PREFACE

Acknowledged as indisputable, Raja Rao, today too, stands in a niche which is solely his. His novel writing is of a very unique nature and the challenges he accepts, in fact, earns him this status. It is gratifying to note that through the passage of time Raja Rao's works have neither tarnished nor lost the distinctive appeal achieved half a century ago. Undoubtedly, no other writer of fiction has been able to comprehend under his influence the multifarious shades of life and characters with meticulous details as well as the Indian thought and culture with such subtlety as Raja Rao has. Among the big three, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, Raja Rao can be singled out for yet another landmark he makes i.e. his deep study of the ancient Indian philosophy and presentation of the same in his fictional writings. He can rightly be said to be one of the most Indian amongst the Indians writing in English.

Raja Rao has indeed enhanced English Literature by writing in the English language. Earlier the Indians were not very optimistic about the future and achievements of this literature. Fortunately, with the passage of time Indian writing in English has taken remarkable strides and has emerged as an acceptable body of writings of acknowledged worth. Indo-Anglian literature is
the union of Indian as well as European cultures which gave birth to this new form of literature. More and more Indian writers find English as the best mode of communicative device to convey their thoughts and feelings. Today, Indian writing in English is to be perceived as a distinctive literature, moreover, English is accepted as a world-wide language. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his Introduction comments that Indian English Literature is like "a tree that has sprung up on hospitable soil from a seed that a random breeze has brought from afar."1

The choice of English as the best medium of expression, by Raja Rao, is solely due to his inability to find full expression in ancient Indian language of the Gods, Sanskrit, or write French with dexterity. Language, as a vehicle of self-expression depends on one's individual skill to convey his ideas adequately. Raja Rao's works are impressive. The English written with the native sensibility in mind and the English expressing the complexities of the Indian philosophy cannot be better expressed. Another reason envisaged for accepting the English language is that, he wanted his fictional writings to be readable not only in all the states of India but he

also had an eye on the Western audience as well.

English is not an alien language as he states in his Foreward to Kanthapura. Besides English being the best medium of self expression, it can be developed and moulded to the creator's need and thought content perceived by him.

Raja Rao realised that English has the subtlety to be moulded to a great extent to suit the native sensibility and garrulity. This speech pattern is best seen in his novel Kanthapura. Even Kannada words and native idioms and phrases have been tactfully and indigenously sprinkled throughout this novel. In contrast to this novel's language the scholarly handling of the Indian philosophy of Advaita is significantly expressed in The Serpent and the Rope. Similarly, another philosophy of Vishistadvaita is cleverly woven in the structure of The Cat and Shakespeare. The quest for Truth and an inner discovery of the self (protagonist) is best seen in the autobiographical work Comrade Kirillov. The above novels with variegated themes and subjects could not have been better expressed in any other language.

Fresh innovations in the field of form and technique required an analytical mind. Raja Rao was a constant experimenter and it is his ever-probing mind that produced exclusive results. He adopts the folk-epic form
of the Puranas in his first novel Kanthapura which depicts
the village life in the 1930's. His magnum opus, The
Serpent and the Rope is designed in the puranic fashion
where episode follows episode and the thought-pattern flows
smoothly without being impeded. The Cat and Shakespeare
is a metaphysical comedy, whereas, Comrade Kirillov
projects forcefully the autobiographical qualities, though
this aspect is characteristically spread throughout his
works.

Thematically Raja Rao covers almost all
issues like social, political, economic, religious,
spiritual, philosophical and intellectual which form the major
part of his novels. Besides these recurrent themes the
other themes of marriage, scholarship, Indian life and
thought, Buddhism and the East-West encounters are also
dealt with. Together these themes build up a strong support
between story, plot and technique.

Raja Rao gave a distinct touch of
'Indianness' to the novel - form by adopting the Western
techniques to a different context and situation. In his
novel Kanthapura myths play a vital role besides the native
Kannada expressions and words translated into English. The
Serpent and the Rope has myths, symbols/legends both
Indian as well Western adapted in it. Sanskritic mantras,
shlokas and, French verses are also made use of, to give the
necessary effect of the philosophic ideas he wishes to convey. In his novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* the metaphysical musings of the central characters are of main concern. There are only a few Indian myths presented in this novel as compared to the earlier one. In *Comrade Kirillov* too, mythical study is harnessed for digression just as in *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

As a novelist and a short story writer, Raja Rao, belongs to the Gandhian Age, and his sensitive awareness of the forces of the Gandhian Revolution is noticed in all his works. In a writing career spread over for nearly forty years, Raja Rao has produced only four novels. Chronologically they fall thus: *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960; Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *Comrade Kirillov* (1976). Soon after *Kanthapura* two collections of short stories under the title *The Cow of the Barricades and other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) appeared. The latter a revised version of the earlier collections was made, containing all but two of its stories and in its place adding three more. These dozen stories too exhibit an admirable variety both in thematic and thought content. During the course of research study a fifth novel of Raja Rao entitled *The Cheesemaster and His Moves* (1988) was published. This again embodies the same
abstract philosophy of the quest for Truth like his earlier works. A variety of subjects too has been discussed elaborately. I have not taken this novel under consideration for research study.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt to claim Raja Rao as a genius of outstanding fictional writings. In his slender bulk of four novels, what is noteworthy is that no two novels bear any similarity of theme or local colour, form or technique, but instead they present a variety and maturity of the artist what he gained from experience and passage of time. It is gratifying to note that he is a conscientious artist when he deals with the ancient Indian philosophy, Brahminism, Gandhism, Marxism, Vedantism and several more of the like.

