CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

An assessment of Raja Rao as a fiction writer.
The Indian creative writing in English is termed as Indo-Anglian Literature. It has in its own way contributed to the common pool of world writing in English and the major bulk of contribution is undoubtedly made by British Literature and American Literature. Indo-Anglian fiction is in fact an expression of Indian thought and emotion in English. Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah in his general introduction remarks quite rightly that:

"It can represent the life of a village like Bulashah or Kanthapura, a small town like Malgudi or Kedaram or sweep through continents and eternity itself; and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian it will be Indian literature."

Since it bears the stamp of an Indian it differs in all aspects like theme, local colour and narrative technique from English literature. Undoubtedly, this literature serves as a guide to show the different facets of Indian life and thought not only to the western audience but also creates an awareness among its fellowmen who live in various parts of the country.

The status of Raja Rao is unquestionable, for his fame as a novelist writer is neither the work of any

agency or club, an association or paper but is solely due to his innovations in the field of form and technique. He is a pioneer who dared to deviate from the Western genre of fiction writing and create a genuinely new pattern of writing in Indian English.

An attempt has been made in the preceding chapters to critically examine the fictional writings of Raja Rao. A striking feature of Raja Rao’s novels is that they chiefly deal with the complexities of the Indian philosophy which progresses along with his works. The philosophy of Karma or selfless devotion is overwhelming in Kanthapura, his first novel. This philosophy is then heightened by the philosophy of Advaita or non-dualistic theory of Sri Sankara. The underlying philosophy of self-knowledge is noticed in The Serpent and the Rope and this novel provides a stepping-stone to yet another philosophy of Vedanta, the Vishistadvaita or the Bhakti Yoga, the path of love and devotion, here Raja Rao makes use of Marjaryanaya school of thought or the cat-hold theory of self-surrender. In The Cat and Shakespeare the theory preaches man to become one with the Ultimate Reality by remaining passive and helpless like a kitten before the mother-cat. Finally, the philosophy of Truth in Comrade Kirillov where the quester realises that truth and self-realisation lies in his own country India, from where he had migrated.
Raja Rao’s novels whether social, political, religious or East-West encounter in emphasis, reveal his humanistic philosophy. His picture is balanced, showing the merits and demerits of everything whether it be the East or the West, and this is the measure of his strength as a thinker and artist. This thought is in fact well-exercised in *The Serpent and the Rope* for the protagonist is shown to be most impartial, unlike, typical Indians who eulogise the East and discriminately lash out at the West. An example of this measure is when Rama himself a Brahmin strongly rejects the Benares Brahmins who for a meagre sum make everything holy. He is sick of the ‘sacred Brahmins’ who ask for alms like the cawing of crows on seeing the rice balls given in the name of the manes. In the case of marriage too Indians practise arranged marriages where the woman has to marry in accordance with the choice of elders, whereas, in the West a woman is more liberal and has the right to choose her own husband.

Raja Rao is endowed in the highest degree with the one essential gift of the novelist, the power to create living characters. The portrayal of various shades of characters by him appear static and simple yet they are alive and realistic and possess an individuality of their own. The protagonists in two of his novels *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Comrade Kirillov* are shown to be highly qualified and sensitive characters possessing vast
knowledge of the Indian philosophical thought. The rustics he portrays in *Kanthapura* and the mediocres seen in *The Cat and Shakespeare* are the only exceptions. In his fictional works the characters are all living identities and not mere symbols. Thus, in his writing he reaches the deepest level in man's life and character.

The subsidiary characters of Raja Rao bear their own identities. The process of individualisation is such that with it Raja Rao has transmuted every character into a living being. He has studied his characters thoroughly including their personal habits and appearances. Thus, on a vast canvas he paints and presents a picturesque gallery of characters one different from the other in all aspects. Some of them represent personal evils like selfishness, cruelty, greed, lust and insensitivity while others represent social evils like caste-system, orthodoxy and communalism. Although many of Raja Rao's characters represent their own personality or that of his acquaintances, the success of his art of character-creation lies in his capacity of maintaining the necessary aesthetic distance.

