CHAPTER II
RECURRENT THEMES
A special fascination for history as the theme of creative fiction seems to rule many an Indian novelist of yesterday and today. To name a few, T. Ramakrishna in 1903, wrote a historical novel in English, Padmini. It is the story of romance of the sixteenth century leading to the battle of Talikote which finally brought about the downfall of the Vijayanagar empire. The Slave Girl of Agra written by Romesh Chandra Dutt in 1909 is a historical romance. In modern times Mulk Raj Anand's The Sword and the Sickle and K.A. Abbas's Inquilab both roughly cover the politics of the twenties. The Gandhian Civil Disobedience movement in the early thirties is well pictured in K.S. Venkataramani's Kandan the Patriot (1932) and Raja Rao's Kanthapura in 1938. Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers (1947) depicts the Bengal Hungers, R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) describes the Quit India Movement while Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury renders the frustration and misery of man.

Raja Rao's novel Kanthapura is by far the best novel written during the thirties. The theme chosen in the novel is about the life of the people living in the Coffee Estate (the Skeffington's) like Mulk Raj Anand's Two Leaves and a Bud taking place at Macpherson Tea Estate in distant Assam. Raja Rao has depicted the agony and pain that the poor peasants and labourers undergo during the British Regime. Similarly Mulk Raj Anand too has ventured
to write on the Pariah and the underdogs rather than the elite and sophisticated life styles. Another writer who comes closest is Munshi Premchand who chooses his themes from the peasantry and humble folks of Uttar Pradesh. Dealing with the politics of that period, R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a Gandhian political action in the village of Malgudi. Despite all these novelists dealing with a similar theme Raja Rao stands foremost and the most successful in converting his intellectual thought into a piece of art.

Kanthapura, is almost an unknown village in Mysore in the State of Karnataka, which is suddenly awakened by the non-co-operation movement under the leadership of the great freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi. A smaller version of Gandhiji is Moorthy in the village who activates the villagers with their individualities into action and participates in the freedom struggle. This dramatic tale is related by a village grandma, a widow, Rangamma (Achakka). It evokes the spirit of India's traditional folk epics, the Puranas. Heterogeneous themes like the social, political and economic merge into a single complex story with vivid descriptions and accounts of the atrocities suffered by the simple, innocent folks under the British rule.

The story opens with a devotional song in praise of the presiding deity, Goddess Kenchamma, such is
the faith of the villagers in the Goddess that they cannot visualise the bounteous nature and the happy peasants without her. Whatsoever they possess is only due to her benign presence.

The villagers are so superstitious that they turn to her for her blessings when there is no rain, or there is an epidemic of small pox, death or despair. They offer their first fruit, sari and bodice cloth for every birth and marriage. Raja Rao has studied the village closely and hence gives an account of the popular beliefs of the simple, illiterate and unsophisticated villagers with their faith in local rituals (bhajans and hearing of Harikathas), superstitions and benignity of the Goddess Kenchamma and Lord Shiva. Raja Rao through Jayaramachar, the Harikatha man chooses the Harikathas as the best medium to educate the villagers about the teachings of Gandhi and his Swaraj. The villagers listen with rapt attention to what is said about Swaraj and how each of them can actively participate in order to fight against slavery under the British. This is how the spark of politics entered the sleepy village and converted it into a burning inferno towards the end of the novel.

Uma Parameswaran speaking about Kanthapura says that:

It is set in the 1930's in Gandhi's Golden decade, when
the spark of genuine nationalism and awakening typically Indian in its yoking of social and spiritual values swept through the country, razing all barriers - communal, religious and intellectual. ¹

The theme of Kanthapura as described by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar is "Gandhi and Our Village" ², and adds that it,

is a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth - the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhi literature. ³

Raja Rao is steeped in the mythical consciousness of his country, hence talking about Gandhian philosophy, one of Raja Rao's character's, Jayaramachar, tells the villagers the story of Shiva Parvati in which Parvati in penance becomes the country, Bharat (India) and

Siva is the three-eyed and Swaraj too is three-eyed: Self-

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1. Uma Parameswaran: A Study of Representative Indo - English Novelist (Bombay: Vikas Publishing House P. Ltd.), p. 142
3. Ibid., p. 396
purification, Hindu – Moslem
unity, Khaddar.

The poor simple peasants had never heard
Harikathas of this nature and are highly amused, but
listened to what is said about the Mahatma. Then
Jayaramchar tells them that Valmiki goes to Heaven and
confronts Brahma telling him that his chief daughter
Bharatha, the Goddess of wisdom and well being is being
long forgotten and that:

men have come from across the
seas and the oceans to trample
on our wisdom and to spit on
virtue itself.

