CHAPTER V

THE PROTAGONISTS
As a novelist, Raja Rao holds a very prominent place in his portrayal of characters and in doing so a very astounding creative power of the artist is noticed. It is neither the Indian philosophy nor themes and narrative technique that earn for him the status of a creative artist but it is his creation of living characters that makes his fictional work laudable. To create characters, living characters, is the most difficult task for a novelist. They may be created under a delirious excitement, yet their nature is conditioned by what he guesses about other people, and himself and furthermore his theme or role modifies them in his work. The galaxy of characters in Raja Rao's novels come out alive and substantial in his fiction as if he knew them closely. He transmitted subjective elements into objective art creating thereby a fictional world of memorable characters. The chief characters of his novels are Ramaswamy, Ramakrishna Pai, Govindan Nair, Comrade Kirillov, Madeleine, Shantha, Irene and others.

A striking semblance noticeable of Raja Rao's major characters is that they are highly intellectual. Everyone of them is a Brahmin in the true sense, as Raja Rao himself asserts in the opening lines of The Serpent and the Rope 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahman'.

character of Kanthapura Moorthy is the most enlightened person in the village, he is a Brahmin. Ramakrishna Pai one of the major characters of The Cat and Shakespeare is a Brahmin. Ramaswamy, the central figure of The Serpent and the Rope is a highly qualified Brahmin and finally Kirillov of the novel Comrade Kirillov is an intellectual Brahmin.

All his brahminic characters are quite enlightened knowing the various aspects of life and philosophy and acquainted with various subjects. Besides the heroes, the principal female characters too are all religious and intelligent. Ratna, Shantha, Madeleine, Savithri and Irene are highly qualified and steeped in religious duties. A remarkable feature about Raja Rao's characters is that various subjects like the different schools of philosophy, religion, history, politics economics, sociology, biology and even sex and love-making have been discussed with an excellent command of language. As one reads his novels, one feels, that the range of thinking and the thoughts of the writer focussed through the characters covers vast knowledge. The encyclopaedic knowledge and new vistas of thought and emotion have been beautifully described by the author in his novels.

Before proceeding towards the discussion of characters and their characterisation, a study of a common thread that passes through all his novels i.e. 'Brahmin heroes' is made. The concept of Brahminism is
very strongly dealt with by the author as he himself is a staunch Brahmin, following the rituals and reciting the Sanskrit verses from holy scriptures. The task to create characters and impose authentic brahminic qualities in them which he had himself experienced, became an easy one. Thus the writings of Raja Rao have exercised a powerful impact on the reader. Moreover, it was not only the Sanskrit verses but also philosophy, metaphysical and literary wisdom of India that make his works genuine.

As one proceeds from one novel to the other it is noticed that Raja Rao has not only seen or picturised Brahmins with only good qualities or essential goodness or the virtues they possess but also portrays characters like Bhatta and Swami in Kanthapura, the pot-bellied greedy unclean Benares Brahmins in The Serpent and the Rope, the Brahmin heroes of The Cat and Shakespeare and Kirillov in Comrade Kirillov. The author is aware of the prestige and position the Brahmins hold in society and thus makes use of them to exercise their influence and bring a reformation in the society. In the twenties and the thirties the Brahmins held an advantageous position hence Raja Rao introduces the Brahminical hero in his novels.

The hero of Kanthapura Moorthy, a Brahmin, finds a half-sunk linga, performs consecration ceremony and the entire village folk come together to contribute lunch, prasad and money voluntarily. On the other hand a
non - Brahmin finding the same idol does not enjoy the honour Moorthy did. Moorthy injected Gandhism, equality, castelessness and abolition of untouchability into the village. The seeds thus sown received a good response, while a non - Brahmin's similar act would have been charged for sedition against the social norms of the society. Moorthy is wise in mingling politics with religion, hence spreading Gandhiji's message of Freedom. Raja Rao through Rangamma, idealises Moorthy considerably and wins the compliment of having gone through life as a quiet serene, generous and subservient cow and being Brahminic in his ways throughout.

Moorthy being associated with the Freedom Struggle becomes a figure of contempt in the village. Bhatta plans for Moorthy's excommunication as the latter mingle with the pariahs freely which is a gesture for eradicating untouchability. Waterfall Venkamma is annoyed with his action and says, that he should not

call himself a brahmin ... the next time I see him in the Brahmin Street, he will get a jolly fine marriage - welcome with my broom-stick. 2

Doré too is of the opinion that politics is

not to be handled by a university student like Moorthy instead it should be the work of an aged and matured person. Even Achakka condemns Moorthy for his involvement in the pariah business, she advises him to change his holy thread, and the Holy Water (Ganges) to be taken after each time he touched a pariah. Swami too did not understand the underlying principle of Gandhiji’s teachings. Narsamma, Moorthy’s mother, faces an hostile behaviour from the villagers. She fears that the involvement of her son with the Pariah will lead to the latter’s excommunication. An excommunication in the family means a dishonour to the family. In spite of all bickerings and bitter behaviour of the Brahmin clan, nothing could deter Moorthy from continuing and fulfilling his endeavour. By this act Moorthy further strengthens his position for the national cause rather than to cling on to the old conservative Brahminhood qualities.

