CHAPTER III
OTHER THEMES
Besides the recurrent themes that build up each novel there are a few other themes which help in the progress of the novels. Themes such as Indian life and thought, scholarship, marriage and Buddhism are also knit to give the reader a variety of topics to ponder on, in a single capsule, in the form of a novel. Raja Rao meticulously studies the deeper aspects of human values which go into the making of man's life besides the worldly, and with his powerful mind and pen is able to throw light on life itself.

Raja Rao's foremost novel, Kanthapura, a typical traditional Indian village with its agrarian economy and age-long intricate organisation is aptly pictured. In fact the very name of the novel suggests an Indianness. The Kanthapurians are Coffee-Estate peasants and their language is crude and punctuated with abuses. Except for a few, all others are uneducated, they do not show a desire to become literate, for, their chief livelihood depends on manual labour. The entire novel rings with Indian life, thought, superstitions and unity to fight the British. The author shows the social-economic divisions of the village by stating the various castes and the status of the villagers of Kanthapura. Casteism prevails and to eradicate it is a herculean task. The chief protagonist of this novel, Moorthy a college student gives up studies to join the mission of Mahatma Gandhi, that is,
to unite and fight for freedom. Moorthy’s mingling with Pariahs results in his excommunication from his Brahmin society. He goes to the root of the problems prevailing in the village and realises that only by love and religion can communities be brought together. The caste system, iniquitous in many ways, nevertheless, held society together, at least in the villages. Despite differences in status there is a spirit of unity. It possesses a dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and the life — impulse all working to the highest pitch but in perfect collaboration.

The religious rituals of the village folks are offered to Goddess Kenchamma whose omnipresent self is spread over the village. The villagers are staunch believers of the presiding deity and always turn to her in distress or in any celebration. The bounteous crop they get is only due to her grace, sicknesses of various nature are eradicated if a vow is made to the "Benign One!". The celebrations of Rama festival, Krishna festival, Ganesh festival and the daily evening prayers and bhajans are carried in unity and oneness. Each one lends a helping hand in the religious rites irrespective of their economic condition and caste. The villagers are thus simple, superstitious and tradition-oriented people, who are only aware of their little world of Kanthapura but unaware of the world outside.
Shri Sankara, the great religious reformer and teacher of Vedanta philosophy of advaita is popular among the village folks. Harikathas and scriptures are read to the villagers everyday. Their simplicity draws a curtain of unapprehensiveness in the minds of the peasants and hence they fail to recognise politics injected in the Indian myths. Fasts are observed on the Ekadasi day. Kartik is a month when oil lamps are lit at the entrance of houses during the first fifteen days, and this is still a custom in South India. For Kartik is believed to be a month of the Gods, and "as the gods pass by the Potter's street and the Weaver's street lights are lit to see them pass by".¹

Raja Rao chooses rural India as representation of real India and the theme that knits the story of Kanthapura is the Gandhian Revolution. Though he takes only the village of Kanthapura under his microscope and studies its social structure of casteism, traditional customs and life of the coffee planters, he represents all Indian villages which are undergoing the tough trial of the Indian Freedom Movement. Raja Rao's vivid details of the happenings are so realistic that the reader becomes one of his characters and takes part in the revolution. Raja Rao does full justice by depicting the true Indian village life

with all its pros and cons. From the materially undeveloped unknown Kanthapura village the scene shifts to the urban with a philosophical touch added. In The Serpent and the Rope Raja Rao exposes the East - West traditions on philosophical and cultural grounds as discussed earlier in the main theme.

The Serpent and the Rope has the Indian thought spread throughout the novel and it is largely true of Raja Rao’s own life experiences and attitudes which he illustrates through the hero Ramaswamy. Thus the East - West theme is a :

happy combination of the orientalist patriot and the cosmopolitan occidentalist, [which]

has enabled Raja Rao to depict in The Serpent and the Rope the life and culture of Europe for his Indian readers as forcefully as he evokes the Indian life and interprets its values for the Western ones.