Brahma thus asks Siva to free his, "beloved daughter from
her enforced slavery." 6

It is Gandhi's greatness that produced
hundreds of small Gandhis in the whole of India. Moorthy,
Our Moorthy, Corner-House Moorthy or fondly and with
respect addressed as Moorthappa becomes the Gandhi of the
village. He is only twenty six and a college student. When
he hears Gandhi's speech the impact is so great, that he
becomes a Gandhi-man. Moorthy's character is revealed

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4. Raja Rao: _Kanthapura_, (Delhi: Oxford University

5. Ibid., pp. 15-16

6. Ibid., p. 16.
when the villagers make statements like,

Moorthy had gone through like a noble cow, quiet generous, serene, deferent and brahmanic, a very prince.

Along with the main theme of the Gandhian struggle Raja Rao in order to give the village a realistic touch depicts vividly the different facets of village life, caste prejudices, superstitions, poverty and blind faith in Goddess Kenchamma. The village is made up of "four and twenty houses". Since casteism prevailed the author has distinctly named them as the Brahmin quarter, a pariah quarter, a Potter's quarter, a Weaver's quarter and Sudra's quarter. With the coming in of politics there was a social regeneration in Kanthapura. Moorthy, a Brahmin calls Pariah Rachanna, "Brother Rachanna" but would stand on a gutter slab in front of Rachanna's house and have discussions. His brahminism prevents him from entering the house and mixing with the Pariahs freely. To eradicate untouchability totally it will certainly take time and in the course to improve the standards of the the Pariahs, Moorthy, loses his mother Narsamma and faces excommunication from his caste. But nothing deters Moorthy from going to Pariah

7. Ibid., p. 6
8. Ibid., p. 4
Rachanna's house, though hesitatively, he sits and even sips milk from the brass tumbler, Gandhism preaches that "there is neither caste nor clan nor family."  

Superstition was deeply imprinted in the minds of the village folks and they were averse to taking quinine from their British masters but instead hung a little rice and areca nut tied in a cloth piece over the roof of the hut. They believed this to be a surer remedy to malaria than the quinine medicine. Even if there is an epidemic of cholera and chicken pox, the people offered sari and gold trinkets to the Goddess. Their faith is stronger in the Goddess than in medicines given by the British.

The change of place from Kanthapura to Kashipur does not bring any difference in the life style of the villagers. Raja Rao draws the attention of the reader towards the unity of the village people though there is the division of caste barriers. After the consecration ceremony of the Lingam found by Moorthy, each one accepts to give dinner or pay for milk and banana. A willing cooperation in team work and one's social prestige in a small community is noticed for they have to live in this small world of theirs. Towards the close of the novel, the fear of the police drives the Kanthapurians to settle in Kashipura. There is not much of a difference between the

9. Ibid., p. 13
two villages, so the same routine of eating and grinding and searching for a B. A. pass bridegroom continues. People still have faith in their deity. Pariah Rachanna's wife, Rachi, comes as usual to "the brahmin quarter with her pounded rice or her dung cakes." 10

The people's faith is still planted with the Mahatma as they believe he will fetch them Swaraj and free India from the enslavement of the British. Similar to that of Rama who had slain Ravana and freed Sita or the demon which Goddess Kenchamma killed. In Kashipura the villagers have the same problems and attitudes as in Kanthapura and the torture faced by the Kanthapurians is similar to the turmoil of the whole of India. C. D. Narasimhaiah says: "India in microcosm." 11 is Kanthapura itself.

Politics plays a vital role in the social regeneration of the villagers. Raja Rao does not draw a rigid line between social, political and economic themes but they all merge one into the other to give a perfect wholeness to the novel. Economically the poor peasants live below the poverty line, yet, Raja Rao never lets them expose it. Towards the end of the novel, though these villagers are displaced and have lost all that they

10. Ibid., p. 25
possessed and their houses fallen, they are once again ready to start their new life in the new soil of Kashipura. Their spirit is still unbroken:

but there is something that has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night...

Physically the villagers find themselves in Kashipura while their spirits continue their same old activity. This pattern of the novel can be termed as a closed structure.

The rural folks have been shown to adapt themselves to the new land as soon as they set their nature and they make no hassle about their adjustability. The visit of Rangé Gowda to Kanthpura shows his attachment to that soil and his reluctance to leave till he had drunk three handfuls of Himavathy water.

After viewing the total destruction of the village prays to Kenchamma and:

spat three times to the west
and three times to the south,

and

12. Kanthapura, p. 256
13. Ibid., p. 259
threw a palmful of dust at the sunken wretch.\footnote{Ibid., p. 260} and turned away.

Once the whole novel is read we feel we are at the beginning after circumnavigating through different scenes, different phases of life and meeting different kinds of people in all walks of life. Life in Kashipur goes on as usual as in Kanthapura. A very prominent figure is Moorthy around whom the entire theme is built. He is the Gandhi of the village from whom various aspects like social, political and religious converge. Moorthy acts like a cog in a wheel. The number of spokes that emanate are that of castles and religion. Secondly, the houses are built differently according to the status of villagers. The variegated inhabitants occupying those houses have different political ideas and religious rituals. The factor that links them all is Moorthy and his Gandhism.