In spite of the dominance of the male figures in Raja Rao's novels, there is no lack of memorable women characters. In all his novel he depicts with equal success the women characters belonging to different levels of society and possessing different family back grounds. Female
characters like Ratna, Rangamma, Saroja, Shantha, Madeleine, Savithri, Lakshmi, Little Mother, Saroja (Rama's sister) and Irene are all unforgettable characters. It is through various expressions that he intimates the stability of Indian as well as Western womanhood has imparted to the living tradition. Moreover, apart from showing the suffering of the women, Raja Rao brings out some of her basic virtues for example forgiveness, motherhood, endurance and devotion to the family and her innate vitality and fortitude.

The admirable compactness with many evocative details of the village life mentioned in Raja Rao's novels is yet another achievement besides his character-creation. The topography of Kanthapura cannot be better expressed with all its finery and scenic beauty of fields, houses, roads, mountains, rivers, trees, birds, animals etc. Raja Rao's expressions are so poetic and realistic that the reader himself seems to traverse those dusty roads in a bullock cart and experience the enigmatic beauty around. The onomatopoeia is used intermittently to release the reader from the stress caused by the bloodshed during the Freedom Struggle. In fact Raja Rao has introduced animals and birds who become active participants in the fight for freedom and the sounds they release resemble the agony of the lathis inflicted on villagers by the constabulary. Nature thus becomes his special province.
Raja Rao reigns supreme among his contemporaries in the art of naming everything that catches the eye. Each and everything is easily distinguishable by the name it is given.

It is already seen how tactfully Raja Rao changes his technique according to the requirement of theme and occasion. A perfect fusion of theme and structure is noticed in almost all his works except for a/lapses. In his technical device he makes use of the old technique of the ancient legends, myths and symbols and develops his own innovation in the style of Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf to suit the narrator's reminiscensing speech. He shows a sure grasp of psychology of all his characters which make his pictures objective and balanced. Raja Rao makes use of dreams and diaries and letters as one of the most potent means of revealing a character's inner self. Dreams are significant in the novel The Cat and Shakespeare where the house is proved to be the most symbolic. The diary maintained by Irene reveals the character of Kirillov as well as her feelings of bitterness towards India in the novel Comrade Kirillov. Diary keeping and letters are also used in The Serpent and the Rope and they play an important role in the novel.

From the beginning of his career as a novelist Raja Rao has been conscious of the need of using a kind of English expression in which the truly Indian life
and sensibility could be powerfully expressed. It may, however, be pointed out here that Raja Rao certainly overestimates his powers as an Indian writer in English in his attempt at creating an Indian English as distinct from the English English and using it almost as a dialect. At best we can only infuse in our creative English the tempo of Indian life and at places produce a transcription of Indian expressions and idioms and that is what Raja Rao has succeeded in doing to a laudable extent, even while maintaining the levels of 'chaste English'.

In all his writings a unique command over the English language is seen. He can play any note he wants - ironic, tragic, comical, farcical and pathetic - with perfect ease. He uses many Indian words as they appear in the language of Sanskrit, Kannada and French to impart a piquant as well as an authentic flavour. Where an idiom or a phrase is used it is translated into English or else a reader unfamiliar with the colloquial tongue will miss the beauty of the situation. His peculiar use of the English language is seen mainly in two of his novels Kanthapura and The Cat and Shakespeare. It is his use of Kannada expression, proverbs, local colour, metaphrased idiom in a translated form, and the use of similes and archaisms which brings one closer to the Indian way of thinking and gives the book a special quality of Indianness. For example a sentence like: "One cannot stitch up the mouths of others"
(Kanthapura p. 136) may appear peculiar but the idea cannot be better and more effectively expressed in the context of village life in the Kannada speaking region. To some extent it may be said that it is the native influence which moulds his style of telling a good tale. Thus Raja Rao is described as the most "ideological of all twentieth century Indian novelists".  

In order to remain authentic to India and Indianness, Raja Rao lays great stress on style and in conveying the story by means of deliberate verbal devices, many of them unusual and unheard of. He has made bold importations of the Indian language into English which astounds the reader. In fact, he has invented a language of the natives. His comparisons sound comical and the reader further reads the novel with a greater interest and curiosity to know more such apparently absurd connotations which are a natural medium of expression of the rustics. For example:

Venkamma plants herself like a banana trunk in front of her.

Narsamma was growing thin as a bamboo and shrivelled like banana bark. 4

The Indianess of his stories is further ensured and emphasised by this device of using colloquial dialect.