Raja Rao makes an attempt to show a dramatic contrast between the ways of life and thought in both the worlds of the East and the West. Whatever philosophy it may be the chief idea is of self - knowledge and through this

knowledge to recognise the Absolute, God. It is said to be
an extension of the philosophy of Karma or selfless action
of Moorthy in Kanthapura. Indian thought is heightened in
the very title of the novel The Serpent and the Rope. It is
the theory of advaita or non-dualistic theory of
Sankaracharya that pervades throughout the novel. Rama is
able to write and express more forcefully, this advaita
theory, after his stay in the West because he is able to
perceive the East and West values with an impartial mind.
Each thought experienced is expressed with such lucidity
that it is the work of a man who has undergone the changes
both within and without. The entire novel is said to be an
evocation of the Truth, the tradition of India and its
vitality especially in its encounters with the West. In the
very opening lines of the novel Ramaswamy the hero says
that a Brahmin is he who is devoted to Truth. The author
thus expresses the external physical entity but just like
the Ganges is an inner truth so also the beginning and end
of the Brahmin tradition.

Being a Brahmin, Raja Rao is an expository
of the Holy scriptures and being brought up in a very
conventional tradition - ridden family, feels free on his
reaching West. Though he finds himself physically in
France, in thought he finds solace only in India. Rama
brands himself as, "a holy vagabond" who wanders in
search of Truth. After the death of his mother, he performs
the funeral rituals and feels lonely like an orphan, for the subsequent year his father marries again and Rama is left to perform the death rituals again. Under the guardianship of Grandfather Kittanna he learns that there is no death. He is so enticed by the idea of deathlessness that he is unable to understand as to where these people disappear. Rama gives various instances of death, for example Bossnet and Roi Soleil, believed they will not die, but they did, hence, where indeed did they go? Sundar, Grandfather's horse, too died, since horses come from Arabia do they need a Muslim burial? If Sundar is dead where is he? Such questions haunted Rama right from an early age and towards the end he realises or rather he attains the wisdom to differentiate reality from the unreal. To attain this wisdom a Guru's guidance is essential. Speaking of death, Rama says:

In Benares one knows death is as illusory as the mist in the morning. 3

and the reality is that the Holy river Ganges flows on.

In the West death is taken to be a reality as perceived by Madeleine and Uncle Charles. On the other hand culture and Brahminism teaches Rama and Little Mother that

death is only an illusion. After death the soul migrates into a new form, it is imperishable, and so the life cycle is repeated. To quote The Bhagwat Gita, Lord Krishna tells Arjun:

Just as a man casts off worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied one casts off worn out bodies and enters others which are new.

The Christians believe in 'Reincarnation' it is in fact only in relation to the physical body. Hence, there is a gulf of difference between the two cultures, their religion and thought.

Understanding Catholicism we hear Georges tell Rama that:

it is when a human being touches the cup of misery then you see the fine lines on his anguished face.

just like Christ whose face seemed more luminous on the Cross than when He preached in Galilee. Georges added that:

Evil is fascinating, for without it there would be no

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5. The Serpent and the Rope p. 109
good, no world, no Christ. 6

In other words it is in evil you seek good because the good cannot recognise itself.

Madeleine is not spared from the influence of the Indian thought and philosophy. She, is pictured by Raja Rao, so as to possess the best Cathar like qualities but certainly a deep valley of differences stands between Rama and herself. Both husband and wife involve themselves in long discussions to understand the ultimate goal one is to attain through Christianity or Buddhism or Hinduism.

All religions lead to one common aim, that is search for Truth and discover it. Madeleine's understanding of the meaning of life and the underlying philosophy lacks the depth of Rama. For her the world, "is a fib, a misnomer, a lie". 7 but for Rama the world is an illusion and not a lie. The body and mind of Rama is not Madeleine's husband, says Rama, but something beyond, 'the Principle'. Forms live and die and every one beyond his body and mind is a Cathar and it needs no proof. To make a more explicit statement the author says:

'Benares is everywhere where you are,' says an old Vedantic text, "and all waters are the

6. Ibid., p. 109
7. Ibid., p. 382
Ganges. To realise this is to be a true Cathar. The rest is heresy.

Discussion of this nature continues between Rama and Madeleine and each one substantiates his/her statement with the knowledge of the philosophy each follows. Indian thoughts are ever engrossing as well as complicated to the Western audience. Raja Rao punctuates his novel with innumerable Indian myths and in keeping with the Indian thought he mentions the 'Rakhi festival'. On this day the sister ties a string around the brother's wrist and prays to protect her. If any calamity strikes the brother it is the sister who weeps, such a holy bond between a brother and sister is unnoticed in the West.