After Moorthy’s excommunication his mother Narsamma vows to go on a pilgrimage in order to do Prayashchitta or penance for the wrong her son has done to the Brahmin community. But Moorthy rejects the offer. He strongly affirms that he cares less for the Swami whereas his duty for the downtrodden and the nation stands foremost. He ridicules the Swami as a self-chosen fool who though learned in Vedas lacks thinking power and compassion for the weaker and less privileged people of the
society.

All the implorings of Narsamma, Moorthy's mother, fail to dissuade Moorthy, she thus curses Gandhiji and his preachings. His adamant action to mix with the pariahs only ennobles Moorthy further and helps him in building up a strong character for a national cause. Though Moorthy was in a dilemma about the pariah issue, he sheds his conservatism and frees himself from the shackles of the orthodox Brahmin living. He mixes more freely with the untouchables. On one occasion he even carries the body of Beadle Timmayya's son, Puttayya's wife, for a while. In spite of the high regard Moorthy had for his mother nothing could deter him from doing the duties towards the nation. Raja Rao thus creates a strong character, like Moorthy, who though only a student becomes a staunch devotee of the Mahatma. Moorthy does not believe in words but in action, a quick action in favour of the Freedom Movement which had already spread its sparks all over India.

The character of Moorthy as portrayed by Raja Rao impresses the reader as he possesses some outstanding qualities not noticed in other characters in the novel. Moorthy is a simple, noble, intelligent young man full of enthusiasm and zeal for reform. It is these qualities that make him a thorough patriot and is capable of diverting almost the entire village of Kanthapura towards the National Movement. Raja Rao in creating a living character
of Moorthy, in fact, projects the Raja Rao of thirties through Moorthy. Raja Rao himself had great ambitions in those days as he was a budding novelist.

Somewhat similar is the position of Moorthy, the young man, who through his aspiration emerges as a true Gandhian follower. The author is indeed successful in creating his character Moorthy, a practical young man who with his strong will-power enters the house of a pariah and tastes the milk offered by Rachanna's wife. Moorthy following the Brahmin tradition passed on from generation hesitates to enter Rachanna's house for he always spoke to the Pariahs from the gutter slab. Slowly and steadily he overcomes this caste hurdle and enters the pariah's house. Truly, it is the test of honesty which he sincerely abides by, fulfilling the Gandhian philosophy of eradication of untouchability, caste and creed. The entrance of Moorthy to the pariah's house sanctifies the house and Moorthy wins the confidence of the pariahs in fulfilling the mission of oneness to fight for Freedom.

Moorthy's character is two-fold as shown by Raja Rao. On the one hand he is a strong person who does not change his mind even when his mother treats him as an outcaste but on the other hand there is a conflict within himself. This is noticeable when he heaves a sigh of relief on taking a few drops of the Ganges water after his return from the pariah quarter. This fear within him
is only due to the strict Brahmin rituals which are deeply seated within him from birth. Slowly a transformation takes place within him. His inner conflict is overcome by his strong desire to work for the down-trodden section of people in his society.

Raja Rao was wise to choose a Brahmin for a hero. Brahmins in those days were considered as learned masters and much respect was showered on them by the other sections of the society. The author thus makes Moorthy his tool of action who wins favour of the uneducated villagers, thus making the Freedom Movement successful.

Like Moorthy another Brahmin, Ramaswamy is held in high esteem by the readers of the novel The Serpent and the Rope. Unlike Moorthy, Ramaswamy not only takes pride in his having been brought up in the realm of knowledge but he even possesses vast and deep study of various subjects too. Naturally in Ramaswamy we see a more mature Raja Rao than we see during the Kanthapura days. Ramaswamy is an enlightened Brahmin possessing the knowledge of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Brahma sutras. Moreover, a Brahmin alone enjoys the prestigious position of one who is wedded to Truth and also proves to be knowledgeable. Hence it is due to these qualities that Raja Rao is prompted to take Ramaswamy, an enlightened Brahmin for the hero of The Serpent and the Rope. This
novel has a unique feature of encountering the East with the West. The ancient heritage of India is projected through this novel which interests the foreigners too. Ramaswamy is a Brahmin who is not only a descendent of the great Indian sages but is learned and deeply rooted in the whole traditional and cultural past of India. He is capable of carrying India wherever he goes. Thus his projection of India greatly interests the foreigners in India, and wins admiration from them for himself as well as his country and this is praiseworthy.

In order to perform a herculean task to project India to the rest of the world, Raja Rao had to choose a more learned, cultured hero very different from the kind we see in Kanthapura. Rama has the feeling that:

"India was wonderful to me. It was like a juice that one is supposed to drink to conquer a Kingdom or to reach the deathless... It gave me sweetness and the delight of immortality."

