begins and culminates into Absolute. While the relative experience is called empirical state - 'vyavaharika', the lower degree of reality (than the so-called normal waking life), is the 'pratibhasika'. Dreams, hallucinations and delusions like mistaking a rope for a snake fall under this category. These may disappear with ease but "metaphysical delusion" or 'samsara' can only end after the realisation of Brahman. Ramamurthy explains:

In knowing the true or objective nature of 'Brahman' which was seen wrongly as world, the experience of the world comes to an end. When the rope is seen as rope it is no longer seen as snake, and the snake ceases to have any kind of existence.

The snake and the rope can survive at the same time in a condition of objective reality. But when the rope is seen in its reality, no snake can be related to or identified with in any manner. In the chapter entitled 'Wisdom and Power' in The Meaning of India, Raja Rao has explained that the world is involved in a conflict of opposites. Harmony and connection are established only after the difference or duality ends. However Rao maintains that duality is also essential to existence. But its recognition and
transcendence are man's 'need'. In transcendence there is 'neither man nor woman, day nor night' (man is absolved into his human essence and night and day into time). Truth is therefore defined as non-dual. When the reality which was wrongly perceived as the world (due to nescience), is realized in its complete objectivity, the world experience comes to an end. The re-emergence of any knowledge of duality vanishes after the realisation of the Brahman-oneness.

The title of Rao's second novel - *The Serpent and the Rope* refers to the concept of illusion and reality. Influenced by Sankaracharya's philosophy, it emphasises the dichotomy between the two and establishes the fact that reality and illusion are two faces of the same coin. They are co-existent. Though illusion cannot exist in isolation, it is the essence that gives meaning to reality. This is done through the phenomenon of duality. The insubstantial objects of dreams have no existence beyond sleep. Similarly observed extant world around the individual is non-existent in the truest sense. The discovery of actual truth regarding the riddle of being releases the self from the trap of birth and death. Lack of understanding makes life futile. Hence a perception of reality regarding self is required as this embodies the Supreme Truth. Only when a quester realizes the transitory nature of the "serpent" and "illusory" nature of Reality, can he perceive the mutability of world experience. Dissociating himself from the world, he tends to minimise his bodily activities. The rope-snake illusion employed by Rao can be further explained through an analogy provided by the scriptures. In this moral parallel, a man moving through a dense forest at night, saw a snake and jumped, causing injury and pain to his leg. Just
then a man carrying a lantern in his hand helped him to discover that it was not a snake but a rope. The perception of the snake in this parallel tale lay in incognizance about the true nature of the rope. Such wayward and incomplete understanding of the world is rooted in ignorance. Knowledge of Brahman only can help to understand the real nature of the snake and the rope.

The individual consciousness 'sees' but does not 'recognize' the 'rope', thus wrongly discerning the 'snake' in the 'rope'. The cause for misunderstanding is not the rope but the pre-conceived notion of the object before the eyes. It explains the highest philosophy in the simplest terms. Just as an unreal snake is superimposed on the real rope, similarly, the phenomenal world is superimposed on the non-phenomenal- the Atman or Brahman. This is the only reality which transcends the phenomenal 'real' and the 'unreal'. The basic reason for this misapplied superimposition of the unseen over the seen is absence of proper discrimination. According to Nageswara Rao:

Not to be able to see is to be blind. But to see wrongly is to see in an imperfect manner. Seeing imperfectly is to prove the capacity to see perfectly.6

As soon as the tangibility of the rope is recognised, the snake vanishes along with the fear and agitation of mind and body. In actuality, the dual-perception of a snake in a rope, and rope in a snake confound intelligence. When a person apprehends illusion in reality or reality in illusion, it is the mind that drifts through maya (illusion) and creates a specious world of distinction between seer and seen, and dual perception of cause and effect.
According to Acharya Sankara, the whole world of duality consisting of subject and object, is only an act of the mind. The mind is only an organiser of sensory operations. Even though absorbed in deep sleep, it projects the surroundings in waking and dream states. The cosmos prevails as long as this filter functions and ceases to exist in its absence. As mysterious as the macrocosm, the mind also creates an independent world with Brahman as its cause. "Positive and negative reactions of desires and actions" produce myriad emotions of pleasure, pain, sorrow and confusion. Human psyche, a complex bundle of desires and hankerings suffers if suppressed, even though existence in this universe is no bondage. It is the developed relationship between different objects that becomes the root cause of this suffering. In the words of Swami Krishnananda,

The mind can be transcended through mind itself.

The senses and mind withdraw, dissolving in the knowledge of the Self. Desires can be negated through the realization of Brahman alone. Complete meditation answers all questions about creation, bondage and liberation. Vashishtha, the great sage, on one occasion, explained to Sri Rama - the nature of Reality. Emphasizing a reconciliation of the illusory world appearance with the Ultimate Truth, he stated:

O Rama, the mind in a state of ignorance, imagines bondage which exists as long as ignorance exists and vanishes even as a dream vanishes when the dreamer wakes up. In the vision of the enlightened sages, the hallucination of both - bondage and liberation, does not exist at all.

To illustrate this, the sage cited a story told by a nanny to a young boy:
Once upon a time, there was a beautiful but non-existent city. In that city, three princes lived happily but two of them were unborn and the third was not conceived at all. Due to their ill-luck, they lost all their near and dear ones, and therefore had to leave that beautiful city. They travelled on foot, suffering the heat of the sun at midnight. Their feet were pierced by the tips of grass. They rested in the shade of three trees, two of which had perished long ago and the third did not sprout at all. After resting there and eating the fruits of those trees, they continued their journey. They came to a river which was dry and refreshed themselves by taking a bath and drinking water. After a long journey they reached a big city which was non-existing. In that city, there were three palaces which had neither pillars nor walls nor roofs. There they got three golden vessels - all broken and pulverised. They purchased one kilogram minus two kilograms of rice and cooked it in one of the golden vessels. They first fed their guests - three in number, two of whom were bodiless and one mouthless. After feeding them, they also partook the rest of the cooked rice. They were happy and lived in that city for a number of years. The nanny told the boy: "Remember this beautiful story and you will become wise when you grow up".

The oft-quoted example of gold and necklace helps in understanding the reconciliation of illusion with reality. Although the necklace is nothing more than gold, why can it not be believed to be non-extant? Can the ornament, an illusion in gold, be thrown away, retaining the metal? Only right understanding helps because the necklace is an illusion when viewed in isolation. It is as illusory as the things in the above mentioned story. Maya is neither 'sat' - real nor 'asat' - unreal nor 'sadasat' - real and unreal; it is 'anirvachaniya' - indefinable.
The second focus of Rao's novel is the concept of 'Ardhanarishwara' or 'Shiva-Shakti' principle which is deeply rooted in the Indian ethos. It is also known as the 'prakriti-purusha' principle. Schools of Indian philosophy interpret this belief differently. Samkhya believes in dualism, accepting prakriti as independent, real and capable of creation and existence. Advaita differs from Samkhya in denying independent reality to the prakriti or feminine principle (trait), 'maya'. The 'nirguna-Brahman' of Sri Sankara remains impersonal till its association with maya. The feminine principle makes 'saguna-Brahman' personal. Though essentially single, 'Shiva' and 'Shakti' are two faces of Brahman:

'Vagarthaviva sampriktau
Vagartha pratipattaye;
Jagatah pitarau vande
Parvati parameshwarau.'

(Kalidasa : Raghuwansha, 1)

For the right understanding of words and their meanings, I bow down to Parvati and Parameshwara, the parents of the universe, who are eternally united with each other, like words and their meanings.

Shakti is the conscious energy of Lord Shiva. Just as a potter is the first cause for the pot, the stick and the wheel are the instrumental causes, and clay is the material cause, likewise Shiva is the first cause of the world, Shakti - the instrumental cause and maya - the material cause. Shakti, being in the nature of consciousness, is not the material cause but the intermediary link between Shiva and maya. Consciousness surrounds itself with its own power of 'mayashakti'. Nescience is integral to matter.

In The Meaning of India, Raja Rao observes:
Siva, another name for It, Brahman, is the still masculine power. And she Parvathi, the play. The unmoving desires to play with itself, and so the abstract became concrete,...

He continues in his article:

Our Lord is a dancer who lights the fire in matter and makes it dance in its turn.

The process of creation is for the sake of salvation of souls. If there were no duality, there would be no world. Causality is created for man's satisfaction of appetites, maintains the author. But as there is no peace in duality, the causality must vanish.

Causality, the child of duality, kills causality by its own absurdity.

As soon as the female principle merges in the male principle, duality vanishes. The Shaktas believe that it is not by denial of the world, but through the world, when known as the Mother, that liberation is attained. World enjoyment is made the means and instrument of liberation.

Shiva is unchanging consciousness. Shakti is his power appearing as mind and matter. She is the active aspect of immanent God who is the embodiment of power and supreme supporter of the vast universe. Shakti is Universal Mother. Shiva is motionless power, while Shakti is power in motion. The spiritual aspirant performs sadhana to awaken the 'kundalini'. Piercing the six chakras with the power of Shakti, he attains the union of Shiva and Shakti. This power can be awakened by 'dhyana', 'bhava', 'japa' and 'mantra' shakti. The Mother, the embodiment of fifty letters is present in various letters in different chakras. When the chords of a musical
instrument are struck harmoniously, fine music is produced. Even so when the chords of the letters are struck in their order, the Mother abiding in the six chakras awakens and the seeker attains 'siddhi'. Sadhana as a mode, depends upon the capacity of the sadhaka. Though it is very difficult to break the fetters of maya, yet on being worshipped as the great Mother, she unbends to bestow grace and blessings. In the Shakti philosophy, Shiva is omnipresent, impersonal, inactive and pure consciousness. Shakti as dynamic power latent in the pure conscious principle, gives rise to a distinct world of variations. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva perform their respective functions of creation, preservation and destruction in obedience to Shakti as the 'iccha-shakti' (will power), 'jnana-shakti (knowledge) and 'kriya-shakti' (action). Shiva and Shakti are inseparable. Maya or 'prakriti' lies within the womb of Shakti. Maya, the matrix of the world, is latent in the state of dissolution and becomes dynamic during the process of creation. It evolves into several material elements and physical parts of sentient creatures under the direction of Shakti. Hence only a profound knowledge of Shakti leads to salvation.

'Shaktijnanam vina devi nirvanam naiva
jayate'

O devi, without the knowledge of Shakti, mukti cannot be attained (Ishwara says to Devi).

The 'jivatman' or individual soul presumes himself to be the doer and enjoyer and identifies himself with the body under the influence of maya. Through the grace of Shakti and his own individual sadhana he attains enlightenment and merges himself in the Supreme.
In reality, the Self is One. The experiencer is not different from the experienced. Maya is responsible for making Brahman appear as the world. Mind alone perceives maya. In 'nirvikalpa samadhi', 'trikuti' (knower, knowledge and knowable) vanishes and Brahman alone remains. There is a reference in the Kenopanishad to gods, proud of their valour and prowess, becoming vain in their victory over the asuras. With a view to lessen their ego and teach them a lesson, the Lord appeared before them in the form of a Yaksha. The deities wanted to find out the identity of the visitor and sent Agni for this purpose. When Agni appeared before the Yaksha, the latter inquired about his name and power. Agni replied that he was 'Jatavedas' and had the power to set fire to the whole universe in one single moment. The Yaksha placed before him a dry blade of grass and asked him to burn it. Agni was unable to accomplish it and disappeared to hide in shame. He was followed by Vayu. On enquiry about his name and power, he answered that he could blow everything. The same blade of grass was again put to test before Vayu, and he could not make it move an inch from its designated place. Vayu also departed in shame. Finally Indra arrived. The Yaksha was replaced by Uma who revealed her real identity. She told Indra that it was actually the power of the divine Mother, Shakti, Uma, Haimavati who was the real cause behind the strength which enabled the gods to defeat the asuras.