As remarked earlier, village life is presented in all its details and Raja Rao is superb in presenting the minutest of details of the South Indian village. The size of the houses brings out the status of the people who live there. To name a few, Sidda had a big 'thothi' (inner courtyard) house with a big verandah and large roof, Patel Range Gowda's a nine beamed house.
Postmaster Suryanarayana had a double storied house and Nanjundia’s house had glass panes fixed to the windows.

Raja Rao introduces a galaxy of village folks in a fashion by which they are identified or known to one another by their profession or trait or personal habit. We have Rangé Gowda ‘Tiger’ of the village, Postmaster Suryanarayana, Snuff Sasri, Left-handed Madanna, Beadle Timayya, One-eyed Linga, Jack-tree Tippa, Corner House Moorthy, Nose-scratching Nanjamma, Pock-marked Sidda, Gold bangle Somanna, Cardammon field Ramchandra and Coffee-Planter Ramayya to name a few. Questioned in an interview Raja Rao explains that:

It is a pure Mysore tradition; Kannada tradition. For example my grand Uncle was living in Hyderabad and you say that house. You don’t say grand Uncle’s house. You say that house with the platform in front. It is a pure authentic South Indian tradition.

Social themes such as caste and religion are also present, but the theme of religion is more forcefully presented. From the very beginning till the end of the novel Goddess Kenchamma’s benign presence is felt every

where. It is this very theme that develops the political theme and again economic problem is solved by religion. Collections are made to celebrate the various festivals and hence make the people economically involved. The introduction of the spinning wheel by Moorthy raises questions from Nose-scratching Nanjamma, he explains by linking economic reasons with religious ones. He says:

To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hand is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy. 16

Another economic problem faced by the villagers is the exploitation by the city people as well as their own people. Moorthy had warned the villagers against exploitation by Rama Chetty, Bhatta and Subba Chetty. The exploitation faced at the Coffee Estate and Boranna's toddy grove are social realities.

Although Raja Rao deals with themes such as social economic, religious and political which concern life at surface level, he goes deeper into the subject of self and deals with it at a philosophical level. Gandhiji preached truth and Ahimsa (non-violence), in which one has to control the tongue as well as physical strength. Ahimsa is to love in the fullest impersonal sense. Badé Khan and

the maistri bang their lathis on the women and Moorothy, and
the agonised women tear the maistri's hair. Moorothy reminds
them of non-violence saying; "No beatings sisters. No
beatings, in the name of the Mahatma." 17 He says:

The real 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. If
I, I alone, could love Bade
Khan, I am sure our cause would
win. Maybe - I shall love him -
with your blessings. 18

Moorothy had followed the preachings and
teachings of Gandhi very religiously. Moorothy never finds
faults with others but blames only himself. He undertakes
fasts and does penances for self-purification and through
self sacrifice he brings about a regeneration in the
village. Moorothy stands for non-violence and if there is
any thirst for revenge in others as in the case of Rangé
Gowda wanting to beat Puttayya for meddling with the canal
water, Moorothy calms him down. He consoles Rangé Gowda
saying;

Every enemy you create is like
pulling out a lantana bush in

17. Ibid., p. 85
18. Ibid., p. 93
your back yard. 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. You plant it, and it is there and bears flowers and you offer them to the gods, and the gods give them back to you and your women put them into their hair.19

Hence the significance of the social, religious, political and economic themes with Kenchamma and Moorthy involved vis-a-vis brings about the regeneration of not only the village of Kanthapura but of India as a whole. Meenakshi Mukerjee observes:

It is therefore often in the rural context that the regional reality and the Indian reality more or less merge.20

Raja Rao artistically transformed all the issues into one entity. Speaking of Kanthapura K. K. Sharma is of the opinion that:

It is meaningful that the novel ends with a myth - solution: Swaraj is equated

19. Ibid., p. 99

with Ramraj. 21

David Mc Cutchion is of the view that:

Raja Rao’s book is an exceptional experiment in Indo-English fiction, yet it too is a variation on the major theme of this literature the conflict of old and new, of East and West. 22

The 'book' in this quotation refers to the novel 'The Serpent and the Rope' and the main theme that connects the story is of the meeting of the two worlds, East and West. East and West comprising of India and France represented by Rama and Madeleine, Grandfather Kittanna and Uncle Charles. These two worlds have been brought close together up to a certain point but certainly there is no total merger. The reference is made to the two banks of a river which cannot meet but the gap can always be bridged. Uma Parameswaran has aptly called it; "an intellectual treatise on East – West cultural tensions." 23

23. Uma Parameswaran: op. cit., p. 148
Certainly the novel can not be adjudged as the confrontation of the two worlds but an exchange of ideas, cultures, philosophies through Ramaswamy and Madeleine. In 'Kanthapura' the light is focussed on selfless action based on non-violence and Truth which is on a metaphysical plane, whereas the story *The Serpent and the Rope* alludes to Shri Sankaracharya's non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita, the differentiation between illusion and reality. Once the reality is known,—the knowledge of Brahman— the impersonal absolute,— an identification with it can be achieved.