Though Rama lived in the Provence of France yet, his "thoughts were, as you see, very Indian..." and "wheresoever I [Rama] am is my country,..." This is the

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3. The Serpent and the Rope, p. 15
4. Ibid., p.36
5. Ibid., p.402
honour, Rama, had for his country. He is a thorough Indian and a staunch Brahmin. He confirms that, "I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything."6 With his behaviour and learning he wins the favour of Oncle Charles and Tante Zouble who bore contempt for all 'outlandish people'. Oncle Charles is so influenced by Rama's personality that in choice of a husband for his daughter, Catherine, he says:

In fact we need another Ramaswamy in the household.

This is solely due to his Brahminic Indian tradition as well as the heightened awareness of his caste and country that acquires reverence by the foreigners. Georges is a Christian and in the company of Rama he feels that he becomes a better Christian. What Georges admires most in Rama is the frugality of food and willingness to befriend anyone. In fact Raja Rao makes the right choice of choosing a South Indian Brahmin as a hero. South Indians are comparatively more Indian culturally and bound to the orthodox culture and learning than North Indians. Raja Rao through Rama clarifies this point thus:

I could not understand these Northerners going from strict purdah to this extreme modernism with unholy haste. we

6. Ibid., p.19
7. Ibid., p.108
in the South were more sober, and very distant. We lived by tradition—shameful though it might look. We did not mind quoting Sankaracharya in law courts or marrying our girls in the old way, even if they had gone abroad. The elder brother still commanded respect, and my sister would never speak to me as Savithri spoke to her father ... 8

Brahmins, who had a proper grounding in the cultural past of India enjoyed a prestigious position but today they are frustrated. Rama from time to time broods over the loss of the Brahminic values today. Raja Rao makes an attempt in the revival of the ancient glory once enjoyed by Brahmins. Thus he shows Rama linking himself with the past. An archetypal pattern is noticed in order to show a continuity which links the past with the present in spite of modernisation and various changes. Rama's consciousness of the Brahmin's impotence is, in reality, a part of his total personality. Rama himself admits and realises that it is the Brahmin race which has lived for four or five thousand years with a reputation of a scholar. Brahmins too make doctors and engineers but they stand like pillars in the courtyard which even if eaten by termites continues to stand there in the air by faith. Though modern civilisation has changed much the old order, yet, the

8. Ibid., p.32
Brahmins adhere to the inner faith and strength to a considerable extent. Raja Rao is thoroughly aware of the situation of the loss of the Brahmin's vitality and hence chooses a Brahmin for a hero to preserve the ancient customs and creed to some extent.

Raja Rao's hero, Rama, in the novel *The Serpent and the Rope* is indeed a very intelligent Brahmin. He uses his intellect for making a deep inner search of self rather than use it for worldly gains. The Indianism in him changes Savithri who has taken to the western ways of life. Savithri on meeting Rama reverts to her Indianhood and follows the holy Hindu rituals of prayer. Rama makes a thorough search and concludes that in order to reach God a Guru's guidance is of utmost importance. In a pensive mood, Rama says,

*I must leave this world. I must leave, leave this world. But, Lord, where shall I go, where? How can one go anywhere? How can one go from one self.*

Rama realises that in order to fulfil his need what he needs is, "No, not a God but a Guru is what I need. 'Oh Lord, my Guru, my Lord. "10 and further adds, "Lord, Lord, my Guru, come to me, tell me; give me Thy touch ,

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9. Ibid., p.399

10. Ibid., p.402
vouchsafe, "the vision of Truth, Lord, my Lord." 11

The hero is well aware of the different approaches to life and culture in the East and West and though he lives a good part of his life in the West, yet, remains faithful and true to his caste and religion. Unlike Madeleine, his wife, who gives up Christianity and delves deep into Buddhism, remaining faithful to none totally.

The vast knowledge that Rama possesses even astonishes Westerners. He is temperamentally averse to all modernity. He dislikes Bombay for its ultra-modern ways of life; it is the religious background of Rama that acts as a barrier and restrains him from the western culture and saves him from the resultant vices. He is immersed in Indian culture totally or rather Brahminism. His deep knowledge of the ancient Indian heritage helps him to identify the Cathars with the Vedantins and also prove the Indian Origin of the Holy Grail.

Rama's marriage with Madeleine was solely due to Madeleine recognising the Brahmin in him. Rama's sense of "touch and untouch" 12 allowed Madeleine to touch her. Another instance where his Brahminism stands superior is when he claims that:

11. Ibid., p.403
12. Ibid., p.13
I was a brahmin by birth and a South Indian seemed to have given me a natural superiority. 13

Pratap, secretary to the governor, who is engaged to Savithri is quite the reverse of Rama's character. Though senior to Rama he fumbles at every step and needs support and explanation every now and then. Pratap needs the help of Rama to dissuade Savithri from falling into the trap of Hamdani in England. The Brahminism in Rama helps him to gain a reputation as this. On the other hand it is only due to his being too Indian that brings about the divorce between Madeleine and himself.