After a journey to foreign lands we return to our motherland and in the present novel Raja Rao depicts the life style of Travancore, Kerala, in his The Cat and Shakespeare. The reader travels from Kanthapura in Mysore State, to Aix in France (The Serpent and the Rope) Travancore in Kerala (The Cat and Shakespeare) and finally America, London and back to India (Comrade Kirillov). Raja Rao in his novel The Cat and Shakespeare speaks about the Indian life and thought in the state of Kerala. The Story revolves around Ramakrishna Pai, a Brahmin and Govindan

8. Ibid., p.383
Nair, a non-Brahmin. Normally a Brahmin is he who has the advantage to study the holy text and scriptures as well as he who leads a revered life. In this novel Raja Rao presents real life, as the Brahmin has an extra-marital affair with a teacher in spite of his being a symbol of all goodness whereas a non-Brahmin as a more enlightened one.

Raja Rao, thus, shows respectively the manifold aspects of the rural and the urban life of India of the early and the mid twentieth century. The author vividly evokes the natural aspects of Trivandrum through landscape along with the recapitulation of history. Pai's wife Saroja is ever engaged in her coconut business as she gets a good capital. The nature abound with coconut trees, huts and the sound of the sea remind her of her home in Alwaye. She never tires relating stories her old grandfather told about the Dutch who had come to India some two hundred years ago. Raja Rao presents realistic views of Indian social and political life in the State of Kerala. The scene shifts from rural Kanthapura to urban part of Travancore. A very colourful scene of the material side of life is the pomp and show of the procession of the Maharaja with elephants and horses. This evokes the traditions of the princely state of Travancore.

Possessing a house is a status symbol and the characters in the novel try to accumulate funds by unfair or fair means in order to construct a house.
Similarly, Raja Rao, presents the Puranic myth of the fortunate hunter who sees the vision of Shiva by accidentally dropping bilva leaves on the idol of Shiva. Another traditional metaphysical truth universally accepted in India is the belief that the feminine principle or the cosmic mother is the creator of the universe and also is the preserver and destroyer of the cosmos. Raja Rao thus paints the life and thought with an authentic note, in his novel The Cat and Shakespeare.

Raja Rao strikes a very similar note on life and thoughts in India in this novelette 'Comrade Kirillov'. He attempts more successfully a synthesis between the East and the West. Kirillov the central figure of this novel, like Rama, marries a girl from the West, Irene, an intelligent Czech woman. The Brahmanism and Indian philosophical leanings of Kirillov lure Irene. She develops a very strong love for the Indian language Sanskrit as well as a desire to go to India. She recites Sanskrit verses and learns it for future needs. She in fact instills faith in the language in her son, Kamāl Dev and informs her husband that Kamāl, "can now offer you (Kirillov) Kalidasa for breakfast" and starts to recite - "Vak-Artha ..." From time to time Irene learns Hindustani.

words in order to identify herself with her husband. Her inquisitive nature to know more, makes her question Kirillov as to what is the equivalent of 'darling' in Hindustani. Laughingly Kirillov states that there is no word for 'darling' in India and

We are not that democratic. You must address me, Patiji, revered spouse, and I must call you Patni, the espoused one between you and me there is reverence ...

This shows that though India is modernised in its culture and outlook yet mentally the people still adhere to the conventional norms. Despite the gulf of differences, Irene respects the East for the tradition and culture and philosophy, that is why we witness a happy marriage. She condescends to her husband's way of living, cooks only vegetarian dishes and even teaches Kamal to embrace Hinduism wholeheartedly and become like his father. Having Marxist leanings, Irene, is still keen to know about Indian philosophy, mythical tales and also the ancient language. From Irene's diary, dating from July 4 to January 4, we get to know what exactly is working within her innermost thoughts with regards to Kirillov and India. The enthusiasm and fascination for all that India offers is lost and India

10. Ibid., p. 78
becomes the greatest cause of misery to Irene. Like Ramaswamy, Kirillov too speaks highly of India but unlike Rama who feels he is a part of India itself. A feeling of hatred is nurtured in Irene's heart. She admits that:

P. has such infinite love, but completely lacks understanding. Is it the difference of race... P. is completely an Indian. Will I ever recognise him there? Will his people accept me?

Such questions haunt her mind, hence a hatred is born, and she vows never to go to the country once she loved so dearly. A gulf of misunderstanding arises and her desire to join another culture and go to an alien land slowly dwindles away. She reveals herself completely, in the diary which is the only companion wherefrom she can make her frank statements,

No, I am happy I am not going to India. I never told him the whole truth. India is now my enemy. It will eat up P. His Indianness will rise up once he touches the soil of his land...