Rao also believed in the attainment of an impersonal state which was beyond the physical and mental. It was an experience of the spirit. Through all his novels, he makes an elaborate effort to reach this state. The Serpent and the Rope needs to be examined against this sound background
from scriptures and metaphysics from Rao's own *The Meaning of India*. The first novel *Kanthapura* depicted its protagonist Moorthy, shorn of real physicality. The novelist made up for this by giving him spiritual depth. In *Comrade Kirillov*, the central character is an improvement on Moorthy. Though both are thinkers, but deviant Kirillov chooses the unconventional path of communism. He surfaces in the present novel as Ramaswamy. Persisting doubt in the Ramaswamy persona traps him in illusion or maya. He remains in that state without actual realisation of it as illusion. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Rao has generously granted Ramaswamy physicality. He has been provided an aura of a rich culture and Vedic tradition. The concretisation has added life as well as colour to the portrayal. It has also lent authenticity to his personality. A successor of Kirillov, Ramaswamy is essentially a complex character with a blend of sensitivity, subtlety, sensuality and spirituality. While Kirillov was a reflection of doubt in Rao's psyche, Ramaswamy emerges as a rationalist. The novel projects an implicit account of a quester's search for his guru. Hinduism mentions two paths for a seeker of Truth - 'nivritti - marga' and 'pravritti-marga'. 'Pravritti' is the path involving worldly affairs. It propels the 'jivatman' in the wheel of birth and death. 'Nivritti' is the route of renunciation or freedom from mundane existence and transcendence into beyond. Ramaswamy unintentionally adopts the route of world experience. He wanders in search of a spiritual preceptor who could lead him over the threshold of Immortality. In this sojourn, he comes across many people, mainly women, who appear to his young, dispassionate, discriminating and perceptive psyche as various manifestations of the omnipotent God-mother or Shakti.
He interacts with each of them on various levels. In this connection, Iyengar observes:

....chameleonic Rama strikes different people differently at different times, as sensualist and saint, as poet and catechist, as single-minded researcher and hare-brained theorist.\textsuperscript{13}

While the feminine power in \textit{Kanthapura} operated in the guise of a collective entity, the novel under study exhibits its various shades as mother, sister, bride, beloved, wife and companion. Ramaswamy gropes to find his guru in them. He views the influence of Madeleine, Saroja, Savithri, Little Mother and Catherine as varying forms of devi-maya who assist him in his ascent towards the aspired goal. It becomes imperative to probe into the question of how maya can aid a person into self-awareness and the attainment of a small measure of divinity. But it is an established fact that the world of experience is an unavoidable and essential precursor to this abode. Brahman can be attained only if the seeker undauntingly moves through the fetters of maya. The illusory world has no metaphysical value and is based solely upon convenient groupings of phenomena. When all the views superimposed upon reality are negated or transcended, reality reveals itself in its true objective nature. Maya thus exists merely as a reflection of Brahman. To know reality as God or Ishwara, is to superimpose upon it, individual conceptions. But these so-called superimpositions neither affect the prime reality, Brahman, nor do they create what does not exist as objective reality.\textsuperscript{14} The non-existence or transience of maya is further proved when it confronts Truth.
With a subtle hankering for Indian identity forming the backdrop, Ramaswamy's tale relates the history of a seeker, assiduously involved in the process of purification of his soul. Jha, the well-known Rao critic, observes:

As an intellectual, Rama's cultural crisis is basically the crisis of identity. He desperately needs and seeks assurance in India's glorified Vedic past.\(^\text{15}\)

The hero needs self-identification. However, in the novel he is uncertain about this goal. Being hesitant and unaware of the fact of the essential oneness of all things in the universe, he fails to gauge the true measure of felt experience. Thus all women he comes across become idealised. Though his quest is purely metaphysical but being a social animal, man has to live in society and follow its conventions. Raja Rao also maintains that salvation can be achieved not only by renouncing the world but also by 'belonging' to it. Marriage is presented as the most essential altar in society. A successful marriage demands spiritual union without which it is apt to be barren and futile.\(^\text{16}\)

The young quester in the novel first gropes for individuality in cross-cultural terms, says Rama Jha. His relationship with Madeleine presents the theme of east-west encounter. Having cherished the hope of a happy married life with a companion of good intellectual compatibility, he gets attracted to her outer and external appearance. Considering her an ideal and perfect companion, Rama believes that he could merge his identity with her to create a new and separate world. The idea of the coming together of two different cultures from east and west further
fascinate him and he accepts her as his spouse. But illusion soon vanishes. They drift apart as soon as the husband realizes the difference between Indian and western sensibilities and views of love, marriage and family. The breach widens, particularly after he meets Savithri,

a Cambridge educated and militantly modern girl, who is yet Indian to the core.17

Ramaswamy loved Madeleine as the "unreal" woman of fairy tales. By doing so, he created duality unawares, failing to "connect" and duality ends only when the male principle merges in the female principle. However real or unreal, Madeleine is herself a strong woman. In her presence, Ramaswamy appears feeble and ill at ease. Madeleine appears to be the fulcrum of their combined household. Despite his family status of eldest born, the protagonist gains in spirit and assurance only when he reaches his native soil where he fulfils his responsibilities as brother, son and householder. Separated from his roots, he becomes a psychologically and emotionally dismembered consciousness which looses the spirit to assert. And Madeleine's company rarely offers him with chance or opportunity to affirm his superiority as husband. Many a time, he gets reduced in stature, surfacing occasionally with the intelligence of a child. However, an intrinsic consciousness of his brahmin male pedigree, restrains him from total surrender and submission. He admits:

She might then have taken me into herself as never before, not with the knowledge that she knew me, but with the conviction that she would make me know myself in the shine of annihilation. But I'm a Brahmin, and for me touch and knowledge go with the holiness of surrender, of woman not taking me there, but I revealing to her 'that'.18
Madeleine's efforts to become a good Hindu wife are no less significant. She goes as far as sensibility allows, but cannot continue in the long run due to lack of belief in her own capabilities. The confessions of love for Ramaswamy are veiled questions for herself, "do I love him?" In this context, Rao mentions:

That is very European. Though she was sure of her love, she doubted it. In the West, people doubt themselves a great deal. They are never too sure. They are sure in the beginning, but they are not sure later on.\(^{19}\)

As Ramaswamy is the successor of Kirillov, likewise Madeleine succeeds Irene. In *Comrade Kirillov*, Irene was modelled solely as a wife with no cerebral or mind-involving activities. Madeleine's frame up is an improvement on her predecessor as her persona incorporates a point of view and humanness. Rao enables her to grow mentally. She adopts ideologies and rejects the tried and practised as redundant. During this course, Madeleine travels from Christianity to Buddhism. Afraid of becoming 'too Indian', she hesitates to christen her son with an Indian name. At one place in the novel, Madeleine observes:

My love, the gods of India will be angry, that you a Brahmin married a non-Brahmin like me; why should they let me have a child called Krishna? So sacred is that name.\(^{20}\)

For this lady from the west, the separate cultures were like two distant ends of a bridge. For a sundry perceiver like her, the unattainable Truth lay on the other end of the bridge. An unknown fear of crossing bridges obstructs onward movement and prevents her from realising Truth even though she cherishes fascination for India's mysterious and "infectious"
culture. For her:

India makes everything and everywhere an India. But if anything does not achieve Indianhood, it is the untruth, the lie, the Maya, the British.\(^{21}\)

Madeleine's growing affinity to Georges in the absence of her husband and the hero's subsequent contact with Savithri alienate the two from each other. While in India, the protagonist had also realized with acute intensity that something was "missing" in their marital relationship. Overwhelmed by the image of his mother whom he lost when young, nostalgia overtakes him as he feels:

I was born an orphan, and have remained one. I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel rooms and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother.\(^{22}\)

He remembers Aunt Lakshamma, an old venerable woman, who looked after the orphans of their family. Rama's visit to Benares with his second stepmother, Vishalakshi, whom he called Little Mother, gave further chance of insight into the mother-principle. With Sridhara on her lap, the lady appears the very epitome of feminine coda. He also discovers the benign greatness of river Ganges:

Whether young or older in years the Ganges is ever so knowing, so wise. If wisdom became water, the Ganges would be that water, flowing down to the seven seas.\(^{23}\)

The distant view of the Himalayas remind him of Shiva and Parvati amusing themselves on the Kailash. Later, Ramaswamy, braced with an inner calling, visualises this patroness of India in temples of Benares, and the concubines who worshipped the goddess to sustain "the juice of youth in their limbs".
Back home from this visit, he encounters one more manifestation of Shakti in his young sister Saroja who shares a bond of kinship with him. His meeting with Savithri, the north-indian princess, provides him yet another glimpse into the feminine doctrine. Thus, exposure to these manifold aspects of the woman principle assist Ramaswamy into a cognizance of the absent contiguity between him and Madeleine. Their relationship lacks the elements of passion, sacredness and kinship. On his return to France, he strives to remedy this vacuity by entering into a kind of a sacred relationship with Madeleine but fails on account of an inability to explain to his wife - the Advaitic overtones of the Shiva and Parvati - bonding. Even though he intensely longed for such an alliance, Madeleine, a European, could never grasp the real importance of a spiritual alliance. Sharma, a Rao critic, opines that their failure at the sacred level triggers a collapse on the psychological front. He observes that though the hero and heroine were mentally compatible, yet the sense of kinship was missing in their relationship. Thus ineffective, they try to attain union by engaging themselves in intellectual musings. But, despite mental preoccupation with the Cathars, Rao's young protagonist leans heavily on the 'Advaita' of Sri Sankara, and Madeleine (despite her own private closeness to Shiva and Parvati) trudges towards 'Buddhistic-dualism'. Conscious of the resultant estrangement, they envisage to bridge the gap of "growing alienation" by re-igniting their physical ardour. The momentary ecstasy aroused, peters into a "a desert waste of lust" with disastrous results and they fail to achieve the spiritual state of oneness. At about the same time, Ramaswamy's secret misjudged resentment against Madeleine and Georges gets aggravated on
account of the couple's shared closeness. The lady, however, merely derived a kind of cultural satisfaction from their discussions on Catholicism. Ramaswamy, the jealous deprived husband, perceives in Georges, a personification of Satan itself. Madeleine's own coldness heightens the impression to create a permanent distance between them. Her strange and pathetic conversion to an ascetic leaves him thoroughly dejected and helpless and he grieves:

So this was the Madeleine I had cherished and made!²⁴

The marriage ends in a divorce, confounding both with no answer to their lack of compatibility and failure to achieve oneness.

In an interview, Raja Rao maintained that in a delicate relationship as marriage, alienation stems from a deeper level. Hurt in such cases is beyond expression. Many things in life are done without any rhyme or reason.²⁵ However, it was on account of philosophical differences that this couple finally decided to separate, continues the author.²⁶ The confrontation between Vedantic east and materialistic west (represented by their thoughts, actions and emotions) becomes the root cause of their estrangement.

The Ramaswamy-Madeleine relationship is rooted in pure physicality with very little congenial accord or semblance of pure divine love. Though Ramaswamy, an Indian, recognizes within himself the feeling of love, Madeleine coerces herself to create a condition to "love" him. The emotion is defined in the novel:

To be free one is to know he is free, beyond the
body and beyond the mind, to love one is to know one is love and to be pure one is to know one is purity.

Explaining the notion, Rao maintains:

This concept is of *Advaita Vedanta*. Love is beyond Rama and Madeleine. Love is a state. Europeans fall in love. But that is not love. It is one's intrinsic nature.... it is not a conscious activity. It is one's real nature.27

Through the failure of the Ramaswamy-Madeleine alliance, the novelist wishes to establish the vital fact that 'any marriage outside one's own cultural background creates problems'. The disputed issues may concern "thinking", "eating" and "sleeping". Indians may not be very sophisticated in terms of "living", yet in terms of "thinking", they are surely more sophisticated than the Europeans. Hence it is that the protagonist of *Comrade Kirillov* is christened an "inverted brahmin". Elaborating this idea, Raja Rao states:

So when we begin to have a dialogue with a European woman at the intellectual level, we may like it, but it is not as easy to live it... The Indians suddenly take marriage as a 'dharma'. But unless you have a full understanding, 'dharma' is only on one side. The woman may not think in terms of our 'dharma'. She would think in the sense of her 'dharma', in terms of her own background.28

Ramaswamy in the novel - *The Serpent and the Rope* also echoes the same sentiment that when a man weds, it should not just be the woman but also her "God". An 'austere' and sensitive south-Indian brahmin, he had remained silent and uncommunicative. His 'distant' behaviour aggravated the problem between him and his wife.
In Saroja, he beholds and adores the mysterious beauty of a girl entering the threshold of womanhood. Despite the fact that she is his sister, he cannot help feeling a "strange sensation". For the first time in his life, he observes an occult beauty which makes him bow before her as one would before a queen. He says:

Saroja was a strange sensation for me. Here was a mystery which I had never observed before: the girl becoming woman, and the thousand ways it shows itself, in shyness, in language, in prime presence. I had left India too young to know the sensibilities of a Brahmin girl..... I was intoxicated with Saroja's presence, like a deer could be before a waterfall, or an elephant before a mountain-peak; something primordial was awakening in a creature...... 29

Her presence awakened in him, the images of the Ganges, Jamuna making him realize that:

Benares was indeed nowhere but inside oneself.....
And I knew: all brides be Benares born. 30

Benares, in this case, signifies the city of Lord Shiva, who is eternally united with his spouse, goddess Parvati. Thus, Ramaswamy learnt the spiritual dimension of Indian marriages and later accepted Savithri as his spiritual bride.