Thus, Raja Rao, has given his hero a truly strong position by making him a Brahmin. With a view to reveal the ancient Indian heritage Raja Rao entitles Rama, the South Indian Brahmin to act as a hero. The novelist creates an India with a congenial atmosphere where Rama can display an India with its traditions and culture, philosophy and Indian thoughts of the people in our country and the audience abroad. Throughout Rama remains true and faithful to his tradition and religion and hence wins the hearts of the Western characters he comes across. Raja Rao did not falter in making Rama, a Brahmin, as a hero who has strong powers of reasoning which turns Oncle Charles,

13. Ibid., p.31
Catherine and Tante Zoubie to his way of thinking.

In spite of showing the Brahmins possessing the qualities of a high order Raja Rao never fails to show contrary observations in his fictional characterisation. The novelist himself a Brahmin, nevertheless, condemns the 'sacred brahmins' who stretch their arms for alms. The protagonist, Rama, detests such actions and says that he would rather have thrown the rupees to the begging monkeys than to the Brahmins, "14 who do three funerals a day while their belching and rounded bellies prove all to be wrong, and for just fifty silver rupees he makes everything holy.

Thus the novelist picturises the degeneration of the Brahmins in Benares. Nevertheless, Benares witnesses 'so many limbs go purring and bursting on the ghats by the Ganges"15 and also:

the lovely smile of some concubine, just floating down her rounded bust and nimble limbs, for a prayer and a client. [so] how can limbs have any meaning?"16

Raja Rao in spite of speaking high of Benares

14. Ibid., p.11
15. Ibid., p.12
16. Ibid.
never fails to give some of its imploring and contradictory pictures.

A moving and pathetic scene is drawn when a poor Brahmin carries his own dead child in his arms to let it float in the Ganges for he cannot afford money for a priest to perform the funeral rites nor the fuel to cremate the body. The poor Brahmins too face the lecherous wood sellers whose sole aim is to sell wood and not show sympathy to the one who loses his dear one. Pathos fills the heart of the reader but the poor firewood seller has to sell the wood for his own struggle for existence. Raja Rao portrays both the Indians, contrary in behaviour and with an impartial mind is able to recapture the real India. His tactful presentation makes C. D. Narasimhaiah praise the novel as being:

the work of a great master of his art - to accommodate the vulgar and sublime and make both of them functional is a rare achievement.17

Raja Rao's third novel The Cat and Shakespeare has Ramakrishna Pai, a Brahmin, as a hero. The novelist has chosen Pai as the hero, as he is intelligent and qualified to give us an overall picture of the life in

the State of Kerala. It is a matter of pride as seen in the case of Velayudhan Nair who shouts at the top of his voice to confirm to all that his father was a Brahmin. Raja Rao holds the female principle as supreme to which we submit, an example is of Shantha’s complete submission to Pai. Like all other Kulins, a Keralite Brahmin too has a desire to construct a house. His desire remains unfulfilled but at the same time he has attained much more in other fields. Raja Rao in this novel propounds a new philosophy of surrender to the feminine principle which will give care and protection to her devotees.

Like other novels Raja Rao chooses a Brahmin as a hero who is not all sane and holy. Readers may dispel the prejudice who feel that Raja Rao chooses a Brahmin protagonist chiefly because of his own Brahmin egotism. But in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Govindan Nair plays the role of the hero’s Guru. As a Guru, Govindan explains to Pai what Brahman is and claims that it is only the Nairs alone who can teach the truth to the world. Though Pai is a Brahmin he condescends to the advice and teaching of Nair, knowing fully well that a Brahmin belongs to an upper class society and considered learned by other castes. The author tries to show that it is not caste but human nature, of understanding the superiority of knowledge, one over the other is considered. Here, the bond that the Brahmins are unerringly and the custodians of all goodness is broken.
The other characters in the novel seem stronger than Ramakrishna Pai. He remains a passive figure in spite of being a hero. It is noticed that thought provoking comments are made by Govindan Nair throughout the novel. It ranges from World War II to other issues like philosophies of life, politics, agriculture, medicine, painting and astronomy. Above all, he is the most generous man in the novel in contrast to Ramakrishna Pai who is unduly harsh on Brahmins. Though Raja Rao has high regard for the vital tradition shaped by the Vedas and the Puranas he is not bound by it. In fact he:

scoffs at the superstition and the unthinking derivativeness of the present-day Brahmin. 18

Besides the Brahmins, the affluent non-Brahmins are not spared. To them the passing on of wealth from generation to generation is tradition and Raja Rao has shown his strong disapproval against such practice in the novel.