The hero Ramaswamy, a Vedantist Brahmin of India is of twenty one years of age. He goes to France to do research in the Albigensian heresy. Here he meets Madeleine Roussellin, a French girl of twenty six, a history teacher. Rama is attracted to Madeleine and marries her. Besides, Rama has two love affairs with Indian woman Saroja and Savithri and contrives to do all this with a lack of involvement which makes moral responsibility irrelevant. Madeleine bears two children but none survive. In the helpless face of her tragedy, Madeleine accepts Buddhism erroneously taking it to be an Indian religion.

Rama vaguely regrets her indulgence, as he too is helpless. His mind is preoccupied with his own self and its interminable divagations. It is so elusive that it refuses all discriminations. They realise the great gap
between them and since their beliefs were incompatible, ultimately resort to divorce. Rama decides to set out for Travancore in search of a 'Guru' who will show him the path to God, whom he had always known without knowing His name.

The Serpent and the Rope is in epic form with episode after episode woven with themes of cultural, philosophical and intellectual problems of man. A challenging note is struck at the very beginning of the novel. "I was born a Brahmin that is devoted to Truth and all that." 24 Since the Brahminism of Rama is spread and felt throughout the novel, it is also termed as a 'Brahminical novel'. The mind of the Brahmin seems to work on the basis of the Indian culture and tradition. Rama is a Vedantin and the Indian consciousness is aroused through Upanishadic ancestors like Yagnyavalkya, Sankara, Madhava and their decendants, "Who left hearth and riverside fields, and wandered to mountains distant and hermitages 'to see God face to face'." 25

The fusing of history and legend form the Indian tradition in this novel. These Indian traditions have been sustained in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and The Bhagwat Gita.

25. Ibid., p.5
The tradition of spiritual search for truth as the foremost aim in life and the practice of Yoga is as alive in India today as it has been in the past. Mr. Shepherd has rightly remarked:

In numerous aspects Ramaswamy appears a distinctly Indian character, possessing a symbolic aura which brings to mind a whole culture and tradition. 26

and also that:

he possessed a more immediate and personal presence, a living rather than a symbolic being. 27

Raja Rao has excercised a tremendous impact on the minds of the readers because he has made use of the metaphysical, philosophical and literary wisdom of India in his writing. Through his characters he describes his own inquisitive mind which when confused finds solace only in Indian thought and ultimately forces him to search for a 'Guru' who can act like a beacon light to guide him to merge into the Absolute to attain spiritual initiation.


27. Ibid.
The 'Guru' is an incarnate of the Absolute as believed in our Indian tradition. Raja Rao himself admits that the novel The Serpent and the Rope is a result of his spiritual fulfilment at the holy feet of Shri Atmanand Swamy in Travancore:

After I wrote Kanthapura, I felt dissatisfied. I was not clear myself. My prayer was not clear. I did not know what to write. So I decided not to write anymore. Then I met my Guru. Now my wavering was over. So came 'The Serpent and the Rope'.

An awarness came to him to offer to the world subtler aspects of the way of life and a symbolic metaphysics unknown to the West. The novel is completely embedded in the Upanishadic tradition and has given expositions to the Indian consciousness which is rooted in the Advaita Darshan of Sankaracharya. Advaita knows no caste barriers, religion and creed. The hero of the novel Ramaswamy realises that it is only a Guru who will bring him face to face with the Absolute. Advaita theory teaches that ignorance, avidya, has to be erased by the recognition of the reality, Satya, by knowledge, Gnāna, in order to perceive the truth. Dr. Robin Bessaignac, on the other hand asserts, that it is an ancient adage in their country France to be, "Beware of too much truth. We French live on

28. Shiva Niranjan : An interview with Raja Rao, op.cit p.22
heresies."29

Besides this tradition of a quest for truth there is an elaborate description of the Hindu tradition. Traditional rites are described in the following passage. The eldest son of the family who performs funeral ceremonies with:

wet cloth and an empty stomach, with devotion and sandal paste on my [Rama] fore head...30

on the death of Rama's mother. Though Rama is qualified and has lived in foreign countries, on return it is no excuse to deviate from the tradition. On eclipse day offering of "til and Kusha grass"31 in the name of the departed person as an object of reverence is a practice even today. On the death of Rama's mother, she is adorned with white jasmine flowers from Coimbatore and Champaks, sweet fragranced flowers, from Chamundi and a lot of Kum-Kum. As per Hindu tradition after the death of a family member, the one performing the funeral rites is completely shaven and on return from the crematorium Bengal gram and sweet is given. Knowing that Rama's mother is dead he believes his "Mother Gauri is, not dead and yet I am an orphan."32

29. The Serpent and the Rope, p. 401
30. Ibid., p. 6
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 8
His void of sorrow is again filled for his father married for the third time. He feels an orphan after his mother’s death because he did not love his father. Rama’s father too dies and he with his widowed Little Mother goes on a pilgrimage to Benares, Haridwar and to the Holy Himalayas, Badrinath. Benares stirs Rama to ecstasy and reminds him that on these very banks the Sages had discussed the roots of human understanding. To be stamped as a brahmin a young boy of seven or eight years of age is given a holy thread and the initiation ceremony to attain Brahminhood is called Upanayanam. As one progresses in the reading of the novel one will see that the character Ramaswamy responds to diverse cultures without prejudice and bias. He is adjustable and this is why Paris stirs his ecstasy and animates his being. For him Paris is not a city, it is an area in oneself and discovers that Paris is Benaras turned outward.