His relation with Savithri is based on spirituality and divinity. Therefore it does not end in sadness. Though Savithri appears an independent modern girl, she is no less than a princess for the young hero. The powerful impact of the princess illusion on her personality transforms her even though she is "a fascinating mixture of tradition and modernity". 31
She becomes the sole inspiration in the life of the protagonist. He proudly identifies himself with his grandmother's fairy tale prince who married the beautiful princess emerging from the pumpkin. He idealizes Savithri, glimpsing in her form - Krishna's Radha, Satyavan's Savithri, Tristan's Iseulte, Chang Yi's Wang Chu. But Mukherjee, who does not agree with this view, points out:

Savitri may be the ideal of Indian womanhood for Ramaswamy, but as a character she comes alive most vividly when she is her own Self - the argumentative, rebellious, cigarette-smoking undergraduate fascinated by the wisdom and philosophy of the South Indian Brahmin who for her has the additional glamour of possessing French education and a French wife - rather than when she is enacting the representative and symbolic role of Radha.32

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that it is in the company of Savithri that Rama experiences a vastness growing within him. Undergoing a process of perception, cognizance and purification, he confesses that it is she who "became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding". She stands as the ultimate paragon of wifely devotion, representing also the legendary Savithri who rescued her husband Satyavan from the clutches of death. Rao's Savithri performs the same role in the novel. Naik opines that she brings enlightenment to Ramaswamy and saves him from drowning into a 'purely worldly life'.33 She also stands for the eternal feminine principle, symbolised in The Serpent and the Rope by the coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth. Without any self-conscious effort, they enter a magical and a mystical circle of kinship. He finally realizes the divine female
attributes and also the truth that only a woman can lead a man into the
gateway of self-realization. He says:

Man sees himself in woman as essence, the fact of
womanhood is the meaning of his life.\textsuperscript{34}

Rama and Savithri surrender themselves to the divine, becoming part of the
myth of eternal love, exemplified by Shiva and Parvati, Krishna and Radha.
Their relation progresses through an enchanting path until she finds her
'god' through him and he finds his goddess and the "world" through her.\textsuperscript{35}
The depth and intensity of their true love consummates in a spiritual
marriage. It becomes a mode of quest for the Ultimate and the Absolute as
they realise:

We were not married that morning, we discovered,
we had ever been married - else how understand
that silent, whole knowledge of one another?\textsuperscript{36}

Relationship with Savithri makes him comprehend that true marriage is
possible only with the extinction of the ego:

You can marry when you are One. That is, you can
marry when there is no one to marry another. The
real marriage is like 00, not like 010. When the
ego is dead is marriage true.\textsuperscript{37}

Howsoever intimate Rama and Savithri may be in spirit, yet he was not able
to cross the "stone wall" of his ego in order to dissolve his individuality
into the identity of Savithri as he had observed previously:

We should be Shiva that woman be dissolved - and
with her the world. For the world is meant not for
denial but for dissolution.\textsuperscript{38}

He is aware that "it was not land and rivers that separated us, it was "Time"
itself. It was myself". Ramaswamy and Savithri's relationship continues:
...till at last they see that their love can have meaning only if it is securely grounded on a spiritual base.\textsuperscript{39}

He makes her realize that she must go back to Pratap and fulfil her duties as a good wife.

Ramaswamy interacts with yet another woman in his ascent towards Truth. He, who has not reached the stage of a 'sthita-prajna' (stability in the intellect), easily stumbles in his path by having a brief liaison with Sham Sunder's wife, Lakshmi, towards the end of his second visit to India. But he quickly disentangles himself from this adulterous relationship, feeling guilty and ashamed for his sudden misdemeanour.

Catherine enters (as a loving sister) in his life. They share a loving friendly bond. As a brother, he helps her to find happiness with Georges. Providing 'sibling' protection, he ties the sacred thread ('rakhi') on her wrist and even explains to her:

\begin{quote}
When a girl would become woman, there's a whole universe that rebels in you, as though a kingdom, a sovereignty were to be lost, as though some demon were at your cavern door, and you would lose the all, in fear, in blood and in anguish.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Little Mother also occupies a significant place in the young quester's life. Tender and an ideal portrait of warmth, celibacy, gravity, dignity, devotion and endurance, she possesses deep intelligence. Though younger to him, the feminine trait is well ingrained in her psyche and she possesses boundless capacity for love and care for her household. Shakti appears in Little Mother in its passive and gentle form. She unquestioningly accepts Ramaswamy's father as her husband, conscious that she is his third wife,
consequently much younger to him. She tells Ramaswamy:

If your grandfather had looked at me and my great learning, would he have chosen me for your father, even for a third marriage? A woman has to marry, whether she be blind, deaf, mute or tuberculous. Her womb is her life and we cannot choose our men.\(^{41}\)

The subsequent surrender to her fate enhances her dignity. Her immense love and respect for the eldest son of the family springs from the belief that "a man at home is like a God in temple". Little Mother's reverent attitude towards Ramaswamy is in accordance with India's ancient culture where the head of the family is idolized as God. Rama's presence provides an inner strength and a feeling of security. She thus sharply differs from Madeleine in attitudes. Through the medium of these two characters, Rao re-inforces the east-west dichotomy of the novel.

Compared to Little Mother's whole-hearted devotion for her husband and children, Madeleine's sincerity towards her husband seems to be superficial. Ramaswamy considers his mother as a woman extraordinaire but also values her as a powerful manifestation of Shakti. In the words of Mukherjee:

\[\text{...Little Mother's whole strength lies in her unconscious and unquestioning identification with a set of ancient values.}^{42}\]

Thus the young brahmin's journey towards the Absolute is directed through a profound and sensitive probe into the meaning of womanhood. He does not hold women as mere objects of love. His psyche projects them as 'divine powers' of God. Singing the eternal glory of womanhood, he says:
Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulations of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of that which he is, and reminds herself through him of that which she is. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the gods, inherence; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe.\(^43\)

The different hues of experience from each singular woman in his life help him distinguish between illusion and reality.

In Kanthapura, Moorthy's future was determined by the novelist. As an innocent, sentimental boy, he was unaware of his destined goal. No doubt a quester, he was still ignorant about the significant role of a guru in a seeker's life. Perhaps Rao did not consider it necessary to let Moorthy get initiated by a guru. Hence he was made to have only a vision of Gandhi in whom he could undoubtedly have found his spiritual mentor. Moorthy was an inexperienced novice which led Rao to make him re-appear as Kirillov and later as Ramaswamy, the rationalist and intellectual quester who moves to France to continue his studies.

The protagonist in Kanthapura was left untouched by awareness of beauty of the female 'coda'. In Comrade Kirillov, he "takes" a Czech wife with an ulterior motive, and Ramaswamy from The Serpent and the Rope is educated through sense perceptions. He is made to experience male-female relationship which forms an essential aspect of being. He probes deeper
than Moorthy and Kirillov, into this particular relationship. Though his association with the women he encountered at various levels, imparts to him partial understanding, yet his experience of void continues. The end of the novel brings to him the realisation that the journey of a sadhaka is incomplete without a spiritual preceptor. His failure to find an ideal partner revolves around the truth that illusions are temporary and cannot be sustained for long. As maya is illusory in nature, its diverse manifestations - as an occasional Madeleine or Savithri, remain unreal. They can merely serve as steps to help Ramaswamy attain his spiritual goal. Representing merely the means, they are meant to be transcended for access to the Absolute. By committing the folly of accepting them as 'the only realities' in his life and harbouring personal conceptions about them, he converts impermanence into Truth unawares. Parameswaran observes in this connection:

He never sees them as they are, he sees only the qualities he wants to see; even if facts are brought before him, he dismisses them as appearances, and claims to see beyond what is, to what 'really' is. It is his lack of belief in his own self that makes him perceive a 'serpent' as a 'rope'. The women in his life, as he sees them, become the creations of his own mind and appear before him in concrete forms from time to time. His education demands self-effort to transcend them himself in order to pave the way to reach Abstract Reality. The female principle which Rao presented in Kanthapura as a collective unit has been split into many forms in the present novel. Ramaswamy does not realize the essential singularity of all such cognizance and feels disappointed after each perception.
Howsoever intellectual, he is not able to shed the previous illusion of Madeleine in the light of the next illusion (of Savithri). He often thinks about Madeleine, Saroja and Little Mother.

The quest for the Absolute, says Shiva Niranjan, is born out of a feeling of torture, grief, agony and misery which constitutes this life. Sadhana envisages ceaseless devotion and strict control over one's mind and its waywardness. The sadhaka then gradually reaches his cherished goal.

Ramaswamy's illness and hidden grief are stimulants for his sadhana. His ailment which is in the form of consumption, is a symptom of: 

......extraordinariness of his spiritual anguish and exultations.

As he progresses with spiritual ardour and growing intensity, his illness diminishes. Feeling an intense longing for liberation, he steadily moves to the state of desirelessness. Acharya Sankara describes it thus:

'Nityanitya vivekashcha
Dehakshanikatamatih;
Mrityorhitishcha tapashcha
Mumukshavriddhi karanam'.

The desire for liberation grows in growing measure with discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, with the awareness of the transient nature of life, and with the fear of death, as well as with a knowledge of the ills of life.

Ramaswamy shoulders the burden of pointing the right path to Madeleine, although half-inadvertently; he directs Savithri even though it meant great suffering to him; he guides Catherine too but he has no one who can guide him. Though Savithri leads him along the path to salvation, yet the vedantin fails to reach that state because of his own ego-
consciousness. He needs someone who can aid him in shedding his ego. Finding himself bereft of all support, his agony reaches its pinnacle. Weeping in the dead of the night purges him of the dross in his soul. Self-introspection leads to an acute revelation as he realizes that "not a God but a Guru is what I need". He feels like a man liberated of all bondages. Thus Rao's protagonist, having experienced manifold associations, finally realizes the 'snaky' image and discovers the 'rope'. To truly live such a spiritual life, he begins on the journey in search of a guide. He realises that the apparent 'rope' of his vision was non-existent. The fault of double perception lay within his own psyche; the cause for his misapprehension was not the rope but his own non-recognition. He becomes aware of the reality that man is never alienated from his source but only needs to 'identify' himself with the Supreme Being.