In the novel, Govindan Nair is the most enlightened one who explicitly propagates the idea of self-surrender. He is carefree and a happy man and lets the

mother-cat carry him wheresoever or in the manner she likes. Nair's philosophising sometimes serious and sometimes in a very light mood is because of his devious ways which combines Rats, the British, God, corruption in the Ration office etc. all in one and thus is successful in his endeavour as he does in his conversation between Pai and himself. Nair enjoys his own jokes and Raja Rao makes him pass from one point to the other uninterrupted. Nair speaks of terrestrial topics like water, sin, life and the reality with perfect ease. At times he selects from the contemporary events to speak of a superhuman being, a manner in which man's relationship of man can be felt.

On the other hand Ramakrishna Pai contemplated the world in a more leisurely way and in a very detached mood. A very prominent scene which gives a clear picture of Pai's leisure and detachment is the scene in the Ration Office which is more on the Shakespearean pattern. The metaphysical study is quite difficult to interpret but Raja Rao integrates the Shakespearean art of melodrama very beautifully. The presence of Shakespeare is felt throughout the novel. Like Nair he too could differentiate between the left eye from the right eye just as A from B.

Through the Shakespearean objectivity Govindan Nair is able to present a true account of the worldly affairs in India and also gives a view of life on
the metaphysical plane. Thus *The Cat and Shakespeare* is the story of two friends Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair whose life has the simplicity of joy and the universality of Shakespeare. It is rightly said by C. D. Narasimhalah that:

> It is a kind of continuation of the theme of 'The Serpent and the Rope' with the interest now centred in the serpent, and now in the rope.

The novel deals with multiple themes just like in *The Serpent and the Rope* and has sunk into formlessness, into eternity. Though Nair is the most active throughout the novel, yet, it is Ramakrishna Pai who plays the hero's role because he gets emancipated by the path shown to him by Nair, that is, the Mother-Cat theory. Pai, towards the end, says that it was the first time he had gone across the wall. Here he notices a beautiful garden with flowers and pools and herbs and orchards. There were old and young men, women and children who danced gaily. Not that Pai did not know the joys across the wall but he was too lazy to find out who lived there. The credit thus goes to Nair who as a Guru to Pai showed him the way to achieve emancipation from worldly matters. Besides, Man can know the world only by worshipping woman; Purusa

19. Ibid., pp. 139-140
can know himself only through Prakriti.

Finally, in the novel Comrade Kirillov Padmanabhan Iyer, a South Indian Brahmin plays the role of a hero. He self-styled himself as a communist and gave himself the name 'Kirillov' as we notice in the novel. Like Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope Kirillov possesses extensive knowledge in various fields like philosophy, politics, economics, religion, history etc. Kirillov is a theosopohist when we meet him in the beginning but slowly he becomes a communist, towards the end. He realises that real solace and happiness is found only in Indian philosophy and ideals.

The hero, as presented by Raja Rao, is a conservative rebel. Kirillov is devoted to Marxism but at the same time recites Sri Sankara's metaphysical verses. He speaks highly of Indian philosophy, culture, religion and tradition and is truly in love with India. Irene, Kirillov's wife too is attracted towards Sanskrit verses and encourages their son Kamal to recite it. Brahminic qualities are noticed in Kirillov, he has a wide knowledge of the Vedas and Puranas, similar to, Ramaswamy. Irene in her diary admits that:

when it came to metaphysics, his natural inclinations showed. He is a Brahmin. ...P is an inverted Brahmin - how happy he was
reciting Sankara's verses ... 20

Kirillov's reserve nature makes him appear to be cold. On one occasion his wife tells him that she is with child, she, however, later admits,

I was wrong about P. (I have taken all his time to find out.) He is shy - his joy is silent. 21

Raja Rao's Kirillov can be said to be modelled upon the noted Indian statesman V.K. Krishna Menon who like Kirillov, was brilliant, versatile and a South Indian expatriate. He too was influenced by Annie Besant and went abroad to learn more about the Theosophy and returned home more enlightened on that issue. Just as Menon abandoned Theosophy and joined the British Labour party so did Kirillov.

Menon and Kirillov did differ in two aspects firstly Menon did not marry whereas Kirillov did, secondly Menon did not turn a communist like Kirillov. Another similarity is Kirillov's vegetarian abstemious eating habits which recall Menon. It may perhaps be the character of Krishna Menon which gave a spark to Raja Rao in

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21. Ibid., pp. 117-118
creating a character like Kirillov. In many respects Menon and Kirillov resemble each other except on a few issues.

Kirillov is an ambivalent character and it is Irene's diary which reveals his contrariety. A remark in her diary is an excellent summing up of his character:

P.'s illogic is so astonishing. 22

yet another clue to Kirillov's character is when Irene writes:

There is a certain honesty of mind that is the greatest dishonesty of being. 23

Though Kirillov behaves like a child yet, the subtle ties and the complexities of his mind and thought processes are equally apparent throughout the narrative. Intellectually he is a communist or a Marxist but at heart he is an Indian, a Brahmin. He refuses to admit the fact and declares, "I am a communist because I understand history." 24 but this does not reject him from being a South Indian Brahmin. He has been brought up in a traditional way in which the Brahmins are brought up. Irene

22. Ibid., p.102
23. Ibid., p.119
24. Ibid., p.45
truthfully writes that though he is a Marxist in his approach of life, Kirillov, in fact is a truly Indian. He is:

racially arrogant. I have never known anyone speak with such as he does—to anyone, White or Black. Only the Chinese is exempt from his mental cruelties. Old civilization etc. etc.