Though Irene tries to some extent to embrace Hinduism, it is difficult to adhere to its norms and tradition so easily.

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11. Ibid., p.112
12. Ibid., p.113
Kirillov leaves his country to find the path of salvation and realises that it is in his own country the Vedantin philosophy teaches us to differentiate the illusion from the reality. What Kirillov took it to be a reality is actually only an illusion. Truth he finds in India and so also solace.

The theme of Indian life and thought is more forcefully presented in two of Raja Rao's novels Kanthapura and The Cat and Shakespeare. A very realistic picture of the Indian village is depicted showing the ancient traditions and also a deep sense of rootedness to the Indian soil.

Education did not play a very important role in Kanthapura as the poor peasants needed only manual labour to work in the fields. They did respect the learned men in the village but looked down upon the city ways. Rangamma, for instance, has her elder brother's children come from Bombay, they are labelled as, "all those city-bred fashionable idiots".\(^{13}\) The villagers detest the modern city life and prefer their simple attire and living economically. Raja Rao mentions Dore, 'the University graduate, who never gets through Inter but leaves his land in the village and goes to the city for higher studies.' He learns the city ways and reads city books and calls himself

\(^{13}\) Kanthapura, p. 5
a Gandhi - man though he did not possess much knowledge.

The villagers wear tell - tale nick names, for it would be absurd for an insignificant and illiterate village to be known by his initials like a white collared man. Superstitions as well as untouchability prevail in this village for lack of education. Beliefs and superstitions reveal the gullibility and backwardness of the Kanthapurians.

Chanting of Gods names, simplicity of food habits described in the novel bring to mind the modern Indian village which has not changed much since the revolution. Illiteracy and simplicity of the rural folks make them accept the Gandhian philosophy without much difficulty. There is no dualism in their thought, hence they join the Gandhian Movement wholeheartedly and firmly withstand the atrocities inflicted on them by the constabulary. A total merger of religious and political activities is noticed when the villagers shout slogans like, "Satyanarayan Maharaj Ki Jai" followed by "Vande Mataram". In spite of accepting the Gandhian way of life the Hindu tradition is still warm in their blood.

Popular beliefs and superstitions are not only common among the economically backward and uncultured people but also among intelligent, learned men. The Indian tradition and culture are there with us from the very beginning for it gives us a sense of identity and
rootedness. On the other hand if scholarship and education are familiar with the villagers, Gandhi's mission and Moorthy's effort would have been futile. At the same time the villagers hold 'Moorthappa' as their idol of reverence and approach him with great confidence to discuss the Gandhian philosophy.

A contrast to the villagers is Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* a Brahmin Vedantist who reads the holy scriptures at the age of four. Scholarship plays a very important role in the life of Madeleine, Savithri, Ramaswamy, Georges, Oncle Charles and others. All are educated and hence possess the knowledge to discuss the highly complex Indian as well as the Western philosophy. Rama comes to France to do his research in history and the subject is Albigensian heresy in the context of Indian thought. The University where he is researching offers him a job, though he leaves for India to attend the death ceremony of his father, the Government continues to give him scholarship. This assignment forces him back to France where his attraction for Madeleine results in a marriage. Madeleine is a history teacher, researching for a doctoral degree on the 'Untouching Cathars'. Both the scholars probe deeper and deeper into the subject taken up for research. Both subjects are traceable to Buddhist influence and their investigation results in two opposite incompatible beliefs. Rama is seen to possess a highly philosophical
mind as well as acquainted with various subjects that call for study.

Ramaswamy's father is a mathematician and his grandfather not less educated. Savithri to pursue higher studies leaves for London. She and Rama discuss a variety of issues from personal feelings to Indian myths. Georges as well as Lezo and Catherine have interminable debates on topics on philosophy, life and death, Christian faith and dogmas and so on. It is the scholarship in Rama which teaches him that death is unreal. To him:

Death makes passion beautiful.
Death makes the concubine inevitable.

Rama's inevitable knowledge about the Indian philosophy of Advaita explains the illusion and reality which is distinguished one from the other only with the help of a Guru. Raja Rao puts Rama and Lezo in a juxtaposition and reveals their opposite attitudes to both learning and knowledge. Similarly Madeleine and Rama discuss Buddhism and the Holy Grail. Most of the discussions that take place are philosophical or metaphysical. Raja Rao thus presents an abundance of knowledge in his magnum opus The Serpent and the Rope.