Raja Rao’s sense of identity with two countries like India and France diverse in almost all aspects, manifests throughout the novel. East and West cultures are as far apart as the banks of a river and only rope bridges can to some extent bring a communion between the two. Raja Rao or to say his hero Rama has an intoxication for India, not an intoxication for the sensual but for the land of ideas, multiplicity of traditions and cultures. The foremost being the teaching of
the Upanishads. Rama is shown as having the brahminic tradition right from the opening of the novel. His knowledge of the Upanishad and the Brahma Sutras at a very early age, wearing of the sacred thread, performing the funeral rites of his parents, visiting of the holy cities are very typically Indian. A Brahmin is knowledgeable and he utilises the teachings and preachings of the Sages as a vehicle, through a Guru, to arrive at the Truth. Rama is always fond of ruminating about India, her vastness and her cultures so alive even today as it was four or five thousand years ago. The more he is exposed to other ideas and other cultures, the stronger the appeal of India becomes to him. To Rama:

India is not a country like France is, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic. Why go there anyhow, I thought; I was born an exile, and I could continue to be one. My India I carried wheresoever I went. But not to see the Ganges, not to dip into her again and again ... No, the Ganges was an inner truth to me, an assurance, the origin and end of my Brahminic tradition. I would go back to India, for the Ganges and for the deodhars of the Himalayas, and for the deer in the forests, for the keen call of the elephant in the grave ocellate silence of the forests. I would go back to India, for that India was my breath, my only sweetness, gentle and wise; she was my
Mother. I felt I could still love something; a river, a mountain, the name of a woman... 33

The only place where Rama finds solace is India and only India. Its mystic beauty so enhances him that it is in his very bones and breath. He is so obsessed, and confesses that:

it was the absence that had become presence again... something of the Ganges and the Jamuna that rose into my very being. 34

After his sojourn to India Rama returns to Paris. Here he is placed in altogether a different atmosphere where the philosophy, culture and tradition speak a different language. Paris does not give him the freshness of Benares nor is there any confirmation of his visualising the divine in the architecture of the Orangerie, in an advanced city as this. Even the two rivers Gangā and Rhône are shown as having a difference in their sanctity. Mother Gangā flowing down the mighty Himalayas for ages is so mature and so fresh, only a dip in her will purify oneself and "If wisdom became water the Ganges

33. Ibid., p.376
34. Ibid., p.50
would be that water, flowing down to the seven seas." 35

River Rhône flows like the Holy Ganga but is used for commercial purpose, allowing ships to reach India. In order to sanctify herself (River Rhône) is asked to:

Go there, Mother Earth, go there, Mother Rhône! Do not devastate your being with fast, tear and prayer. India is the Kingdom of God, and it is within you. India is wheresoever you see, hear, touch, taste, smell. India is where you dip into yourself, and the eighteen aggregates are dissolved. 36

Rama reiterates the river to accompany him to India. A difference in the sanctity of the river is noticed here.

Religion and culture too play a significant role in building up of this novel, East and West cultures are in no way similar. The religion of Hinduism consists of several schools of Vedanta but the ultimate teaching is to merge into the Absolute, God, through reality or truth. A similar thought is noticed when the blind kitten surrenders to the Mother Cat in The Cat and Shakespeare or a believer turns to Brahman, Atman in total surrender. Be it Marxism, Islam, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, they are all names of an unknown principle, it is all felt but has no

35. Ibid., p.41
36. Ibid., p.389
identity: "For all the roads as the Gita says, "lead but to the Absolute." Rama's brooding throughout the novel is for his Brahminical India which seems too magical.

Coming to Madeleine, she is a Catholic who has faith in the Holy Grail. At times she discusses Christianity with Lezo. Her acceptance of Buddhism is traced to be Rama and herself choosing to investigate the origins of the two heresies important in the Christian theology, as a subject of dissertation for their doctoral degree. They both face a lot of abstruse discussion on metaphysical problems. They are concerned with dualism and monism, with, whether Christ was human or divine or both. Both the heresies are traced to be of Indian sources. Madeleine sets out to prove that the Holy Grail has come to Europe from the Buddhists through the Manicheans and the Nestorians. On the other hand, Ramaswamy too, has set out to prove that the Albigensian heresy is ultimately Buddhist or Jain origin. An important point is that both the heresies are Manichean i.e. a result from the belief that good or evil, God or Satan both are eternal and independent of each other. The moral implication is that the body is evil and the spirit is good. Naturally the body is taken to be either unreal or immoral. Rama and Madeleine trace their heresies to be the ultimate result of Buddhist origin. In