Kirillov, though in West, is all in all an Indian and has an 'unreasoned love' for India. He speaks out with confidence that in whatever field a new discovery is made its origin can be traced to 'Holy India'. Even the name of his son is Indian, a tradition to which he rightfully belongs. To conclude in the words of M.K.Naik:

his Marxism does not appear to be a result of intellectual conviction as much as an act of faith and his clever Brahminical mind with its innate capacity for hair-splitting can rationalize its own contradictions to itself with absolute success.

Raja Rao's protagonists are all Brahmins and everyone of them is highly qualified in the field of

25. Ibid., p.103
philosophy, religion and tradition of our country. They may differ in degrees as each solves his problem in his own way and the manner in which he intellectually feels is right. This does not mean that the range of characterisation by Raja Rao is limited. He creates living characters each different from the other either in habit or personality. Raja Rao is said to draw ideal characters and each one plays his role with perfection. None of the characters can be said to be passive for each one plays a role either singularly or collectively. It can be said that:

Raja Rao is endowed with an androgynous creative mind, and therefore is capable of depicting human life truthfully. 27

Raja Rao appears most successful in painting unforgettable characters or rather his protagonists like Moorthy, Ramaswamy, Ramakrishna Pai and Comrade Kirillov. Besides the male, the principal female characters too are shown to be strong and intelligent, such as Ratna, Madeleine, Achakka (Rangamma) Savithri, Little Mother, Shantha, Saroja, Irene and others. Their appearance may be only for a while but the brooding of the hero makes them omnipresent throughout the novel.

Achakka or Rangamma is the principal female character of Kanthapura who is accredited with having an exceptional memory to recollect and retell the entire story of the Freedom Movement in Kanthapura. Raja Rao shows her as endowed with an extraordinary gift of memory and is omnipresent to the happenings and incidents taking place in the sleepy village. She too, is an active figure at the time of the struggle but when she narrates the tale she is a grandmother. Ratna, another character, is an active widow who joins hands with Moorthy in the freedom struggle. It is she who could read the Vedantic texts and Rangamma says, "Ratna knows how to read"\(^{28}\) moreover, the village women folk knew that Ratna is more suited to read the texts:

for never was a girl born in Kanthapura that had less interest in philosophy than Ratna.\(^{29}\)

Since casteism prevailed and the other village women did not know how to read, they had to compromise with Ratna, a non-Brahmin, to read the text for:

if Ratna read out the texts, well her tongue would not

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28. Kanthapura, p.146
29. Ibid
pollute them, would it? 30

Ratna reads and Rangamma discusses it with the women folk and says:

"Sister, if for the thorny pit the illusioned fall into, you put the foreign government, and for the soul that searches for liberation, you put our India, everything is clear..." 31

Credit goes to Rangamma who so wittily introduces politics by citing examples from the Vedas and Puranas. Ratna had set her heart on Moorthy and always wishes him success in his endeavour. The group formed by the women volunteers is called 'Sevika Sangha'. In those days the women were not as liberated as we notice today. Women were meant only to attend to domestic duties and not to participate actively in politics. If perchance anything went wrong in the household the men folk would grumble and say:

"was there nothing left for our women but to vagabond about like solders?"

And every time the milk curdled or a dhoti was not dry they would curse:

30. Ibid
31. Ibid., pp. 146-147
"And this is all because of this sevi business." 32

The women had to bear the atrocities inflicted on them by their husbands. Every little fault of the woman is said to be the result of the Sangha but Rangamma having the capacity to speak strongly wins the men folk too. Her character is so strong that she freely imposes the rights of the women on men and the men accept them readily. It is Ratna and Rangamma who lead the women folk when the soldiers lathi-charge the men folk. The villagers are badly beaten and in the dark they speed towards Kashipura. Moorothy, Ratna and few others are imprisoned. Ratna is freed after one year and she returns to Kashipura. After this struggle she becomes more 'deferential' and gives the news about Moorothy's release. Moorothy has confidence in Ratna and in his letter he writes:

as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate, ... there will always be pariahs and poverty. 33 Ratna, things must change...

Rangamma too is jailed and she is all for the

32. Ibid., pp. 150–151
33. Ibid., p. 257
Mahatma, a true Gandhian. Soon after she too is released from prison but later in the novel nothing is known either about Ratna or Rangamma.

Raja Rao's principal women characters in two of his novels stand as contrast. Indeed, it is an art of characterisation to present characters having diverse nature. Saroja and Shantha are poles apart as seen in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Similar is the case with Madeleine and Savithri, possessing dissimilar natures in *The Serpent and the Rope*. For that matter Ratna of *Kanthapura* and Irene of *Comrade Kirillov* are altogether different. The love of Ratna for Moorothy and the love between Savithri and Rama are different. Ratna has a soft corner for Moorothy but does not expose her feelings as she holds Gandhi's philosophy in high regard. Savithri, on the other hand, exposes her affection for Rama and even has sexual relations with him. A similar attitude is noticed in the character of Shantha who gives herself fully to Ramakrishna Pai.