In Comrade Kirillov Raja Rao's central

14. The Serpent and the Rope, p. 12
character Kirillov is very similar to Rama in knowledge and learning. He too is a great scholar who leaves India in quest of an answer to the problem India faces then. He deals with a variety of subjects like political, economic, sociological and anthropological and discusses with equal ease topics like sex, biology and love-making. Kirillov's wife, Irene too is an intelligent and literate woman. She is a communist like her husband but develops a deep sense of regard for India. Scholarship is a pivot on which the entire theme of the novel rests. The learned heros of the two novels solve the problems they face only due to their extensive knowledge of all subjects including the Indian philosophy. Kirillov becomes an authority on India's place in the war as well as his manuscript on India entitled "India and Our Struggle", is accepted by a publisher. Another book to his credit is "Mahatma Gandhi - A Marxist Interpretation" which contains his remarks on Marxism and Mahatma Gandhi.

A very characteristically scathing and realistic remark by the novelist on University education is noteworthy. He says:

The university catechism was the sign of new wisdom, for he who could get a scroll in Gothic type, wear a gown, have himself photographed on the convocation day, had a frame made for his degree and hung it beside Goddess Lakshmi in the
central hall, just opposite the front door, right above the sofa set with springs—well, this one had all the qualifications for a British job and the horoscope of the bridegroom. In a new India the university degree spoke the stars and threw into darkness the horoscope of the ancients. Marriage became a commodity, and European clothes the new uniform. Success waited at your garden-gate, and the British came and took you away in landau and four to a comfortable sub-collectorship. But if you are small, and your limbs awkward, not even the Gothic scroll would lead you up to the District Offices. 15

Kirillov thus, by his remarks on education of the past years and the present brings a contrast in the validity of a University degree. The statement about scholarship is scathing no doubt but he possesses a dialectical reality. Raja Rao describes his central character, Kirillov as a confused person, his name itself is changed from Padmanabhan Iyer to Comrade Kirillov in order to give it a communistic touch. He is a voracious reader and hence masters various languages in order to read the relevant books. Thus Kirillov is a highly intellectual man having diverse interests.

In The Cat and Shakespeare the two main characters Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair are educated.

15. Comrade Kirillov, pp. 11-12
The former is a brahmin and works as a clerk, the latter a non-brahmin and also works as a clerk but in the Ration Office. Govindan Nair is more enlightened as he believes and preaches the mother-cat theory thus makes a total surrender to the Divine Mother. It is Pai who learns the 'kitten's-way' from Nair in the end. Witty Nair, brings to light the corrupt practises in a good-humoured way. He reveals serious things in a humourous way and trivialities in a very serious manner. Govindan Nair is not restricted to the Ashtavakra alone, he is a master of many languages and has knowledge of various literatures and theologies. He speaks a language which is a combination of both Shakespeare and Oliver Goldsmith. In order to explain his message he draws examples from literature. He elicits the cat-hold theory with equivalents in different religions and countries. Nair acts, accepts or rejects confidently because his knowledge of other religions is vast in comparison to those who profess them. It is because Nair is educated and knowledgeable that he is free from prejudices and thus easily surrenders to the 'the cat' or Feminine Principle.

The theme of marriage is again more forcefully presented in two of his novels The Serpent and the Rope and Comrade Kirillov. The East-West encounters in marriages is seen in these two novels while Kanthapura and The Cat and Shakespeare being Indian in nature show
marriage as a sacred union between man and woman.

The Kanthapurians with their rural sensibility know that marriage means a man of any nature who has a lady who can bear him children and look after the family. A lady's domain is restricted to her home alone unlike the urbanites where a lady either chooses to work or goes to club. If widowed she remains so with her head shaven, in a village, whereas a widower has the advantage of marrying again. Such is the position of a woman in an undeveloped village. An example is given where Bhatta arranges the marriage between Advocate Seenappa, thirty four, a widower with three children, and the daughter of Venkamma who is yet in her teens. Bhatta feels Venkamma will be happy to have an advocate for her son-in-law and whether it is the first or second marriage does not matter. The girl will be happy and blessed with many children. He further states that Seenappa's eldest daughter is already married, and will go to her in-laws leaving Venkamma's daughter with two children. Such is the position of a girl in a village. The horoscopes too are matched so as to ensure a perfect compatibility between the couple. One of the village woman Santamma says:

Let our marriages at least be according to the ancient ways.  