Raja Rao has a unique quality of presenting his themes and characters with deep compassion and understanding. One can almost experience with the author what it is to be an illiterate peasant, a peasant beaten with lathis, sorrow-inflicted Rama in his childhood on the loss of his mother, later neglect of Madeleine towards Rama and their ultimate separation, the ecstatic joy of Rama in the company of Savithri, the passion of Ramakrishna Pai towards Shantha, transformation of Govindan Nair before Lakshmi in the brothel house and finally Kirillov's misery as an expatriate and Irene's misery on perceiving the idea
of rootlessness in an alien land, India. Together with this the presentation of the Freedom Struggle in *Kanthapura* is so vivid with its realistic backdrop that the book leaves a lasting impression on the reader's mind. The portrayal of characters and their characterisation too are noteworthy and classic by themselves. Every single detail irrespective of male or female characters, shows his keen perceptive potential and sensibility in creating the concerned character to play the role designed by him.

Raja Rao is a versatile genius in his art of writing novels. Due to his own potential in writing he has attracted some perspective Western critics like Lawrence Durrell and David McCuthion. The reviewers of 'Sunday Times', Diana and Meir Gillon said in praise of *The Serpent and the Rope* that it is certainly an epic and "a magnificent guide to India, and, for those who are prepared to work for their pleasure, a book to read and re-read". Commenting on the same novel Denis de Rougemount said:

"I know nothing in literature that confronts East and West more tenderly, more rigorously."  

It is the themes and philosophy language and expression, encyclopaedic knowledge of subjects and detailed discussion on Indian thought and culture, which give us an insight and understanding of our own age — long tradition, which attracted me to take up the fictional writings of Raja Rao for serious study.

Recently, there have been some critical books, learned articles and a few doctoral dissertations on Raja Rao's works. There are many works written and published. Many approaches to Raja Rao's life and works are possible. Each new study and approach adds a little to our understanding of Raja Rao and his works. In spite of dealing with Raja Rao's works from various angles and perspicacity there is more in store to explore. Hence the subject remains inexhaustible. Although his works have been critically examined in various aspects still a keen critic's perception is able to discern yet another patch that is left untouched.

Most of the books and dissertations on Raja Rao offer a critical study of his novels in the chronological sequence. In this dissertation, however, the chapters have been divided instead in terms of thematic patterns, a comparative study of themes by other contemporary writers, characters and characterisations, and narrative technique, since the intention here is to
evaluate his total output rather than to trace a
development or a decline in the course of his career.

The work has been divided into nine chapter-
heads for the sake of convenience. Chapter one is
Introductory and gives a brief biographical sketch of Raja
Rao's life. It also gives the Gandhian impact on
contemporary Indian Literature as well as the spiritual
values, social and political awareness among the writers of
this period has also been dealt with.

Chapter two deals with the recurrent themes
involved in all the fictional writings of Raja Rao.
Political, social, economic and religious facets of the
themes are dealt with, in Kanthapura. Focus is made on the
cultural, philosophical and intellectual problems of modern
man when exposed to other values than his own in The
Serpent and the Rope. In The Cat and Shakespeare the author
draws our attention to a particular school of Vedanta
philosophy, the Vishistadvaita in which Raja Rao chooses
the marjaranyaya, the cat-hold theory to express his views.
The idea of Shakti worship in the novel also calls for an
allegorical study of the novel. Comrade Kirillov is mainly
cconcerned with the quest for Truth, an inner discovery of
the protagonist as well as the theme of East-West
encounter.

Chapter three consists of other themes which
run concurrently with the recurrent themes. Themes like Indian life and thought, scholarship, marriage, East-West encounters and Buddhism have been discussed elaborately. In order to avoid repetition or to give a more detailed discussion, these themes have been considered under this chapter.


Chapter five is a study of the major male and female characters and their portraiture as they appear in the fictional writings of Raja Rao.

Chapter six is a continuation of the earlier chapter but here the minor male and female characters and their characterisation have been considered. Each character in his or her own way subsequently contributes in building up the story in the novels.

Chapter seven deals with Technique I as a device in exhibiting the author's mind and feelings. The form and style as well as narratives, dialogues and descriptions fall under this chapter.

Chapter eight, Technique II is an extension of the previous chapter and it gives the narrative devices
adopted by Raja Rao in his works. It consists of the diction, idioms and phrases, myths, symbols and legends and also the use of other languages in the course of dialogues or high class rant.

In Chapter nine an overall estimate and an attempt has been made to evaluate Raja Rao's works in the light of the preceding chapters. A reference has also been made to the special contribution of Raja Rao to the enrichment of the Indo-Anglian literature.