The novel beautifully expounds 'jnana yoga'. Ramaswamy's quest for fulfillment comes to a conclusion through knowledge ('jnana'). His faith is born out of self effort ('purushartha'). Being a scholar, an intellectual and a metaphysician, he realizes that he has to do all by himself, though the clue to get out of the labyrinths of maya will be shown by the mentor whom he seeks. Only the spiritual guide can help him out of the darkness of ignorance, releasing within him, the light of knowledge. The title of the novel suggests two ways of apprehending reality, says Meenakshi Mukherjee. The first way is the recognition of the object as object and the other is the recognition that the object exists because the perceiver perceives it. She further says:
The novel merely presents the confrontation of these two modes, but does not come to a definite preference of one over the other.\textsuperscript{48}

The role of a 'guru' bears paramountcy in India, admits Rao. In spiritual life, a guru is not merely a teacher but a role model who dispels inner darkness by opening the flood gates of enlightenment. The job of a teacher or a professor is to provide intellectual knowledge whereas it is only through a guru that a sadhaka may acquire the light of Truth. He is the first step in a quester's journey towards the Absolute. The relationship between him and the disciple belongs to the realm of spirit. The sensibility of a real aspirant has to aspire to reach the spirit of the spiritual instructor. The seeker, therefore, does not look upon him as an ordinary mortal but beholds him as an extension of God and divinity, incarnated in the garb of a human being to direct the seeker to the right path of knowledge. Each human being has a spark of the sublime which keeps him alive. But a few among them become capable of awakening this divinity. Only such persons belong to the category of tutor-saints and rise to the level of being called gurus. In the words of Swami Satyananda Saraswati:

\begin{quote}
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 goodwill 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.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Instead of giving a complete manifestation of female principle in the novel, it has been presented in fractions for the understanding of the aspiring protagonist. Had he been confronted with the complete vision of
Shakti, he would not have been able to comprehend it, hence the need to make him familiar with the different aspects of maya or Shakti. There are four kinds of people in the world. Sri Krishna expounds in the Bhagavadgita:

'Chaturvidha bhajante mam
janah sukritinorjuna;
Arto jignyasurarthathi,
  jnani cha bharatarshabha'.

(7.16)

Of doers of good who worship me, there are four kinds, O Arjuna: the distressed, the knowledge-seekers, who seek for wealth, and who are imbued with wisdom.

Debating on the subject of knowledge, Raja Rao in The Meaning of India postulated that removal of everything objective - body, senses and mind leaves "the knowing principle, the knower, who finally is himself Knowledge". The I is revealed when the ego is dissolved. Reiterating Yagnavalya's question, Rao concludes his essay "Look, the Universe is Burning" in The Meaning of India with:

Who knows, or What knows the knower? What then, Sir, is knowledge?
The answer is simple. Knowledge, Jnana, itself the "I".
Oh!
And that, Maitreyi, The Meaning of India. 50

The young intellectual is one such seeker after knowledge, a 'jignyasu' who treads the path of 'jnana' or spiritual insight to reach his goal. Throughout the novel, he is seen to be dissatisfied with the world. There is a lingering void in his life. He comes to know that sensual pleasure is not the highest form of happiness and that pure eternal bliss,
the truly spiritual experience can only be felt within the psyche. In this respect, the brahmin vedantin and young Indian scholar - Ramaswamy, resembles Uddhava who got wisdom from Lord Krishna. At the end of the novel, the quester perceives a ray of hope that his guru may impart wisdom and thus enlighten his path towards self-realization.

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The Cat and Shakespeare
A Metaphysical Comedy
The Cat and Shakespeare mythicises 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 becomes transformed into a bhakta. The term bhakti is derived from the root 'bhaj' - to serve or be deeply interested in. The Narada Bhakti Sutra says:

'Sa tvasmin parama prema rupa',

Bhakti is the absolute love towards the Supreme Being.

Thus the practise implies intense attachment to God. A thread of divine love ties the heart of a devotee to the Lord. It results in supreme dedication and devotion. This sacred and sublime emotion unites the votary to the Supreme. Bhakti in its purest manifestation is a formidable task of developing a consistently perennial pneuma. The innate nature of all human beings is attachment and desire for external objects as sense perceptions display tendencies of divergence (inside out). The dispersed longings and aspirations get fascinated by countless visible and tangible objects of the universe. Devotion requires a motivation to centralise these "wandering" thought processes of the human mind. Convergence does not, however, imply infatuation with earthly objects which enamour and confine the individual into the cycle of mortality. Instead, it refers to pure and unselfish love for God. 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. Compared to 'jnana-marga', this is a more tractable way of reaching the Absolute. In the 'jnana-marga', the votary experiences difficulty in focussing the mind on Brahman who is above form and 'attribute'. But in bhakti marga, the devotee establishes an intimate relationship with God by concentrating his mind on a symbol of the Lord. As the average man is mostly governed by emotions, the path of 'upasana' offers a convenient channelisation. If human endeavour directs its love for gross objects towards love for the Infinite, it leads to speedy fulfilment.

Devotion is further classified into - 'sakama' and 'nishkama' modes. 'Sakama' denotes worship with a desire for worldly gain and material possession. These become an 'end' in themselves and counter any wish for supreme satisfaction, immortality and 'moksha'. 'Nishkama-bhakti', on the other hand, consists of supplication sans desire. Dedication of such a kind gives immortality to the individual. Yet another classification of the 'love-principle' (bhakti) is : 'apara' and 'para'. 'Apara' or ritualistic bhakti concentrates on ostentations and ceremonials. Adherents of this creed decorate the representative image of the deity with garlands and flowers, ring bells, wave lights and observe fasts and rites. The Creator is regarded as the supreme immanent power manifested in the visible image. This represents the primary stage of the aspirant's journey.

Idol-worship or 'upasana' forms the first step in 'bhakti-marga'. The symbol is infused with life and venerated as godhead. The visible image acts as external symbol of God for purpose of worship. In The Meaning of India, Rao observes:

Man is ignorant and he needs an outward symbol for
an inward giving. He needs to see outwardly what he performs inwardly.\textsuperscript{1}

The devotee feels the presence of the Lord in the image and worships it with dedication. The idol remains an idol, but the worship is for the Lord. The next step internalises emotions and seeks God inside the quester's heart. Believing that God is present in every speck of existence, he is overawed by his Supreme and divine presence. This is an advanced form of worship meant exclusively for men of rare intellect. Depraved and materialistic minds fail to reach this stage. Their ego and cravings become the biggest hindrance between them and God. Perfect worship requires complete detachment from all worldly things. The Lord tells Arjuna:

\textit{'Nayamatma pravachanena labhyo na medhaya na bahudha shrutena; yamevaisha vrinite tena labhyas-tasyaisha atma vivrinute tanumsvam'.}

(I.ii.23)

This Atman cannot be attained by study of the Vedas, nor by intelligence; nor by much hearing of scriptures. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him this Atman reveals Its true nature.

In the second stage, the devotee feels the presence of the Lord. He graduates into 'para-bhakti', experiencing the transcendental power of God surrounding and enveloping him. Reverence and devotion of such a votary is generous, unselfish and total, with complete disregard to any kind of reward:

\textit{Thou art all pervading; on what 'simhasana' shall I seat Thee? Thou art the Supreme Light, by whose borrowed light the sun, the moon, the stars and the fire shine; shall I wave this little 'deepa' or light before you?}

Repeating His name, thinking of Him and His attributes, the worshipper aims
at unification with the Oversoul. Such a meditation generally results in the seeker's communion with the transcendental, immutable Brahman.

Devotion should not be considered as only a state of emotional exhibition. It is thorough discipline and complete training of the will and mind. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa observes that divine love can be developed only through redirecting the total human experience. Duality created by ego and desire obstruct the sadhaka. Raja Rao maintains:

It is this undivided Consciousness that the mind and the senses seem to divide into subject and object, superimposing - on the invisible, timeless and spaceless - division, time and form.  

In order to attain liberation, it is incumbent that the wise should voluntarily remove all hindrances. The individual can achieve this state by following the eleven principles prescribed by Ramanujacharya. These practices are - communion with God, perception, absolute freedom to love God, Truth, honesty, humanity, generosity, compassion, non-violence, charity, contentment and optimism. Swami Satyananda maintains that devotion is the path of:

affection, service, dedication, total surrender, love, giving mind, body and soul and everything.

The difference between bhakti and jnana is that the former has to be practised and the latter can be acquired through study of scriptures. Love for God demands something vital from the sadhaka. It is easier to attain 'nirvikalpa samadhi' than be inspired for devotion and worship. A devotee may be an intellectual but an intellectual bhakta is rare. The spark of inspiration essential for devotion is sign of God's grace on the worshipper. The Bhagavadgita declares:
'Sarva dharman parityajya
mamekam sharanam vraja;
aham tva sarva papebhyo
mokshayishyami ma shuchah.'

(18.66)

Leaving off all your duties, take shelter in me alone. I shall free you from all sins. Grieve not.

The relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped exists in various forms. Designated as 'nine-fold bhakti', it depends on the 'bhava' or feeling predominant in the devotee, intense love being the common factor in all. Shrimadbhagvata illustrates this aspect thus:

'Shravanam kirtanam vishnoh
smaranam padasevanam;
Archanam vandanam dasyam,
sakhyam atmanivedanam.'

(7.5.23)

Hearing of God's 'lilas' or stories, singing of His glories, remembrance of His name and presence, service of His feet, worship of God, prostration to the Lord, cultivation of a 'dasya-bhava', a friendly relationship with the Lord and complete surrender of the self form different modes of worship.

There have been many votaries who have established such relationships with their masters. Hanuman's love for Rama is an example of 'dasya-bhava' (the relation of a servant to his master). Arjuna's dedication to Krishna represents 'sakhy-a-bhava'. In 'atma-nivedana', the adherent submits his entire being before godhead, simultaneously declining a separate existence. He ceases to feel perturbed by pain, sorrow, grief. Instead, these are treated as gifts from heaven. Considering himself a vassal submitting his body and ego, the bhakta does not feel sensual craving. This form is best exemplified by the 'gopis' who love Krishna to the exclusion of everything.
Rao accepts *The Cat and Shakespeare* as the "conclusion" of *The Serpent and the Rope.*\(^4\) Thematically succeeding the novel, it forms yet another landmark in the spiritual journey of the novelist. In his own words:

*The Cat and Shakespeare* is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope,* and... it takes up the theme of metaphysical quest at the point at which Rama's story has carried it, and shows the next step in this quest.\(^5\)

Ramaswamy's protracted adventure with the Absolute culminates in his successor - Pai's encounter with a guru in Govindan Nair.

*The Serpent and the Rope* advocated Sankaracharya's philosophy of 'Advaitavada' or unqualified non-dualism and *The Cat and Shakespeare* propounds Ramanuja's theory of 'Vishishtadvaitavada' or qualified-monism. Ramanuja's celebrated system is so called because it speaks about God with implied attributes. It is Advaita or non-dualism without qualification. Sankara holds avidya or ignorance responsible for not understanding the manifestations of God. The unreal appears real. Ramanuja regarded attributes as real and permanent but subject to the control of Brahman.

Sankaracharya's 'Advaitavada' and Ramanuja's 'Vishishtadvaitavada' are different stages to the Ultimate Truth. They are not contradictory but complementary. Combined with Madhavacharya's 'Dvaitavada' or rigorous dualism, they eventually culminate in the realisation of the Absolute.

Sankaracharya's philosophy may be too subtle or abstract but Ramanuja's treatise is suitable for people inclined to devotion. The two streams of this school are - 'marjara-nyaya' and 'markata-nyaya'. The first emphasizes the feminine aspect of divine grace through the mode of
surrender. This is symbolised by Mother Cat in Rao's novel. Markata-nyaya stresses the need for self-effort.

The two principal characters in *The Cat and Shakespeare* - Govindan Nair and Ramakrishna Pai are:

......neither men of action like Moorthy nor intellectuals like Ramaswamy.6

They are simple, ordinary people for whom realization is possible only through acts of faith and surrender. This accounts for Rao's use of familiar and domestic items of human experience as symbols. Esha Dey opines that repetition of symbols like 'bridge', 'mountain', 'ant', 'elephant' in *The Serpent and the Rope* may be considered as "motifs of decorative rhetoric in the traditional structure". Nowhere do they control the story of Ramaswamy in his journey to the Absolute. They merely lend richness to the narrative texture in the novel.7 But in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, symbols like 'cat', 'kitten', 'Shakespeare', 'wall', 'house', 'garden', 'tree', 'sea', and 'ration-shop' control the entire fabric.