16. Kanthapura, pp. 113-114
A contrast to this is the marriage between Madeleine and Rama. In *The Serpent and the Rope* the marriage between Rama's father and his Little Mother reminds us that the ancient village practices still continue. Rama's father having married twice, on losing his second wife is privileged to marry a third time to a girl who is much younger to his son, Rama. But on the death of Rama's father she remains a widow and fulfils the duties of parents towards their children. Though Rama's father is a learned man and a mathematician he is yet to break away from the shackles of the tradition of the past. Rama makes a break through for he marries a French in spite of being a tradition-bound Brahmin. Madeleine Rousellin, though senior in age marries Ramaswamy because of his Brahminism. Moreover over her studies for the doctoral degree concerning the Cathars origin is traced to be of Indian origin. She never likes the idea of touch as she loves celibacy and implores Rama to practise 'Brahmacharya' of the ancestors but he, "was too proud a Brahmin to feel defeated. The bridge was anyhow there, and could not be crossed".17 The bridge seems a fragile one as under the strain of the death of Rama's and Madeleine's first child, cracks appear. Frustration grows within Madeleine as she is more sensitive about the death than Rama who is taught

17. *The Serpent and the Rope*, p.15
to accept death as an illusion, for the soul lives on. On the other hand Catholicism believes in reincarnation after death. These answers are not favourably accepted by her and in a tremendous mental disorder and to win an identity with her husband, like all Indian women, she embraces Buddhism erroneously taking it to be of Indian origin. The process of disintegration in their married life is hastened with the death of Madeleine's second child and then completed by her total acceptance of Buddhism and withdrawal from the world, and finally the inevitable divorce. Thus the gulf between the East and the West cannot be bridged so easily for a little misconception or a calamity will break the rope bridges. Her estranged relationship with Rama makes her feel that only Indian women are capable of merging their identity with that of their husbands, she suggested Rama to remarry an Indian girl younger to him. She writes to Catherine:

I am sure it would also be wise to give Rama his freedom... He will be happy with an Indian woman, I have no doubt. 18

Madeleine tried to reach Rama through a changed religion but failed.

Savithri, a little princess, a Cambridge

18. Ibid., p.394
undergraduate goes abroad for studies. She is engaged to Pratap in India. Though she takes up the western ways of life of smoking and dancing and having an affair with Rama still she returns home to be married to the rightful match, Pratap, her father chooses for her.

Discussing marriage between Rama and Madeleine or Georges forthcoming marriage with Catherine, Saroja wishes to be a European where a woman is given the freedom to choose her own husband. But Rama much acclimatised to the Indian tradition retaliates:

"What freedom? [Rama exclaimed] The freedom of foolishness. In what way, Saroja, do you think Catherine or Madeleine is better off than you?"

"They know how to love."

"And you?"

"And we know how to bear children. We are just like a motorcar or a bank account... Our joy is a treasury receipt."

So in the West there is too much freedom and the East too traditionally bound. Saroja, Rama's sister marries Subramanya Swamy, whom she is incapable of loving again and hence Raja Rao focuses on the futility of marriage as a

19. Ibid., p.257
social institution only. Saroja's assertion regarding marriage:

Between a funeral and marriage, there isn't much to choose. In both you have Brahmins with mantras—whether it is in Benares or here, it makes no difference—and in both you have the pandal first, and then music in front, flowers, bright shawls, fire. The only difference is that in one you are two, and in the other you are alone.

With these pessimistic views she goes through the marriage rituals. On leaving her mother's home a sad note of self-sacrifice is noticed when she says to Rama:

Brother, I shall bring but a fair name to the household. Do not worry.

In France Oncle Charles's marriage with Tante Zoubie is only a social adjustment and nothing more. Zoubie is of the opinion that Charles marries her only because he felt lonely and wants a wife to sew buttons or wipe his saliva from his face. She adds that, "marriage is a grand institution. It prepares you handsomely for the grave."

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20. Ibid., p.258
21. Ibid., p.271
22. Ibid., p.374
Charles's daughter Catherine marries Georges on compassionate ground. Georges is a Russian who is rather a confused man who sees goodness in everything. He bears a scar within his mind but never exposes it even to his fiance. Another marriage that takes place is between Lakshmi and Sham Sundar. Sham Sundar is seen to "prefer white skin to brown [one]" and in no way proves to be an ideal couple. It is due to the hollowness in Lakshmi's marital status that she develops a liking for Ramaswamy.