Besides the newness of language and form a novel form of story narration is introduced in his first novel Kanthapura. The entire sequence of the events that takes place in the village during the Freedom Movement is related in the old traditional style of a folk-epic. Vivid descriptions, racy dialogues, native dialect, various facets of man's social life, conform into the making of a new genuine style.

His English, unmistakably, conforms to Indian ethos, rhythm and intonation. 5

Raja Rao's unique achievement is that the novel is Indian both in form and thematic content and is born out of Indian life expressed in English. Another major contribution is his use of the sthalapurana or the story connected with a place or a local legend, like his novel Kanthapura. On the other hand the novel The Serpent

4. Ibid., p. 61
and the Rope is called as the Mahapurana or an epic where numerous episodes are harnessed to form the content of the novel. This novel has the erudite style generally noticed in epics and is comparable with that of Henry Fielding who adopts this style in the English Novel. Philosophical and metaphysical discussions are contained in this novel besides the large chunks of details on a variety of subjects like that of history, politics, economics, sociology, biology and religion, thoughts on communism, Vedantism, Buddhism, Marxism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Gandhism, Hitlerism, Catharism, Albigenarian heresy and many more of the like have been introduced from time to time. In spite of detailed discussions introduced as digressions, the reader never grows tired and proceeds further in expectation to find something more interesting and informative. The subject chosen by Raja Rao, in The Serpent and the Rope opens new vistas of understanding to the reader and he delves deeper and deeper into the unlimited world of knowledge.

Himself a philosopher, Raja Rao in The Serpent and the Rope gives an idea of man's liberation from the complex tangles of life. His magnum opus which took ten years in shaping itself, is a highly intricate and a many-sided novel. Our long wait did not prove futile for we have been rewarded suitably. The novel The Serpent and the Rope consists of the tragic story of a marriage which eventually
ends in a divorce; it is an autobiography of a Western Indian Vedantin Brahmin who is a searcher for self-knowledge and self-fulfilment; a confrontation of the values of the East and the West based on various aspects and issues; it is also a fictional statement of the philosophy of Sri Sankara's non-dualism or Advaita; it is nevertheless a compilation of various ancient Hindu myths, symbols and legends of East as well as the Western ones; Buddhism and its philosophy has been dealt with elaborately; and finally its authenticity as a truly Indian novel using English as its vehicle of expression. All the complexities embodied in this novel help in the growth of the story and make it readable by Indian as well as Western audience.

Through his works Raja Rao is able to build a rapport between the East and the West which is neither strong nor permanent fixtures. It is usually the East which looks to the West to explore new vistas in the field of literature, whereas, the West looks to the East for solace. India provides the cure. It can be traced back to the nineteenth century when American writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, David Thoreau and Walt Whitman harnessed the Indian thought and philosophy in their works.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a poet, a mystic and a thinker, was the first amongst the writers of the nineteenth century to demand a truly native American
Literature. Similar to that of Raja Rao, who proves his originality and authencity by contributing to Indo-Anglian literature, a literature truly Indian in theme, form, content and narration, including importations of Indian phrases, idioms and words in English. Vedanta philosophy is one of the several thought currents which reached America in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Emerson on studying the most inspiring passages of the Vishnu-Purana, the Bhagwat Gita and Katha Upanishad makes use of the excerpts in his philosophical writings.

Walt Whitman in his long opening poem of *Leaves of Grass* - Song of Myself - has his exultant concept of 'myself' in which he expresses the essence of Vedantic mysticism. So, it is India and its philosophy which lends a helping hand to understand the concept of self and also makes life meaningful.

The protagonist in *The Serpent and the Rope* after experiencing and confronting the dualities of life, of the East and the West, his mature mind forces him to shed all illusions of life and death and search for truth - the Ultimate Reality. Rama towards the end looks to India in order to find peace and tranquillity.

Comparing Raja Rao with his contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan, we feel that Raja Rao's insight into the Indian philosophy, thought and tradition is much deeper and wider than those of the other two. R. K.
Narayan's stories are interesting and he is a widely read and greatly admired writer, but he is essentially an ironic spectator of life. The Guide is his Sahitya Akademi Award winner in 1960 and it is Narayan's finest novel where irony and moral imagination are at their climax. Mulk Raj Anand with more than a dozen books including short stories to his credit makes use of satire, farce and irony in his works and perhaps his only allegiance is to the cause of suffering humanity. On seeing the pattern of misery in the life of the Indian masses under the British rule he chose to write on the underdogs of society who were illiterate, under-fed and disease-ridden. His novels like Coolie, Untouchable, Two Leaves and a Bud, all deal with the class of the under-privileged. Unlike these two, Raja Rao's works deal with the complexities of life and the underlying Indian philosophy to realise the Truth. It is truly a feast for those hungry intellectuals who wish to shed illusion and acknowledge reality by self knowledge.