Drawing a character - sketch of one of the main woman characters in *The Serpent and the Rope* is Savithri, the daughter of Raja Raghubir Singh of Surajpur. Pratap, who belongs to a family of Jagirdars of Mukthapuri in Aurangabad District, proposes to Savithri. She is unwilling to accept this marriage proposal. Raja Sahib is a tyrant and a dominating father hence Pratap's
desire to marry Savithri grows still stronger, because it is believed that, "A manly father has a gentle daughter always". 34

On the other hand Savithri's mother is a religious and pious lady, following the rituals of fast and Kirtanas. She is in fact:

a contrast to the whip-bearing, pan-spitting father, who was known to have other and more common vices. 35

Savithri goes abroad for further studies and is seen as an entirely different girl who does not seem to belong to a traditional Hindu culture. She is extremely modern. Her fixation of dance engagement on phone and a deep desire and craze to visit European countries reveals her longing for worldly pleasures. As one analyses the character of Savithri one perceives her to be hardly capable of meditative mood. Madeleine on the other hand belongs to a different culture and thus follows a different tradition. She is French and has faith in the Holy Grail. She too researches to find out the origin of the Cathars and traces it to be of Indian origin. She mistakes Buddhism to be an Indian religion and accepts it. In spite of the love and understanding between her and Ramaswamy, she

34. The Serpent and the Rope, p.29
35. Ibid
proposes a divorce. Not that she cares less for Rama but the Buddhist religion states that the body is unreal and has to be rejected because the spirit is eternal. She takes up to prolonged fasting, meditations and other spiritual practices and she attains a state where she ceases to be herself. She becomes indifferent to Rama's health and pleads; "I am no more a person, so why speak of it?"  

Savitri is a woman to the core whereas Madeleine is found to be inconsistent and vacillating between "ascetism and sensuality". Savitri makes no effort to find a path of renunciation. It is not in her nature to realise God either by understanding the self or by practising yoga. Madeleine on the other hand is steeped in Buddhism and in doing so draws herself away from the worldly affairs. Savitri is aware that the theoretical knowledge of the Vedas and the Puranas cannot lead anyone forcibly to self-realisation or God. Rama plays an important role in the life of Savitri as a lover and an alliance maker. Though Savitri rejects Pratap's proposal of marriage it is Rama who initiates her to marry Pratap. After her marriage to Pratap she continues having extramarital relations with Rama, an unusual act for an Indian.

36. Ibid., p.370

37. K.K.Sharma, op. cit., Introduction, p.XXX
girl, Rama says:

to know Savithri was to wake into the truth of life ... Her simplicity was her defence, and her laughter - for she laughed so widely but softly... My courage was a failure turned into strength, her laughter was fear turned into simplicity. 38

Savithri becomes

the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding. I lost the world and she became it. 39

Rama draws inspiration from Savithri who has such a dynamic personality. In his company Savithri brings various subjects for conversation and finds herself very happy. Unlike Madeleine, Savithri with all her Agra jewellery and Lucknow attar reminds Rama of his India from which he cannot detach himself. Rama apparently relates things of metaphysical importance and this Savithri confesses to Jack: "He's my Guru" 40. Inspite of such good companionship Savithri is a flirt as Lakshmi reveals:

"I cannot understand how Savithri can go about with so many men at the same time."

38. The Serpent and the Rope, p.169
39. Ibid
40. Ibid., p.182
she's a flirt".\(^{41}\)

Being with Rama Savithri is enlightened about the Nirvana Shataka of Sri Sankara and wants to surrender to the Truth and she is very happy about it. She smokes only to be like the other undergraduates and "her humility was to accept the common denominator of all."\(^{42}\)

Rama and Savithri are so attracted to one another that the latter marries him spiritually by anointing Rama's feet with kumkum and flowers and performing the arathi. She also touches his feet. A change comes in her and she says:

\[
\text{I've known my Lord for a thousand lives, from Janam to Janam have I known my Krishna...}\(^{43}\)
\]

Madeleine is the principal character and there is no doubt that Rama is drawn towards Madeleine's beauty, which is only on a physical plane. In the beginning one sees that she loves her husband and adores him for being a Brahmin. Soon after the death of Pierre, her son, her concentration in the Holy Grail origin takes her to

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 187
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 188
\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 212
Buddhism. This drastic change from a wife to a Buddhist nun, in fact, makes Madeleine more of an introvert in comparison to Savithri's extrovert qualities. Madeleine did believe in Nandi, the Bull but could not worship him wholeheartedly as she has the Christian blood in her. But soon after initiation into Buddhism she becomes more economical, this is seen when she says:

I'm glad we don't have the car any more. It's not good for your lung, and I am too exhausted to drive a car. Anyway, where's the need? So much income tax the less.