37. Ibid., p. 90
the anxiety to join her identity with Rama she embraces Buddhism which she mistakes to be a Hindu religion. In the true sense it is Buddhism that merges into Hinduism. The result of their investigation leads the husband and wife to two opposite and incompatible beliefs. Madeleine's indulgence in Buddhism only drifted her afar from Rama, resulting in divorce. Rama ends up as a complete monist who accepts all experience positively, Madeleine ends up as a Buddhist nun who rejects the body completely. Had she remained faithful to her Christian faith and religion this calamity could have been averted. Certainly, on the other hand, she cannot be converted to Hinduism as she cannot be born a Brahmin. Earlier in the novel she has the deepest regard for India and wishes she to be in India but her newly accepted religion brings about a dramatic change in her attitude towards life. She confesses that she studies Buddhism for her own spiritual benefit and religiously follows the Buddhist rituals of meditation and penance. Madeleine is averse to lillies that Rama strews on the bed for, "they remind me [Madeleine] of First Communion," 38 i.e. the initiation of Christianity.

Madeleine, as we notice is unable to perform the Hindu worship of the Bull, Nandi, because she has the Christian blood in her. She is intelligent but is so

38. Ibid., p. 326
confused and entangled in the triple philosophies of Hindu, Christian and Buddhist that she gives up everything and prefers to live a recluse's life.

As if to reinforce the fact that the central theme of the novel is oriental in its philosophy, several characters are made to demonstrate their belief in Eastern philosophies. The character Savithri, an Indian, goes abroad for further studies takes up smoking and dancing but sustains her ancient religion and reconciles hereself to traditional domestic duties. Rama himself who plays the key role in the novel adheres to his orthodox Hindu Brahminism in spite of living in France and having a French wife. Georges in the company of Rama is infatuated by the Vedas and eulogises the Indian culture and food habits thus:

Living beside you, [Rama] as I do these days, you cannot imagine how much your Brahminical "aura," as it were, helps to make me a better Christian. What we do with such an effort, such a desire for virtue, you do so spontaneously. What I admire is the frugality of your food, the generosity with which you open yourself to everyone and everything.

The idea of simple living and high thinking of Gandhiji helps the Indians to attain the status they have through

39. Ibid., p.81
the pen of Raja Rao.

The Indian Philosophy takes a prominent place in this novel The Serpent and the Rope. From time to time the Vedantin thought has been discussed because the chief protagonist, Rama is a Brahmin and the knowledge of the holy Hindu scriptures has come naturally into him. Being knowledgeable or wise does not mean an isolation from what is incompatible, but to integrate into those elements. Rama did plunge into those problems when he was exposed to the values other than his own. Yet misfortune plays mischief and snatches Madeleine away from him for she was unable to understand the deeper thoughts and emotions of Rama.

In Sanskrit 'Brahmin' means one who knows the ultimate reality or Absolute or Brahman. Rama's wisdom helps him to permeate through all distractions of worldly maya in order to communicate heightened awareness of life and to give aesthetic joy.

The philosophy underlying this novel is the Advaita theory i.e. mistaking a rope for a snake, a maya, or real for an unreal. India can be judged as one of the reasons for the parting of ways between Rama and Madeleine. Each one tries to adopt the others world view which is so divergent to permit any sort of compatibility between the two. Besides, there is a basic metaphysical difference in their conception of Self and Reality. Wisdom is the only solution by which one can discern the unreal
from the real, illusion from the reality or even know the difference between truth and untruth. The famous analogy of the serpent and the rope goes thus:

The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in between the two and all that's in between is poetry, is sainthood... looking from the serpent is to see paradises, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wheresoever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes... But in true fact, with what ever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent... One—the guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen... 'It's' only the rope He shows it to you.

The advaita or non-dualism theory of Sankara states that it is the ultimate truth which denies the world while affirming the underlying reality of Brahma and emphasises the role of the Guru in removing ignorance (Ajñāna) of the nature of the reality.

The next novel of importance is The Cat and Shakespeare. It is a complex work of fiction and its essence can be known only by several readings. In this novel Raja Rao depends heavily on symbolic interpretation, taking the most ordinary, simple and household words to

40. Ibid., p.335
symbolise objects of metaphysical significance. He makes use of the ancient religious parable of Cat-hold theory and glorifies the traditional metaphysical symbols to give them fresh meanings. The main theme Raja Rao harps on in this novel is of Shakti-worship or the mystery of the Feminine Principle. The qualities of a woman are of various facets. She is a curious blend of the qualities of a child, mother, mistress and whore and in addition she is intelligent, strong, sensitive and mysterious by nature.