It is not claimed that Raja Rao never put a foot wrong. Some of the plots are too obviously contrived and some characters are shown in their full stature in the beginning of the novel. Protagonist Rama of The Serpent and the Rope, in alienating himself from Madeleine, is a matter of controversy. He being a Brahmin, having thorough knowledge of Hinduism could have done well and brought Madeleine under the Hindu fold. Yes, it cannot be denied
that she cannot be born a Hindu but she could have been converted to Hinduism. Instead it is Rama’s egotism of being a high class Brahmin that forces Madeleine to ignore her husband. Similarly, in being too Indian Kirillov too loses the faith and love of Irene towards India and himself.

Rama shows his liberal attitudes when he allows his son to be called Pierre or even when he bows before the Christian God. A Brahmin who is a symbol of tolerance remains unfulfilled by Rama. Madeleine on the other hand is proud to have taken a Brahmin as her husband. She believes in him and his Brahminical qualities. He is intolerant. Though acquainted with the ascetic class of touch and untouch he has extra-marital affairs with Lakshmi in Bombay and also Savithri, but he calls the latter’s union as a spiritual marriage. Another error made by Savithri is, she mentions Krishna as “Janaki’s son plays on the banks of the Yamuna in Brindavan.” Hindus are aware that Krishna was the son of Devaki and was brought up under the guidance of foster-mother Yashoda or Jasumati.

In spite of the errors committed by Raja Rao, every critic has accepted his greatness and importance. Raja Rao has situations, some unforgettable people portrayed and

also the quality of felt-life in his work. His achievement is considerable in quality but not in quantity. He has chiselled and compressed his bountiful ideas into four of his well known novels rather than to spread them over cleverly in a dozen novels. On a canvas of smaller dimension he has used all the colours that make the picture realistic and thought provoking. It is not the bulk he produces but the various dimensions and nuances in every field he presents in such a forceful and subtle manner, that claims his greatness as an artist.

It can be concluded, thus, that Raja Rao's poetic realism, the fascinating galaxy of characters in Kanthapura, his experiment with the novel form and technique in The Serpent and the Rope, the autobiographical treatment in all novels, the element of expressionism, the touch of Indianness make his novels artistic and memorable. His sincerity and commitment give a moral beauty to his work. His works possess the essential qualities and problems of man and society and hence have an abiding quality that age shall not wither nor custom stale its intrinsic worth. Raja Rao is one such writer. Others may have surpassed Raja Rao in artistic accomplishment, they may seem to be more original or more broadly national than he, but as a steady force in the transmutation of life into words and ideas and as an authority in the direction of life itself he has obtained a recognition which no other
of his country men can surpass.

Reviewing the novels K.K. Sharma writes in praise:

What is highly praiseworthy in him is his great ability to capture from the Indian antiquity its mythical imagination.

Raja Rao changes the expression in order to "accommodate a distinct, profoundly Indian 'sensibility'".

Another distinguished critic and editor Professor M.K. Naik is one of the leading scholars of Indian English Literature. In praise of Raja Rao he writes, that even with his small contribution:

his position as perhaps the most 'Indian' of Indian English Novelists, as probably the finest painter of the East-West confrontation, as symbolist, stylist and philosophical novelist and as an original voice in modern fiction, undoubtedly remains secure.

Concluding this evaluation, which is also a

8. C. D. Narasimhaiah, op. cit., p. xii
tribute, one is tempted to speculate in time - honoured fashion: Is there anything in Raja Rao's work that will ensure its being read fifty or hundred years from now? Kanthapura, and The Serpent and the Rope are two of his novels which, one feels have an enduring quality about them. They have all the ingredients that generally guarantee survival. Being the most Indian among Indian English writers and possessing the distinctive voice in modern fiction, Raja Rao unquestionably stands as one of the most distinguished novelists of the world today.