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 kittens grows into a complex symbol embodying in itself the theme of the woman, and the theme of total surrender to experience which leads to a gradual realisation of Truth. The knowledge of Truth provides a proper perspective by which one views the complex problems of life and death.8

The apparently ordinary animal is accorded distinctive features and qualities. Supposed to possess the highest wisdom and awareness of the rarest kind,
the cat symbolises the guru or God who is omniscient and saves the disciple from adversities. Critics have noticed that the central image of the animal carrying the kittens by their neck to secure havens becomes representative of the feminine principle. The kitten, at that point of time, feels safest in the world. The different places to which the cat-mother shifts its young ones acclimatises and familiarizes them into new, fresh experiences and situations of risk. It builds their resilience, endurance, resistance, judgement, strength and confidence. This exposure is also a test of whether they can withstand the travails of existence. Kittens too are generally of two kinds - weak and strong. The weak ones either die or persist with their feeble lives while the strength of strong doubles with time. The feminine or female aspect of the cat enables it to bear the responsibility of 'creating' a new world. Even when the kittens grow up, the mother tries to protect and carry them, regardless of the wishes of the little one. The mother-instinct in the animal like Shakti becomes a powerful instrument of creation, preservation and destruction. The protection provided by the cat finds ample illustration in Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare. The metaphorical kitten, Govindan Nair who is arrested on charges of bribery is aided by the "feline being" which helps the clerk to locate the correct file. It is the cat's 'wordless evidence', says Iyengar, which saves him. The incident exemplifies the manner in which blessings and benevolence are showered on the faithful. By contrast, it also establishes that people like Bhoothalinga Iyer remain helpless, fearful and miserable on account of their lack of trust and faith. Its ability to preserve good gets further displayed when the cat's leap at the head of the corrupt boss results in his death.

The 'kitten' in the story symbolises 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.\textsuperscript{10}

Maini maintains in an article:

The 'cat-and-kitten' metaphysic is already a part of Raja Rao's vision since the days of Kanthapura, only the idiom is new, as indeed is the form - the animal fable and the rogue story complex - which it takes.\textsuperscript{11}

The cat-kitten theory can be linked to Krishna's incarnation in the prison. Soon after his birth, he was shifted to another place for security. Likewise, a kitten, after its birth, is moved by its mother to a bastioned corner.

The use of 'Shakespeare' in the title has raised a controversy among critics. Some believe 'Shakespeare' has been added to an earlier title - 'The Cat' which appeared in 'Chelsea Review' in 1959. Iyengar points out that:

Shakespearean ambience interpenetrates the warp and woof of the novel, as evidenced in its catholicity, language and poetry.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Paul Verghese:

it is very difficult to establish a connection between the "Cat" and "Shakespeare" of the title.\textsuperscript{13}

Establishing Shakespeare as a symbol, Naik cites examples from Govindan Nair's soliloquy. References to characters from the plays and the typically Hamletian speech style which Rao parodies, find mention in Naik's critique. Naik says:

...... when one remembers that Nair knows his Shakespeare well, it is clear as to why the cat in the mousetrap should remind him of Hamlet, for the "play within the play" in Hamlet is called... "The Mousetrap". (III, ii, 250).\textsuperscript{14}
Yet another critic argues that

Shakespeare represents the profoundest knowledge
and awareness of all layers of life...\textsuperscript{15}

Finally, Rao himself considers Shakespeare as:

......someone who has gone beyond duality, and as
such he is a universal symbol.\textsuperscript{16}

The title also brings to mind the Shakespearean themes of divine justice, equivocation and retribution. Thus, Rao's novel presents a virtual storehouse of rich philosophical musings, language and themes, strikingly similar to the dramatist. Shakespeare's plays grow within a living, dynamic world. A characteristic vibrant inner energy pervades the novel also. The thematic movement of a Shakespearean play proceeds from disorder to order. In an analogous fashion, insecurity, disorder and chaos prevailed in the early life of Pai too. Excess of logic and rationality disturb his equanimity and equilibrium, adding to the chaos. But grace of God in the guise of Nair alleviates his suffering. With the aid of this guide, he is conducted into an ordered state of pure innocence. The dramatist's plays also consist of basic emotions like love, hate, guilt, fear, jealousy. Love as an emotion is not restricted to a single segment or time of human existence but involves a gamut of feelings covering the entire life of an individual. Relations between husband and wife, master and servant, friends, brothers and sisters get exhibited in the Shakespearean world. A compounding of all such traits is evident in Govindan Nair who loves his neighbour like a friend, takes care of him like a mother, guides him as a guru and helps like a brother. With regard to vigour, force, vitality, strength and reason, Shakespeare symbolises the male principle. The use of 'cat' and 'Shakespeare' in the title are as suggestive as a metaphysical conceit. Apparently they are contradictory but virtue of
one symbol is implicit and inherent in the other. The former possesses the wisdom of Shakespeare and the latter contains the latent power of creation. Viewed in this context, the apparently heterogeneous symbols drawn from the plebeian and the literary world no longer seem to be distinctly contradictory but synchronise in a parallel relationship. 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.

The 'wall' is another significant motif. Standing for the veil of maya or illusion, demarcating appearance from reality, it divides the houses of Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. Those who succeed in crossing it, attain the vision of the Beatitude (represented in the novel by the 'garden' on the other side). Rao emphasizes 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 a negative symbol. Regarded as an exigent obstruction, the barrier negatively epitomes 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 when he says:

What a will-o'- the wisp of a wall it is, going from nowhere to nowhere; tile-covered, bulging, and obstreperous, it seems like the sound heard and not the word understood.
Sustained effort is therefore required from 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.

'Garden' in this particular novel of Rao may denote eternity. Connection can also be established with other faiths namely Christianity in which the garden is a traditional place for redemption of souls. After overcoming the illusory wall, human existence becomes a metaphorical journey from the 'house' (world) to the 'garden' (eternity). Dey maintains:

Pai..... led by the mother cat, arrives at the garden and is blessed with the vision of the Supreme.18

His quest reaches consummation as he experiences a glimpse of "the divine, perfection incarnate, absolute good, pure love and super bliss".19 The 'tree' standing by the wall represents the 'cosmic tree'. Cherished by Lord Shiva, it constantly reminds the protagonist of the legendary hunter who was blessed by the three-eyed god as he unknowingly dropped bilva-leaves on a mount. Existing as a benediction in disguise for the devotee, the trefoil leaves indicate 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, Sridhar and Usha are occasionally seen standing beneath this very tree. Though the children happily play with each other, Sridhar contracts pneumonia and dies. Still the hero looks up to it for benediction.
The 'house' figuratively represents an individual soul's temporary refuge in company of the Lord. The storeys signify the 'gunas' in human nature - 'sattva', 'rajas' and 'tamas'. Pai's house is described in a similar fashion, vividly conveying the spirituality associated with it:

It was new and it was white. It had ochre bands on it - almost as on a temple - and I could hear the sea.\(^{20}\)

The 'sea' connotes eternity, continuously reminding the protagonist of divine creation or the cosmic principle, for a window on the sea is "a window on God". However, it also conveys the immeasurable depth of knowledge which corresponds to profound and unfathomed wisdom. The storeys in the structure may be linked to various stages of metaphysical evolution in man's life. Ramakrishna Pai is, with the help of Govindan Nair and Shantha, able to construct two storeys which can be equated to the two states of being - 'jagriti' (waking) and 'swapna' (dream). 'Jagriti' should not be confused with the final state of samadhi but comprehended as ordinary perception of things with or without spiritual awakening. Ramakrishna Pai is a 'spiritually-awake' sadhaka, conscious of the metaphysics of his soul. In 'swapnavastha' or dream-state, the person is awake subconsciously. In this condition also, duality exists between man and God. The second storey of the house signifies the dream-world before entry into Reality. The third stage is 'Sushupti' - dreamless deep sleep - when the individual, though actually unaware, becomes closer to the supreme Creator. This storey in the novel is not constructed. It may be inferred that space above the second storey of the house denotes the condition of 'sushupti' which finally leads to the state of Absolute Consciousness. In the words of Ramakrishna Pai:

I will never build a house three stories high. Have you ever seen a house so high? No, not in Trivandrum.\(^{21}\)
A house in Trivandrum acquires much significance because of the added fact that Raja Rao ended his spiritual quest near his guru in this very city. He notes:

When you come to Trivandrum, you feel you've come home. For Trivandrum is the home of the homeless. Everybody is born homeless.22

Here, "a house always opens into openness". Suggestive of the city of God, to Rao it implies a yearning for sublimation in the guise of a three storeyed building. Success in this venture permits entry into a blissful union with Him - the final abode of human soul on earth. Thus, Trivandrum is a macrocosm in relation to Pai's house, and at the same time, a microcosm against the cosmic background. The open area above the house is supposedly left for the third storey which can be equated to the spiritual evolution of the hero. The third state is shorn of barriers of maya, denoting the union of individual soul with the cosmic mind. But this too is not ultimate because of absence of true consciousness. The protagonist has not yet had vision of the Absolute which is possible only after transcending this mode. The last being 'turiya' or 'samadhi' - is a state of pure absolute consciousness or super-consciousness with no illusory veils. The devotee, having reached this step, enters into a blissful union with Brahman - a stage which is:

.....neither sight nor mental consciousness. There is only spiritual consciousness.23

Here, the mind dissolves in Him. It is not a 'stone-like' inert condition of forgetfulness or annihilation but "a life in spirit". Only through 'samadhi' can a person:

.....know the Unknown, .... see the Unseen, ... get across into the Inaccessible.24
The guru, having guided the disciple through the first two stages, leaves him to reach the final destination through his own sadhana or spiritual ardour. Hence Govindan Nair disappears suddenly towards the conclusion of the novel.

In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the symbols employed by Rao are obviously unusual. The two ambiguous representations in the 'serpent' and the 'rope' and their deep philosophical import in the previous novel have been lent metaphysical continuity here in the form of the 'cat' and 'Shakespeare'. These may also correspond to the motif of 'female-male relationship' discussed earlier. Acting as varied points of reference owing to their singular associations, they appear different with different perceptions. Their main function is to dissolve contradictions. Rao's figurative world progresses in a two-fold manner. There are some which are subject to immeasurable interpretations and others have the capacity to merge or dissolve all external contradictions for example the 'ration shop' which stands for human life on earth. Just as human actions are evaluated according to deeds in past life, similarly, ration is distributed according to the red, green or blue colour of the card. As Rao's protagonist observes, the scales weigh in accordance to them:

> Life is like that. Life is a ration shop. The scale weighs everything according to the ration card.\(^{25}\)

An individual with predominant 'sattva-guna' at the time of his demise, proceeds to 'Brahma-loka', the abode of Brahma (It should not be equated with 'Brahma-Jnana' - the finale). A person with singular 'rajas - traits' is born after death, among men of action whereas those dying in 'tamas' are reborn in the wombs of the deluded. (*Bhagavadgita*, XIV, 14, 15). But the embodied one who transcends the three gunas (because even 'sattva' binds
the individual through attachment to his own happiness and knowledge) latent in the body, is released from the misery of birth, death, decay and pain, thus attaining Immortality (Bhagavadgita, XIV, 20).