Raja Rao shows all the marriages, of an older tradition, modern, ultra modern and the Western too. But we notice that all the marriages have failed due to some reason or the other they are most unproductive and futile. There is something lacking either in culture, passion, kinship or sanctity which produces discord in the union of all the couples.

In Comrade Kirillov Raja Rao attempts more successfully a synthesis between the East and the West. Kirillov, like Rama marries a girl from the West, Irene, an intelligent Czech woman. Irene too like Madeleine loves the Indian culture and the Brahmin qualities in her husband. She learns Sanskrit but notices the egoism of her husband, hence a doubt arises in her mind of her acceptance in India. Thus she gets a setback, she lacks confidence whether she can merge herself fully in a totally new cultural setup. This attitude nurtures a strong hatred for
India and she vows never to go to India. The evil hand of death snatches her away from Kirillov during the birth of her second child. Her premature death proves that the East and the West cannot meet, be it on personal misunderstanding or a natural calamity. Before discussing the East-West encounter, the marriage theme of *The Cat and Shakespeare* is to be discussed.

Marriages in *The Cat and Shakespeare* too are not in anyway strong and ideal. Ramakrishna Pai is married to Saroja but due to her over indulgence in her children and coconut business he feels neglected. To satisfy his needs he befriends Shantha a school teacher. She knows to give and gives everything to Pai. Govindan Nair too indulges in worldly pleasures but is more enlightened than Pai. Lakshmi of the brothel house undresses and waits to be enjoyed by Nair, instead he blesses her as his sister as her "whole being" becomes "lucent". The Cat-hold theory professes the superiority of the Primordial Mother or Shaktism. Nair knows the kitten's way and thus surrenders completely to the Feminine Principle.

Speaking on the East-West encounter and the role it plays in the lives of Rama and Kirillov basically is that both are Brahmins of India. Madeleine and Irene make an attempt to follow the Indian religions so as to win their identity with their respective husbands. They try to embrace Hinduism with a Christian blood within them thus
their hesitation impedes in the acceptance of the new religion. Raja Rao tries to repudiate Kipling's assertion of the East and the West never meeting at all. Raja Rao makes the two worlds meet at various points but a total merger is never shown. The rope bridges between the East and West are built but are not strong enough to withstand the test of time, for example cultural, traditional, national or religious inconsistency easily breaks the bridges. Madeleine loses her first son Pierre, if he were alive, he would be twenty three years of age and he would have certainly constructed a bridge across these cultural gulf. Children do play an important role in restoring the strained relationship between husband and wife. Their egos are neutralised through their child and hence the misunderstanding is easily patched up. It is through religion that Madeleine tries to reach Rama but fails disastrously. Irene, on the other hand reaches Kirillov but he being a confused man with egoistic mannerisms she withers away feeling helpless at entering into a new cultural atmosphere. Hence the bridge is broken in the case of Madeleine as well as Irene. Both the heroes are staunch Brahmins and with their Brahminhood garb they remain sincere to their religion. Had Madeleine too remained true to her Christian faith and Irene too not lost her confidence in Kirillov, both the marriages could have been successful. The inevitable divorce between Rama and Madeleine
could have been averted.

The major contrasts are culture and religion but besides these there are sex, life and death and knowledge which show contrasts between the attitudes of the orientals and the occidentals. Sex stands as the extremes in both the cases. For an Indian it is between two married people, whereas, in West sex is free and unrestricted sexual activities do take place whether married or not. Madeleine was different, she had never touched anyone nor did she like the idea of touch. In India sex is sacred and performed after marriage, though secretly illicit relations continue to take place. Divorces are not common in the East but in the West if a couple is incompatible a divorce is permissible. Indians lead a conventional life following the ancient tradition. Though modernised in attire and culture still in the very core they remain Indians. West has no bindings on the life style of the people, yet, the Westerners are punctual and keep up their appointment, whereas Indians take it more lightly. Indians have attained knowledge from the Vedas, the Puranas and the Upanishads and the theologies practised abroad are traced to be of Indian origin. Thus the above arguments are some of the contrasts between the East and the West which do not allow a concrete bridge to be built. The illusion remains illusion and reality reality, just as the East remains East and West West.
Raja Rao seems to advocate inter-caste marriages though in the initial stages there may be difficulties and differences of adjustment and understanding to various degrees. The history of mankind is the story of such inter-racial fusion, though its primary result may be confusion of duties and neglect of the cultures of the parties. It, however, leads to a reawakening of the spirit, a re-assessment of cultural values and a new civilisation. A total merger of two different cultures will certainly take time.