She engrosses herself in learning Chinese and Tibetan from Ledo in order to know more of Chinese Buddhism. Her daily routine too changes as she rises early and applies no more make-up. She admits studying Buddhism for her own spiritual benefit and gathers herself into the eighteen aggregates, chiefly because she believes that Buddhism is the most rational of all religions. Madeleine's character is dynamic and her love is ever growing. Because of her love for Rama she becomes a staunch Buddhist Sadhaka. A point of difference is that Madeleine's love for Rama is spiritual whereas Savithri's is intellectual and platonic, while Lakshmi's is purely physical passion. In

44. Ibid., p.300
spite of knowing that Rama is married Savithri worships him so her love is termed clearly as platonic. Savithri cannot completely draw herself away from the idea of personal love whereas Madeleine could ultimately do so. Selfless love is attained by Madeleine when she takes self-willed divorce from her beloved husband simply to attain spiritual perfection. Madeleine attains self realisation and hence her marriage or divorce loses significance. These terms are only relative and cannot exist in the realm of the absolute. At the level of relative what appears as a serpent becomes a mere rope when looked from the absolute. When truth is born, the person dies and this is the Advaita truth which Madeleine explains. We can thus conclude that the divorce is not born of hatred or jealousy but to realise the spiritual sadhana she undertakes. It is solely because she wants to comprehend the truth that she completely frees herself from all social and moral commitments. Though Savithri and Madeleine stand in sharp contrast yet the most enlightened and successful in her vision is Madeleine.

Among the women characters and those who stand in contrast are Saroja and Shantha in The Cat and Shakespeare. A similarity in the character of Shantha and Savithri of The Serpent and the Rope is noticed. Shantha in spite of knowing Ramakrishna Pai, the central character, of The Cat and Shakespeare is married, has sexual
relations with him and also bears him children. Saroja though legally married is more interested in her coconut business. She gives birth to two children - Usha and Vithal. It is through the love and devotion of Shantha and Pai that the cat-kitten relationship is illuminated. Although Shantha's love for Pai is extra-marital, it is depicted as a kind of worship, possessing all the intensity and depth that is not possible between Pai and Saroja. Saroja's love is divided between her children and household affairs. Pai reads Shantha's mind and says that Shantha willingly became his mistress as she felt a wife to Pai. Moreover Pai's feet are there to be worshipped. On the other hand Shantha's fulfilment in surrendering herself in love is noticeable, too. Though their marriage is not administered in public yet she feels as elevated and holy like a ceremonial marriage. A complete sense of dedication is seen in the behaviour of Shantha. She sells her land to acquire a house for Pai. She weeps when Pai is unwell and is fully aware of the fact that whatsoever she possesses is his and vice-versa. Hence Shantha's dedication to love fulfils the total — surrender theory or a complete surrender to the benign Mother of this Earth. Shantha loves her own true self when she worships Pai and explains to Pai the mystery of the self. The wall is a symbol showing the visible and the invisible, Shanta sees the other side and feels illumined and also instructs Pai to see the invisible
to see the invisible side to identify his self. Of Saroja and Shantha, the former lives in the present connected with the worldly problems but the latter sees something beyond the visible.

In Comrade Kirillov, Irene is seen having a strong will power which slowly degenerates into hatred for fear of lack of recognition by her husband in India. Just as we see in The Serpent and the Rope where India and Indianism become the bone of contention between Madeleine and Rama similarly in Comrade Kirillov it is India again which brings a drastic change in the attitude of Irene. It is Irene's diary which helps us to study the ambivalent nature of her husband Kirillov. Since she is the closest to Kirillov she is able to pen the details of his character unnoticed by his companions. In the marriage of Kirillov we again encounter the union of the East and the West but not for long as Irene dies at the birth of her second child.

It is during the war that Kirillov marries a Czech called Irene. He loves her more so because she too had communistic leanings like him. She cared a lot for her husband's health as well as she played the role of a party-member too. Her affection for India is due to her love and regard for Kirillov. Expecting her first child she decides to call it Stefanovitch if it is a male or Lila if a female. A male child is born and she names him Kamāl Dev
and not Stefanovitch because he has a dark skin. She learns Hindustani for her future needs though her intonation and accent "was naturally peculiar, being a mixture of Slavonic and South Indian intonations.  

Kirillov in a long Hindustani conversation with Irene about Prague finds that "she could answer to the exact definition of everything." she tries to identify herself with her husband. Irene in her diary which dated October 5, writes about the Indians who will never change, for Kirillov who defends the Muslims, at heart is a staunch Indian. Irene too is a foreigner to Kirillov and hence is "afraid of going to Prague as going to Trichinopoly." Irene's fears grow to a unsurmountable height and in the last date and last time of her diary dated January 4. she strongly admits that; "I shall never go to India".

45. Comrade Kirillov, p.76
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 119
48. Ibid., p. 120