Raja Rao's novels, based exclusively on metaphysics, reveal two types of people - the uninitiated and the initiated. In the earlier novels, Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope, Rao permitted only the uninitiated characters to appear. It is a well-known fact that a seeker cannot attain realization unless he is ushered into the world of spirit by a realized guru who may bear the responsibility of acting as a lighthouse to the lost wanderers on the path of Truth. In Govindan Nair of The Cat and Shakespeare, Rao builds the portrait of such an instructor. An ordinary clerk with a meagre income from his ration shop, Nair is a realized sage who has pondered deep into the mysteries of life and its existence. His charismatic looks along with "unpredictable actions and reactions", attract everyone to him. It is believed that the personality of the master exudes energy and an esoteric kind of blessing. The sadhaka feels energised, elevated and spiritually awakened. Contact, conversation and nearness to such a guru provides emotional and spiritual satisfaction to the disciple. Govindan Nair, the guru in the present novel, is a devoted bhakta of Mother Cat and adores her as the divine feminine principle - Shakti. Though in the garb of an ordinary individual, he is a 'jivan-mukta'. Yoga Vashishtha defines 'jivan-mukta' as a 'state 'in which:

... the saint has ceased to have any desire... He is full of bliss and happiness, and therefore, appears to ordinary eyes to be an ordinary man.... He is wise and pleasant and loving to all with whom he comes in contact.... He can take part in the enjoyment of others, he can play like a child and sympathise with the sorrow of the sufferers.26
Critics have branded Nair a "rogue". However, the literal dictionary meaning of the word 'rogue' is 'rascal' which in no way, conforms to the character of Rao's present protagonist. The other purport of the word is 'trickery' or playful mischief. On examination, Nair's disposition displays this particular trait. Childhood days of Lord Krishna, his captivation of the 'Gokul-vasis' through mischievous, divine sports, 'lilas' and exploits find parallel in modern reincarnation. Govindan Nair too is one such fascinating soul who bears a charmed life. His 'roguish' activities attract all hearts. At the same time, unquestioned faith in the Mother Goddess, symbolised by the cat cocoon him in a feeling of perfect security and he sincerely feels that a person with full faith of a kitten in the Mother will attain liberation. Thus the 'kitten-way' of Pai's neighbour forms the core of the novel. He himself observes thus:

We would all be kittens carried by the cat. Some, who are lucky..., will one day know it. Others live hearing 'meow-meow'... I like being the kitten....²⁷

Nair appears at a very significant juncture in the novel. As Ramakrishna Pai is looking at the bilva tree, he is reminded of the "wicked" hunter and wonders whether he too can "build a big house". Peeping through the leaves, the '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 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.²⁸

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.\(^{29}\)

The wall of ignorance separates the individual from God which, maintains Radhakrishnan in his *Indian Philosophy*, is not "intellectual error but spiritual blindness". 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!\(^{30}\)

Critics attack the apparent hypocrisy of Pai's preceptor because the author does not depict him guiltless and blameless at the trial for bribery. In this regard, it would not be incorrect to suppose that the so-called arrest is in actuality a charade to educate his 'shishya' into a revelation of the omnipotent and omniscient nature of the Mother Cat. Simultaneously, the display also exhibits its relatedness to the subtitle of the novel - 'A Tale of Modern India' as nowadays, even realized sages are indicted on false charges of corruption and dishonesty. Nevertheless, the scene strengthens the wise man's unshakable faith in the supreme munificence of the Goddess to mankind. Moreover, the whole incident can also be linked to the statement of the accused himself:
In the dream the whole is real.\textsuperscript{31}

As every appearance in life is a delusion like in dream, similarly, Nair's imprisonment is only deception. The reality behind the trial scene remains unrevealed as the novelist expected the reader "to weep at every page, not for what he sees, but for what he sees he sees". (These words by Raja Rao appeared on the cover of the New York edition of The Cat and Shakespeare). The author's wish 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" is ample demonstration of its ambiguity. Being a "book of prayer", for Rao, the novel acquires added significance from its seeming inconclusiveness. In this regard, Soni's statement beautifully reveals its quintessential core:

.... as no prayer is complete or all-embracing in its scope - the book remains incomplete.\textsuperscript{32}

Perceived as such, the novel reflects its 'double-edged' reality and multilayered conclusions.

Rao builds Govindan Nair's persona with very apt statements. 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 heave and bear you to where the isles are.\textsuperscript{33}

Like Mother Cat, the initiated 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 restraints and bondages of earthly existence. Ramakrishna, throughout the novel, seems to be mesmerised by
the 'strange gestures' of his neighbour. He observes:

I am just like that hunter carelessly dropping 'bilva' leaves 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.34

The preceptor 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 and reasoning and creativity of Shakespeare. Despite complete detachment from illusory perception of the world, the instructor does not fail to fulfil his duties. Not believing in renouncing 'karma' for salvation, he observes:

You no more find the truth in the Himalayas than you find it in the Indian Law Register. You may find it on your garden wall and not know it was it. You must have eyes to see.35

He sees the reality behind the 'serpent':

You only see what you want to see. But you must see what you see. Freedom is only that you see what you see.36

Parameswaran translates the incomprehensible statement in the language of common understanding:

Freedom is gained when you reach that stage where you see things as they really are and not as they appear to be to eyes prompted by preoccupations or desires. Complete detachment is essential for complete self-surrender.37

The novelist quotes from the Ashtavakra Gita (XV, 14):

'Yattvam pashyasi tatranikastvameva pratibhasase'

Seeing rightly is seeing the seen is ever the seer seen.38
Perception of the unchanging reality of objects in the universe terminates non-duality. This state can be achieved only when the ego is obliterated. Rao designates the individual with "no ego" as:

......the wise, the all-giver, the man of peace... the choice of the princess, he the choice of the populace.\(^\text{39}\)

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. The young lady who strips herself before the elderly gentleman for monetary compulsions, is stupified by the poised, calm and unmoved reaction of the beholder. Her charm fails to attract him. The conversation between them elevates the mundane erotic scene to sublime and spiritual heights. The "terrible" self-control in the personality of the enlightened man, his humility and sympathy with the tragedy in the girl's life prompt her to surrender like a daughter before him. In the words of the novelist, man leaves the carnal beauty of woman behind because:

......he looks at the world of twilight, which is not really of this world.\(^\text{40}\)

The incident exhibits Nair's implicit confidence in the divinity and protection of Mother Cat even in mundane situations. Describing the nature of Govindan Nair, Mukherjee maintains that he adheres to:

the ideals of non-attachment, conquest and selfless love towards humanity.\(^\text{41}\)

It is very difficult to fully grasp the profundity and depth of a liberated sage like Nair. Rao has perhaps intentionally not revealed his entire personality. Leaving him as a spiritual enigma for aspiring souls, the novelist curbs all attempts to diminish his importance. An ideal friend, husband,
father and guru, he is a loving playmate to children, a fascinating and interesting conversationalist to young men and a suitable guide to amateur philosophers. Through sadhana (which transports a man back to his origin), he rises above personal interests, reaching high innocence. Through selfless actions inspired by love and purity and the sublime as motivation, he succeeds in attaining total unification with the Supreme. Individual relations thus cease to exist because he has achieved oneness with the universe. 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 instructions are distilled from his unfettered actions and experiences. Nair's deeds of comedy are "packages" of deepest philosophy. The children seated in the huge scales of the ration-shop enjoy themselves thoroughly and the sage is amused at their innocent frolics. Pushing the needle to the middle, he says:

Everything in the world weighs the same.\(^{42}\)

It establishes the truth that nature maintains balance at all costs in its creation. Everybody is provided with an adequate quota suiting the ability and personality. People with poor action record are endowed less by nature. The guru comments:

.....you can't always be at the top. Even Hitler sometime has to come down.\(^{43}\)

The statement reveals the fact that life is a cyclic process of pleasure and grief. An individual asserting his ego, suffers. But people displaying perfect faith in the Lord, remain undeterred from their goals and view pleasure and pain alike as gifts from God. Hitler had to face defeat because of his ego-
consciousness, self-aggrandisement and ambition. Govindan Nair is never seen involved in sense perception. Always in silent communion with the Lord, the worldly temptations fail to soil the purity of his mind and spirit. Though living in this world, he exists on a different plane altogether. Such an enlightened visionary becomes the only vigilant among the careless, the only one who is awake, aware and reflecting among the heedless. This is the lesson of the wise one to his neighbour. As a true guru, Nair removes the veil of 'ajnana' 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.44

Keeping in mind Rao's metaphysics, 'house' could not be having connotation in material sense. 'House-building' in spiritual terms, may signify a structure with foundation of 'faith', bricks of 'love', cement of 'devotion', walls of 'dispassion' and 'discrimination', erected for the day of final judgement. Ramaswamy, the rationalist and an intellectual aspirant, could not have attained Truth without denial of his ego or 'I-ness'. The spiritual mentor thus guides the intellectual, willing him to surrender himself. Ramakrishna Pai, the "innocent" and ignorant quester realises that he is actually the mythical hunter who was blessed by the vision of Shiva. He too is unaware of where the leaves dropped. Nevertheless, like his 'ancestor', his mist of doubts will clear through association with the guru. At no place in the text, does the protagonist display anxiety to move across the wall, making self-effort to transcend the constraints of maya, time and space, even though he himself is bewildered and mystified by his guru's unrestrained moves. Raja Rao considers 'vertical' and 'horizontal' - the only two possible perspectives in
human understanding. Vertical movement is "sheer upward thrust towards the unnameable, the unutterable", and horizontal is "the human condition expressing.... concern for man as one's neighbour". The latter perspective includes duality whereas the former process abolishes it, uniting the aspirant with God. The novelist explains it thus:

The vertical rises slowly, desperately, to move from the I to the non-I, reaching out to ultimate 'being'.... It is the nobility of 'Nirvana', of zero, of light.

The horizontal..... on its long, arduous and confused pathways will reach the same ultimacy by divesting the I of its many vestments through concern for the other, by compassion for the other....

The vertical, however, is inherent in the horizontal. These perspectives may also imply the 'house' and the 'wall' respectively. For Nair's disciple, there is no vertical leap. Fully aware of the searcher's mettle, the teacher directs him through the horizontal path of duality, gradually culminating into non-dualness as he needs a realization of the importance of surrender. He seems too naive to grasp the drift of statements uttered by his instructor who himself says:

Yes, sir, the cat always meows. That is my nature to say meow-meow. All my language can be reduced to this - meow, meow, meow.

This statement enhances the image of Govindan Nair as a loving, inspiring and compassionate master, unmindful of the weaknesses in his disciple, guiding him to ultimate blessedness. Like Ramaswamy, the aspirant in this novel also receives grace with minimum effort. This is perhaps the result of the earliest of Rao's sadhaka-protagonist - Moorthy's selection for initiation into the realm of Truth at the very beginning. The divine visions appearing in the psyche of Moorthy, the first initiate of the novelist's world, materialize
in Pai's life and appear as some kind of spiritual legacy which the present hero, Ramakrishna, inherited from his ancestors.

Pai's illness, "an unknown phenomenon of physiological eruption", appearing as strange boils all over his body, burst like "country eggs". Govindan Nair calls them "British boils" which significantly implies some 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. His successor, Kirillov, though got misguided from his path, yet was made to recognize the west as evil. In the next book, Ramaswamy got 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'. Sage Vashishtha defines 'yoga' as 'vrittinirodha' and 'jnana' as 'samyagvekshana'. 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 if this process is consciously and deliberately followed. Thus Ramaswamy has to bear the pain of tuberculosis and later, the eruption of British bubos afflict Ramakrishna. 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". The loathful sight of lizards feasting over the pus indicates the truth that one man's poison is another's meal. The ayurvedic medicine literally and figuratively permeates the body and mind of the infected person in a total cleansing operation. It is strange that the hateful scene does not, in any manner, disturb him. Instead, his interest and Nair's reaction to it are a revelation of the equanimity typical to their psyche. This experience is parallel to Moorthy's lesson of loving his enemy. Moreover, it also 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.

Just as Ramaswamy's malaise vanishes on meeting Savithri, Ramakrishna's disease too finds cure in contact with Shantha. The latter lady is a continuation of the 'Shakti-principle' incarnated previously in the former. Heroes of Rao do not share a happy relationship with their spouses. It is always the mistress who serves as inspiration and performs the task of the wife. The relationship shared by Pai and Shantha rarely embarrasses them. With grace, the lady accepts her role as a mistress becoming a model wife in spirit. Wholly dedicated to her 'god', she bears the conviction that

To be a wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born. And you give birth to what is being born. You annihilate time and you become a wife. Wifehood..... creates. It lives on even when time dies.47

In this respect, she is the counterpoint to Saroja who displays least interest in her husband and his life. Pai views Shantha as the "ideal woman" possessing all essential qualities of womanhood. He confesses:

I have developed a bad habit. I like women. Not that I like all sorts of women. I like woman, in fact. What is woman, you may ask. Well, woman is Shantha.48
Believing in whole hearted surrender, her capitulation towards Pai is total and 'complete'. Like a true member of the Nair community, she 'worships' her man. While Saroja knows how to 'take', Shantha believes in 'giving'. Saroja is fashioned in the 'rajas' trait as she surrounds herself with materialistic pursuits. 'Sattva' trait is predominant in the person of Shantha. Pai's first wife lives, at all times, in her 'serpentine' world and his alter ego frequents the world of 'rope'. The former merely gives birth to children and the latter who looks after Sridhar, Usha and the others, fosters and cherishes them. Even Usha, with intrinsic feminine instinct, imbibes these genuine emotions and learns to look after young and old alike. As observed by Parameswaran, all these women embodying the Shakti Principle are mothers from birth.