It is noticed that with The Cat and Shakespeare Raja Rao moves a step forward from The Serpent and the Rope in the treatment of a metaphysical theme. In almost all his novels he makes a philosophical study as the pivotal force. In the present novel the idea of total resignation to the will and care of the personal absolute - the benign cosmic mother - employed by the analogy of the cat and the kitten. It embodies the idea of the blind surrender of the kitten to the divine care of the mother. Shakespeare represents our ordinary life of joys and sorrows. The two principal male characters are Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. Ramakrishna is transferred to Trivandrum from Pattanur and his wife Saroja, lives in Pattanur and continues her coconut business as it yields her money. She cares less for her husband and there are bitter quarrels sometimes. Consequently, the two do not have much respect for each other. In Trivandrum Pai meets
Shanthan, a school teacher. She is a contrast to Saroja. Intimacy grows between Pai and Shanthan and she plays the role of wife and mistress. She has the Feminine Principle hidden in her, she does not care to marry Pai, as Pai asserts:

If she became my mistress it was because she felt wife. She remained a wife. My feet were there for her to worship. My weaknesses were there for her to learn; my manhood, at least such as I possess, for her to bear children.

Raja Rao portrays Shanthan as an ideal woman, unlike Saroja who only receives but gives no return. Shanthan's urge on the other hand is to give as much as she can to her man and child. Govindan Nair is a friend of Pai, and works in a ration shop. He faces tragedy on the loss of his son and shifts all his affection to Usha, Pai's daughter. Nair is unhappy for he believes that his family is under curse for seven generations and thus catastrophe now befalls him. He is arrested. Nair is a man of strong morals. When the beautiful girl Lakshmi strips herself naked before him and is ready to have sexual relations with him he is not overpowered by the sexual

desire but maintains his high moral sense. So the most initiated is Nair and the uninitiated is Pai. Nair's unshakeable faith in Mother Cat gives him peace in life. Though he is a clerk he did not show dissatisfaction or grumble in life. He believes the world is all right because the Mother-Cat is in her heaven. Pai on the other hand is an ill-paid clerk and dreams of building a big house. He says that he worships nothing and does not care for anything. Nair's talk of Mother Cat completely mystifies Pai. His desires are fulfilled towards the end and he is also rewarded with the additional bonus of a mystic experience. The central image of the Mother Cat glorifies the Feminine Principle or the Shakti worship is one of the leading ideas in Raja Rao's fiction. Shakti with her feminine logic rules over the universe and all logic of causation and ethics of responsibility becomes irrelevant.

In Shaktism as well as Tantrism, the Feminine Principle stands supreme. The Kumari-Tantra states that the entire world is embodied in the woman. To realise this one should be a woman oneself. It accepts women to be gods as they possess vitality. Hence women become a symbol of worship. The Feminine Principles are seen in different forms in The Cat and Shakespeare, they are Mother - Cat of Nair, Shantha, Lakshmi and Usha in whom the woman is seen as Mother, beloved, sister and daughter, respectively. A woman's guidance and support is always needed in life, she
indeed is the biggest puzzle. Raja Rao shows a complete triumph of the Feminine Principle over the worldly matters.

Raja Rao resorts to an allegorical study of his characters and the surroundings. Shakespeare is omnipresent and his presence is felt everywhere and we conclude that he knows everything about the ration shop. The card too holds a mystery as it is got by some on bribing the officers while others adopt various false means to obtain a card. The queues are long and people wait patiently for their turn. We encounter a gram merchant who goes to Jagannath Puri to offer silver spire to the Lord for fear of accumulating money by unfair means. To complete the picture, the children are seen playing with scales; young women awaiting their turn to procure ration "jerk" and "tilt" the scales; an aged woman waits for waiting so long in the queue. Such is the picture painted by Raja Rao. To end, it is said that the philosophy of surrender is the moment of acceptance of safety when one surrenders to the Benevolent Mother i.e. self surrender like the kitten to the Mother Cat.

**Comrade Kirillov** is a novelette written at a time when the novelist was passing through a phase of deep emotional setback. It is probable that Raja Rao had taken up writing this novel when the Indians were losing faith in their religion and metaphysical heritage. This novelette contains all the themes Raja Rao has taken in
his earlier novels perhaps it may be said that we have here the central concerns of Raja Rao presented in a concentrated and cryptic form. The East-West theme, the philosophical and spiritual themes are the two themes recurring in this novelette.

Broadly speaking, Comrade Kirillov is a novel about the life and adventures of a South Indian Brahmin. Padmanabhan Iyer, calls himself Comrade Kirillov to emphasise his communistic leanings. He is a confused person both from within and without. The poverty and suffering of India is his main concern, he hopes to find an answer to this problem in theosophy. This Theosophy takes him to California where new religions are born. With his keen perception he soon realises that his journey to the West is futile and the problems the Indians were then facing cannot be solved. He imbibes Marxism and learns German to help him read and understand Marx and Engels. Gradually he is attracted towards the U.S.S.R. A transition from theosophy to Gandhism, Marxism and communism takes place and confuses him still further. He contradicts himself often in his praise and criticism of India. Though he becomes a staunch Marxist yet he could speak of India:

as though he were talking of a venerable old lady in fairy tale who had nothing but goodness in her heart, and who was made of morning dew and
It is due to his profound love for India and Indianness that Kirillov is unable to give himself up fully to the foreign ideology. In spite of his ambivalence he marries a Czech girl, Irene, with her communistic leanings attracts him strongly. Their union bears him a child, a boy, named Kamal Dev. Irene, to identity herself with Kirillov learns Sanskrit and teaches her son the Hindu tradition and classics. During the birth of a second child Irene dies and Kamal Dev is sent to his grandfather in Trichinopoly.