All manifestations of Shakti in the previous novels merge in Shantha. Her personality amalgamates the qualities of Moorthy's mother Narsamma, Rangamma, Kirillov's Irene, Ramaswamy's Little Mother, Savithri, Saroja, Madeleine and Catherine. Though Shantha is not beautiful, yet she possesses an extra-ordinary and daring self-confidence. The instinct to recognize "love" enhances her status in the eyes of Pai and the feeling of total submission persuades Ramakrishna to admire her more than his wife. The protagonist's remembrance of his wife is either "vague animal violence" ("I struck my wife only twice and have left marks on her face") or the lineage of "chillis and cardamom and tamarind and coconuts". He shares with Shantha, the principle of the 'Ardhanarishwara'. His brahmin heredity makes him stick to the awareness that woman is born to worship her man. In the novelist's view, Shakti is an inseparable part of man's life. Hence, Ramakrishna should not be accused of being a pleasure-seeker. Like Rao, he too believes that woman is essential to provide a sense of completion to
man. Shantha who remains pregnant in the major portion of the novel, embodies Shakti, the creative phenomenon, without which the world cannot survive. 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 Siva. Here, Pai, like Rama, becomes Siva and worthy of worship because the woman makes him so.  

Srivastava has referred to Pai's attachment to Shantha as "a love for a two-storied house". In his opinion, the hero welcomes only those who assist him in the realization or fulfilment of his dreams. However, Ramakrishna claims that he worships neither Shantha nor money even though "it will make the three stories possible". As perceived earlier, in materialistic terms, house-building may imply the state of 'rajas', but viewed metaphysically, it results in transcendence. Shantha becomes instrumental in leading Pai to salvation. Her wish for an "eight directions wide" structure with "eleven windows facing the sea" signifies her close affinity to the ocean. In this manner, she resembles goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity who is believed to have emerged from the ocean while it was being churned by gods and demons. In due course, the child born to her gets named Krishna. In the previous novel, Krishna Pierre did not live long. Perhaps he could not have survived as he was a son born to Madeleine - a representation of maya or illusion, and all progenies of illusion perish. Though Shantha has links with maya, yet it can be argued that when illusion or maya resides in the Lord, it assumes life. Madeleine could not merge herself in her 'god' - Ramaswamy while Shantha succeeds in doing so which explains the fact of survival of their child. Offering her son to her 'god', she
says, "This is yours". Their mutual love increases and she gains acceptability in the household. Madeleine's keen interest in Georges had kindled jealousy in Ramaswamy in the earlier novel. But with intuitive knowledge, Shantha in The Cat and Shakespeare recognises her limits. She never enters Pai's wife's house. Deeply intelligent and confident, she has already crossed the obstacle in the form of wall, mentally. Like Govindan Nair, the lady becomes instrumental in the hero's perception of Reality. It is Shantha who convinces him of his love for cats. Like Maitreyi, the learned wife of sage Yajnavalkya, she instructs him into the realm of knowledge and liberates him from the constraints of 'particularity'. Pai, who loves only the 'woman' in Shantha, is made to realize the universal nature of womanhood: "all that is born had a mother". Thus motherhood is 'nothing special'. She exclaims:

...... I am your proof. You are only seen by me. Who could know you as I know you? So the proof of my lord is me. The proof became concrete and became the child. I must know I am. You made me say I am... Only I say you. And you say I.....That is the proof of proof.\(^{52}\)

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 tune but to the tune of trees.....The air was so like a mirror you just walked toward yourself.\(^{53}\)
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 get dissolved. Ramakrishna'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 (transcendentally) 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?"

This bestowal of grace upon the uninitiated disciple is a "prelude to a richer vision" which follows when Pai walks behind the Mother Cat like a mesmerised kitten. Similar to the mythical lad - Nachiketas - in the Kathopanishad, the hero in this novel, too, is a willing recepient. 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.

A similar kind of experience, though richer in essence, was meted out to the
heroes in the earlier novels. Moorthy, while in meditation, felt that he could "touch the stones and they would hang to his hands" or a snake would readily spread its sheltering hood above him as soon as he touched it. Ramaswamy too experiences oneness with nature at certain places in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

But these experiences gained by the previous heroes were ephemeral. They were like flashes of lightening, providing only a glimpse of a higher principle which was far removed from them. Ramakrishna, the blessed hero, achieves this state of illumination. His ego merges in the 'divine'. Niranjan observes:

> It is difficult to know life before knowing death, in the same way as it is difficult to be happy before knowing what happiness *is*.\(^{58}\)

The seeker, when he confronts Reality, knows no fear. As Nachiketas was liberated and Yama ushered him into the nature of the Self, likewise Ramakrishna 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. It involves his transformation into a bhakta with the added knowledge that intuition is superior to intellect. (Book or literary knowledge is only a medium to develop an understanding of the world and its ways). The true way to reach God is 'meditation'. Contemplation of the Supreme should be a constant process in the mind of the sadhaka. For Nair, "the whole world was one living organism", the language common to all being 'love'. The same education is imparted to the disciple. He 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. The actual meaning of the ration-shop scale is finally revealed to him:

And I understood the ration shop scale where children played. You weigh only that which you seem to weigh, but that which knows neither balance nor weight stands outside time. Life is so precious. I ask you why does not one play?

It is significant that Ramakrishna 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 highest wisdom dawns upon him as he walks through the world with a sense of total detachment. Saroja's indifference and resentful nagging fail to deter him. He realizes that real marriage is between souls:

How could one not be married in marriage when you move where there is no movement, you sleep where there is but light? Marriage is not a fact, it is a state. You marry because you see.

The novel ends on an optimistic note as the seeker hears the music of marriage. This motif of 'marriage' recurs in The Cat and Shakespeare denoting a new mysterious world. The quester is unaware of what lies beyond. Though the audible sounds are full of hope and expectation, yet the protagonist faces an uncertain future. Raja Rao rejects institutionalized marriage. In The Serpent and the Rope, he played with the illusion of Ramaswamy - Madeleine marriage, but it is the spiritual union of the hero with Savithri that is made to succeed in The Cat and Shakespeare. The novel also reveals the success of a bond outside the restraints of a conventional marriage.

The Cat and Shakespeare presents the "subtle interplay of the comic and the serious, the amorous and the metaphysical". The strange
juxtaposition of apparently heterogeneous elements (like 'cat' and 'Shakespeare', 'boils' and 'British') in the novel lend complexity to the text. Apparently diverse symbols interpreted in a homogeneous manner help Rao in the attainment of singleness of vision. As the story-element is very thin in the novel, the narrator uses it as an instrument for conveying the deep philosophy of life. The guru, Nair, instructs the disciple into the subtle understanding of life through humour and an equipoise of psyche. In the words of Naik:

.... it is a strange prayer to a strange god, a prayer in which the solemn chants of devotion are mingled with loud guffaws of laughter. Reverence and irreverence, fantasy and reality, mysticism and Mammonism, the past with its age-old philosophy and the present of the global war - are all mixed together in this brief, teasing fable.63

The book is a series of episodes which appear to be "non-happenings", for example Ramakrishna Pai, the brahmin-clerk in the Revenue Department is attended upon by his neighbour-guru, Govindan Nair when he is afflicted with the "British boils"; Nair who is found philosophising to a young whore helps Pai in buying the house in the name of his daughter. Sridhar's death prompts Shantha to shift with Pai and Usha, Nair's arrest leads to the salvation of Pai. These instances function more on a symbolic rather than a realistic plane. The 'quiet' humour pervasive in the novel arises from 'intellectual frame of reference' and a generalisation on matters like life, marriage and death in which the issue of death is deliberately made to lose importance. The lack of significance converts it into an unreal non-issue. Dey observes that in *The Cat and Shakespeare*:

......human situation..... is presented and immediately rendered unreal through humorous distanciation based on a witty play with metaphysics.64
However, the author has attempted to provide a blase and ordinariness to difficult and obscure metaphysical truths which are beyond laymen comprehension. Govindan Nair's 'enigmatic' humour in marriage and death related matters soften their cliche ridden institutionalized images. Through his affable, easy-going mannerisms, Nair presents solution to diverse problems, trivializing the most difficult concepts, aiding common understanding and insight into the world and existence. The semantic movement in the theme of The Cat and Shakespeare proceeds from the simple to complex. The apparent humour and comic expositions are employed with the specific purpose of providing a cover and subterfuge to the grave and profound metaphor of metaphysical truths. The laughter evoked by Rao is not purposeless. It serves the task of lessening the impact of obscurity, bringing the substance within the ambit of common human understanding. Further, it will be noticed that the humour content of the novel surrounds the persona of Govindan Nair who is a spiritually awakened initiated guru. The protagonist of the novel begins his journey with a search for such a guide and mentor. Plagued by the paradoxes of human existence, the widening gap between illusion and reality and the true purpose of a bhakta, Ramakrishna Pai, an individual ordinaire, submits his common place understanding at the guru's feet. The problems require solutions and the spiritual guide who is otherwise an enigma and mystery, has to lower and bend his stature to accomodate the comprehension of the disciple. Hence the need for comedy and humour. Deeper truths are explained through correlatives and the intangible is thus easily apprehended. The experience of Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare leaves the reader and the quester with a sense of wonder and amazement which triggers a plummeting of the psyche into a state of disbelief and amazement.
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45. Raja Rao, *The Meaning of India*, pp. 139-140.

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Conclusion
The novels of Raja Rao may be deeply immersed in metaphysics but the novelist manifestly preferred the medium of fiction to communicate the metaphysical experience. Selecting south of India as his primary locale, Rao gradually builds the fictional boundaries. The subsoil is supplied by 'customs, festivals, beliefs and the current socio-political condition of his native country'. It finds representation in the numerous secondary characters like the Venkammas, Lingayyas, Iyers, Lakshmis and Bhattas of the novels. Into this scenario and among these people, Rao introduces his four protagonists - Moorthy, Kirillov, Ramaswamy and Pai. They are all men with missions, linked together through one common 'aim' and one experience which manifests itself in different ways in each novel. The novels are instruments which colour and enrich his devotion. Metaphysics and fiction narrative, therefore cannot be examined in isolation. They are inextricably linked to each other. Rao felt that the Indian novel-form could not exist in a valueless void. Hence, he interlaces Indian metaphysics with a fictional framework and the novel form serves the purpose of embellishing an otherwise obscure and abstract theme. Fiction and metaphysics complement each other. Had the novelist chosen to proceed with his sadhana in a decidedly conventional manner, the texts would have been designated 'philosophical treatises' rather than literary creations read for aesthetic pleasure. The metaphysical principle is essayed within a fictional structure comprising loose plots, profound themes, sketchy dialogues and abstruse characters. It is a unique style that endeavours to weave together Indian philosophy, metaphysics and religious beliefs with everyday living.
Rao is essentially a 'thinker' living in his own private world of religious ideologies. A genuine sadhaka, his entire work traces his spiritual wandering. The sadhana is no mere collection of words, but an act and process of "growth within himself" to attain the state of 'oneness' with Brahman. The journey is 'herculean' and Rao takes years to reach a milestone that each novel becomes. It is a conscious and deliberately personal activity culminating in an encounter with the impersonal. Rao states in an interview:

I take writing as a Sadhana, a spiritual Sadhana. That is why I write so little and take a long time to complete my text.\(^1\)

However, fiction did not merely remain a component of exploration into social reality. It became a medium to impart "something" beyond and above mundane existence. Rao has confessed several times that he wrote essentially for himself and seldom cared for the readers. His books are 'silent', intensely personal and profound sadhanas. Raja Rao started his literary career with the first novel - Kanthapura. Apparently dealing with Indian freedom struggle which he used as an objective correlative, the novel explores one of the most significant subjects of philosophy - the quest for Self. The action and theme of this book and the fortune of the village Kanthapura determines the fate of the succeeding generations of Rao's protagonists also. The multidimensional struggle depicted serves as a recurrent motif in the later novels because this phenomenon underlies the conflicts of subsequent protagonists. Kirillov, Ramaswamy and finally Ramakrishna fight emotional and psychological battles in their respective fictional domains for the attainment of their own 'truths'. The struggle of the Kanthapurians is no simple contention or community warfare. Their
combined sacrifice and achievement get elevated to the level of a revolution sweeping through the entire country. The search for identity in Kanthapura is individual as well as collective. The novel reflects an intense and united effort to gain victory over baser elements. Based upon the philosophy of 'karma' yoga, Kanthapura marks the preliminary stage in Rao's metaphysical journey. He injects his motive into the protagonist who follows the path of a true karma-yogi, incessantly fighting to eradicate evil, in this case, the British. He becomes the village-leader and multitudes, fascinated by his charisma follow blindfold. Triumph against the British forces becomes a correlative feature in the war of good and evil. The feeling of contentment is figuratively the first step in the march towards regeneration and a new life. For a single individual, the protagonist Moorthy, this effort becomes translated into a mode of self-discovery through a firm control over the ego. Kanthapura serves as an index for Rao's later work.

The next novel is Comrade Kirillov. It displays the novelist's temporary affair with Marxism. The predilection to doubt, scepticism and waywardness had lingered towards the end of Kanthapura. The new novel depicts a political arena of diverse ideologies which trap the central character. Still, the deluded Kirillov searches for practical ways to reach deeper truths and awareness of essential reality and being. Just as the immature Moorthy had failed to recognise the reality of his own lineage as an archetype of the Mahatma avatar, so did Comrade Kirillov, the protagonist here, require Rao's assistance to understand the demands of his own spirit. His creator makes an intense effort to establish before him the superiority of 'Vedanta' over other ideologies. But the unconventional hero, engrossed in
self-created fantasy, prefers to adopt Marxism as religion. Based on Arjuna's 'Vishada-yoga' (the grief of Arjuna), the novel depicts irresolution, darkness and confusion in the life of the hero. At the same time, it reveals an inner paradox: there is distrust and conflict in the psyche of Kirillov. The novel uncovers the state of human mind before the actual realization of Truth. Rao considered this to be an essential adjunct to sadhana just as 'doubt' was the precursor to 'faith'. Towards the end, the faith of the comrade is restored through his son - Kamal, who seeks India for its indianness, spirituality and magnificence.

Rao's next important work - The Serpent and the Rope is based purely on Adi Sankaracharya's 'Advaita Vedanta'. The novel is an exposition of the novelist's and his protagonist's search for the Absolute. Having travelled through the path of 'karma', the quester reaches the state of 'jnana'. Rao's third novel is a discovery of the significance of the 'jnana-marga' or the path of knowledge which demands total commitment, submission and devotion. Without these prerequisites, the individual fails to attain Supreme Brahman. It is an important stage in the life of the searcher because he understands the fundamental issues of 'existence' and 'being' during the course of his sadhana. This novel becomes a landmark in Rao's spiritual mission. Rejecting maya (illusion), he gains perception and realizes the necessity of a guru or a mentor who could explain the mysteries of life. As a consequence, Ramaswamy, its protagonist begins an earnest search for a guide. Explored are the basic tenets of Hindu philosophy such as maya, the Shakti principle of 'Ardhanarishwara', God, Liberation (Moksha) and Truth.
The novel embodies the spirit and meaning of India in the central symbol of 'Benares'.

The Cat and Shakespeare emphasizes the importance and necessity of surrender. This tenet is assiduously woven into the fabric of the story. Roughly rooted in Ramanujacharya's 'bhakti-marga', the novel exhibits the significance of a mentor - medium to guide the quester on the path of Truth. Having recognized the impermanence and non-existence of maya, Ramakrishna Pai seeks help from a liberated initiated sage - Govindan Nair. The rapport and deep bond between them enables this sadhaka to reach his aspired goal. The prominent symbols of the novel are profoundly suggestive. Rao's instruction to leave three hundred blank pages at the end of this book is open to interpretation. They may refer to the singular nature of felt experience which Rao considers is either beyond expression or needed immense space for its explanation.

Rao has experimented with various forms and styles in his exercise of fiction writing. The experimentation in his writings gives him the impetus to fulfil his sadhana. In Kanthapura, Rao uses oral tradition. The narrator is an illiterate old woman who garrulously dredges the story of her village from her memory. Her description is simple, artless, voluble and in complete empathy with her mental stature. The narration flows in an endless fashion, broken occasionally through punctuation. Sentences extend unceasingly with the aid of innumerable 'ands'. The following is just one example:

And the next morning they rise with the sun, and the men begin to dig pits and to hew wood and the women to pluck weeds and to kill vermin; and when
the sun rises high, and one rests one's axe for a while to open the tobacco - pouch, or one rests one's basket to open the betel-bag, there he is, the maistri....

Rao uses the old 'pauranic' tradition in both - Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope. He observes:

I like the Puranic conception. That is the only conception of the novel for me. I don't want to compare my novel with any foreign novel. I am very much an Indian and the Indian form is the Puranic form.

A 'purana' is an old Indian form of literature which amalgamates history, philosophy, religion and knowledge regarding human existence. It comprises of stories, fables, legends, long poetic description of places and nature. Some of the 'upa-puranas' have a description of holy places and are called 'stha-panuras'. Kanthapura is a "rich stha-panura" - a legendary history - crammed with innumerable episodes. Religion is the central force of action. Kenchamma - the local goddess of the village - guides the lives of Kanthapurians and protects them from adversities.

Comrade Kirillov employs a narrator-witness technique which is a singular achievement in experimentation with style. The novelist assays multiple narrator-witnesses by splitting the personality of the protagonist into three disjuncts - Kirillov, Padmanabhan and Rama. Each represents a persona of the hero's self. As the novel is supposedly a record of events in the life of Padmanabhan, it could also be termed as a probe into his psyche. Filtering through the mind of the narrator, the episodes (though unrelated to each other), make a loose-knit structure. Irene's dairy adds to the effect of unravelling the hidden identity of Padmanabhan.
The Serpent and the Rope displays a simple narrative technique. Ramaswamy, a profound young intellectual, recounts the "sad and uneven chronicle" of his life. The book is a record of the hero's quest for liberation. The novel is called a "maha-purana" or a major epic legend. With remarkable sweep and broadness of vision, it "recreates" Indian charm of 'pauranic' story-telling. It blends story with philosophy and religion and the narrative is saturated with Sanskrit verses and pithy sayings from the Upanishads. The novel also makes use of devices such as letters and diary entries.

The Cat and Shakespeare is also narrative in texture. Though the text appears baffling and obscure, yet close reading reveals the hidden philosophy and compact structure. Rao makes a departure from convention by inventing his own set of private symbols. Connotation therefore abounds, and meaning becomes obscure and abstract. Words like house, cat, ration-shop, Shakespeare, boils are invested with layers of private association. This exercise enables Rao to communicate his extra-ordinary meaning and metaphysical content through analogies, suggestions and apparently dissimilar concepts. It is this which makes Rao ambiguous. The Cat and Shakespeare is called a "metaphysical comedy" because it has solemn chants of devotion mingled with loud guffaws of laughter. Relevant and irrelevant fact and fantasy are inextricably mixed together to give it the form of a "teasing fable".4

The novels of Rao reveal a remarkable attempt at experimentation. A pastiche of techniques frees him from the task of plot construction. The conceptual framework of a beginning, a middle, and an end are only evident
to some extent in the last two novels. The unconventional plots are loose, circular, episodic and wide ranging and the style vacillates from oral, biographical to stream of consciousness and conventional narrative structure. Use of diary references, objective correlatives, metaphysical conceits, Sanskrit verses, precepts and adages and the quaint flavour of Indian vernacular form the substance of Rao's novels.

The novelist's extraordinary theme and subject decided his choice of plot form. Long years of expatriation had helped him familiarise himself with the format of the novel genre. Deliberately deviating from the standard tradition, Raja Rao creates his own niche because he did not wish his novels to be viewed from the angle of the conventional western pattern.

The penchant for non-conformity continues in his characterisations also. The staid and the conventional people in Rao's gallery are generally mouthpieces of the novelist. Fiction, for Rao, was a mode of prayer and the protagonists represented a part of his own self. He confesses:

..... Ramaswamy is myself; Rama Moorthy is myself; Ramakrishna Pai is myself. The author, some authors, I would say, write autobiographically. So each one is an aspect of myself. I don't think you can say - this is me, this is not me.5

The characters are externalisation of his own sadhana and move in accordance with the wishes of the novelist. Their struggle, dilemmas, choices and experiences, spiritual or otherwise, denote the novelist's own strife to reach goals and attain answers to issues of metaphysical significance. An individual's sadhana is an extremely personal exercise. Rao's theme was incomprehensible and ambiguous. Its delineation in
fictional mode was equally difficult. Hence, characters who constitute the apparatus for novel writing, carried the burden of Rao's metaphysics. They served as significant punctuations controlling the sweep of the novelist's imaginative and spiritual vision. The scope was immense and the subject was intangible.

The characters in Rao's novels are modelled on archetypes. They are split personas and emerge as maturing and developing perceptions from the psyche of the novelist. They appear more as processes of thought rather than physical entities. Moorthy and Kirillov display individual mental growth and enhancement of intellectual sensibility but with very little palpability. These two represent varied states of consciousness. Moorthy illustrates a state of innocence and purity of soul, which aspires for liberation from the bondage of this world. He is an archetype, often equated with Gandhi and Lord Shiva. The people of Kanthapura address him as the "local Mahatma" and follow his instructions till the very end. For them, he is an 'avatar'. Comrade Kirillov, also a projection of the mind, denotes bare delusion or doubt. Rao makes no attempt to impart concreteness to these characters. The description of Kirillov's dress and gesture are outward correlates for his inner essence. Kirillov's personality is almost split. Had he existed as a real individual, Rao would not have felt the necessity to show this split which supports the assessment that Kirillov symbolises a state of mind. He is not complete and whole in himself. Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* represents reason and logic. Rao allows him to use reason to reach Truth or realization. However, such a quest is bound to end in failure considering the spiritual and metaphysical content of Rao's project. Selflessness, innocence and purity are
its essential prerequisites. Hence, the protagonist in *The Cat and Shakespeare* can achieve his goal only with the help of a spiritual, enlightened mentor. Pai signifies a stage when the quester is blessed by God and cleansed of all dross so that he too attains enlightenment when the guru instructs him and leads him along the right path. Govindan Nair belongs to this category of charismatic people who are not 'avatars' but frequent a class above the average human being. They are individuals with heightened consciousness and farsightedness not common among ordinary mortals.

Rao's characters are serious spiritual thinkers. They appeal more to the intellect and thought and lay their souls bare in each novel. They force the readers into introspection. Not conventionally round, they do not manifest any growth in the novels. They do exhibit spiritual enhancement and moral development. Mental awareness encompasses their being, in particular the spirit.

The arrangement of the titles of Rao's novels is significant. They represent a thematic and ideological progression. If *Kanthapura* be regarded as the stepping-stone in the journey of the protagonist's spiritual life, it is in *Comrade Kirillov* that illusion bewilders him. However, the struggle which starts from the first novel, continues to the last. *Comrade Kirillov* sharply develops the motif of personal struggle. *The Serpent and the Rope* displays a balance between illusion and reality - 'Serpent' and the 'Rope'. The complexity of motifs of this novel are perpetuated in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. The strife and emotional agony gets its just reward in the enlightenment and perception attained at the end of this book. It must be
remembered that the ideological and spiritual journey from Moorthy to Pai is in reality the progress that Rao himself, the actual 'sadhaka' makes. The dilemmas of faith; efforts to comprehend vital issues; understanding the secret of maya; shedding duality; awareness of the self and merger with Brahman or Absolute Reality constitute the course run by Raja Rao himself. His protagonists are a projection of his own self. The publication of Comrade Kirillov after The Cat and Shakespeare can thereby be justified. It depicted the dark period of doubt and scepticism which Rao was hesitant to expose. But the enlargement of vision and spiritual satisfaction achieved after the experience of the last novel may have provided him the courage to lay bare the paradoxes and dilemmas of faith which he had already overcome.

It is hoped that the thesis will be a significant contribution to Rao scholarship in its effort to specifically work out the complexities of philosophy fictionalized into works of literature.

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