The theme of Comrade Kirillov to a large extent shows a conflict of the East and the West on a political plane. Unlike The Serpent and the Rope where the East-West encounter is on a metaphysical or a spiritual plane. It is the infatuation for politics and not metaphysics that alienates Kirillov from his motherland. During the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, the Indian intellectuals were in the grip of strong political and contradictory ideals. This may be due to a strong challenge in Gandhism to the Marxist philosophy and ideology. The conflict between the two philosophies remains unresolved in his mind, but he is sure of one thing

that he loves India.

Kirillov speaks with authority of the rich heritage of India and often refers to it as 'Holy India.' He holds India in high esteem and he loves her:

with a noble, delicate unreasoned love. He loved her poetry as few among the so-called educated ones in India had—he loved the intricacies, the permutations, the magnitude of the Sanscrit verse.

He unlike the Brahmin hero of The Serpent and the Rope who has high philosophical thoughts and his concerns are spiritual without any interference of politics.

Kirillov's Indianness mingles with the Marxist idea and forms the real issue of the novel. Steeped in the Indian culture and its heritage he is an ardent seeker of Truth, vacillating between his devotion for India and Marxism. He is totally a confused man: "neither a communist nor a patriotic Indian".

Every communist seeks an historical evidence, as a stamp of authority. But Kirillov's thirst for truth takes him from India to California, from London to Moscow and Peking and finally he returns to India.

43. Ibid., pp. 86-87
44. Shiva Niranjan, Raja Rao, Novelist as Sadhaka, (Ghaziabad : Vimal Prakasan, 1985), p.64
Realisation dawns upon him that his journey to foreign lands proves futile as truth lay in his country itself. His ventures teach him some bitter lessons. On one occasion he reacts sharply to the humiliating treatment meted out to the coloured in England and a strong dejection in his mind arises for the Britons. It is only through others that one can judge oneself and Kirillov realises the truth about himself that:

"You cannot walk a mile without discovering yourself over and over again a hundred times, and even thick eye-glasses are no protection to you."

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His knowledge of communism, history, Theosophy and a host of other subjects is of no protection. He goes in search of salvation and resolves that: "I will not betray my ideas - I am hungry. I die." 46

Raja Rao from time to time emphasises that the gravitational pull is always towards tradition and nationalism rather than modernity and internationalism. One tradition cannot fit into the other and the end result is only frustration and agony. This is the condition of Kirillov which is similar to Madeleine’s predicament in The Serpent and the Rope. To remain authentic to one’s

45. Comrade Kirillov, op.cit. p.19

46. Ibid., p.27
tradition or religion is to be wise. Irene, towards the
close develops bitter hatred for India and her husband who
is very Indian. She is uncertain whether she will be
accepted in a totally new tradition and soil and whether
Kirillov will ever recognise her as his own in his India.
The mist of illusion and authority surrounds her leading to
hatred. Kirillov records the admiration for Indianness
that R. possesses:

he is straight and simple as a
child, and like most Indians
magniloquent. He loves India
with a love. I often wish I
had.47

R. is convinced that Kirillov has finally separated
reality from illusion. He traverses through foreign lands
of alien traditions and cultures which make him
knowledgeable to be able to discover the illusion from
reality or the truth from the untruth. His hungry soul
circumnavigates for truth and returns to his country
itself.

Raja Rao, through his character Kirillov
proves and relates the final destiny of man who alienates
himself from his own country with which he is familiar, and
tries to attach himself to a totally new atmosphere. India
waits like the mythic character Parvati in the story of

47. Ibid., p.108
Shiva and Parvati. Parvati goes to Kanyakumari and requests her father Himalayas to arrange her marriage in Kanyakumari. Shiva, who is always lost in meditation never reaches at the appointed time and place and hence keeps Parvati waiting eternally. "At the tip of India stands Parvati. She is India." 48

In other words India is ever awaiting the return of her children who leave her through disgust and frustration. Like Kirillov there are many sons of India who migrate from their country in the persistent quest of spiritual knowledge, discover their inner self and return to their motherland with more awareness and understanding. In order to understand to differentiate the illusion from the reality, a Guru's gracious blessings are needed. Once able to perceive the Truth, the highest goal in life, Brahma or the Absolute is attained. Raja Rao signifies symbolically that India and its spirit lives through Kamāl Dev even when his mother is dead and father shifts to Peking. The link between India and Kirillov will ever live as Kamāl Dev remains in India.

Besides the recurrent themes in each novel mentioned earlier there are a few other themes which help in the progress of the novels. Themes such as Indian life and thought, marriage, scholarship and Buddhism also play a

48. Ibid., p.126
vital role in building up the story. The East-West encounter has also been discussed adequately in two of his novels. These themes have been dealt with in detail in the following chapter.