The theme on Buddhism is presented to a great extent in The Serpent and the Rope. Ramaswamy's wife Madeleine takes to Buddhism after the death of her two children. She never found solace in her own religion as she did in this newly adopted religion. Buddhist philosophy teaches her to bear the tragedy of her children. She thus follows the Buddhist rituals with respect and piety. She reads volumes and volumes to probe deeper and deeper in this newly found religion. While reading scriptures she comes across a conversation between Lord Buddha and Vassita. Vassita loses her child and asks the Lord to restore life in him. Lord Buddha asks Vassita to fetch mustard seeds from a house which has seen no deaths in their family. Vassita goes in search of such a house but no one concedes to her demands and she returns to the Lord of Compassion, and he speaks:
"Thou speakest the Truth indeed, little mother, for all that has birth must perforce have death. The complex must dissolve, the becoming end in being". 23

For Madeleine, Buddhism gives her a certain insight into her own nature. She feels protected and the Buddhist philosophy helps her to step into India. She discards her own religion and accepts Buddhism which she feels is more compatible and soothing to her shattered life. Rama himself feels that Madeleine stands on the cross-roads of Indian religion and Christianity, but the latter is overwhelming, he says,

For Madeleine there is an area which is not me [Rama] that she fills with Christian longings, but she will not admit it. 24

Her conscience did not permit her to worship the bull for she is reminded that primarily she is a Christian and worship is not a ritual in her Christian faith, "Catholicism is in her blood". 25 She embraces Buddhism without much ado because it bears similarities with Christianity.

Buddhism and Christianity believe in

23. Ibid., p.236
24. Ibid., p.80
25. Ibid.
incarnation and no idol worship is practised. The ultimate aim in both is to arrive at the Truth giving up all the worldly aspects or in other words to attain Nirvana. Hindu philosophy on the other hand believes in a different way to achieve the goal in life. Hindus believe in deathlessness, for after death the soul re-enters a new body and emerges in a new form. Idol worship is one of the rituals to be practised and to know the Ultimate Reality it is not necessary to renounce the world but to live in the maya (illusion) and recognise and differentiate the illusion from reality. This is only got by Gnãna (knowledge).

Madeleine through her knowledge of various books and scriptures decides to practise Buddhism, but could not delve deep enough to know the real essence of this philosophy. Ramaswamy says:

religion is an instinct —
that gives illumination to a
line, a reference

similarly,

when she talks of Buddhism I feel the word dukkha almost with the entrails dropping into
my hand, whereas for her it is
mere sorrow. Dukkha is the very
tragedy of creation, the sorrow
of the sorrow that sorrow is. 26

Buddhism in fact deepens her mist of

26. Ibid., p. 80
illusion. She undertakes fasts, penances and chanting of mantras. Christianity believes in the separate existence of man and God, so does Buddhism. Regular practice of Japas and meditations make her a saint no doubt but she strays into a state of asceticism. Buddhist rituals are not followed by leading a normal married life, so she not only changes her behavioural pattern but her living style too which gives a look of sanctity with no extra furniture and decorations. Rama feels:

It was a strange house, it was someone else's house ... The rooms were bare. Almost all the furniture was gone, it seemed. There was the same old bed, covered with a yellow bed cover... The table was richer with few more vajras, a few more demons and a very beautiful Avalokiteshvara. She sat on the floor, squat like a Hindu ... The room smelt of something familiar - it smelt of sandalwood.

A complete transformation takes place in Madeleine, to her, human beings are nothing but "eighteen aggregates". Catholicism seems to have lost its meaning to her. Her involvement in Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism only leads to an estranged relationship with her husband. Raja Rao, expressing his views regarding Madeleine's

27. Ibid., pp. 386-387
change of religion says that in embracing Buddhism she is unfair to her own dharma, Catholicism. If she had remained faithful to her religion the disaster of divorce would not have taken place.

Christianity and non-dualism of Sankara is again different but the requirement is authenticity, authenticity in whatever you are. Madeleine's estranged relationship with Rama makes her feel that it is only Indian women who are privileged to merge their identity with their husbands. Whereas in the West, women lead a more independent life.

The themes of Raja Rao's novels as seen above are concerned by and large with the destiny of man and his struggle for self-realisation. This confirms their universal appeal. Moreover, he is the pioneer in dealing with the Indian philosophy so deeply and exquisitely. All his novels including social, political, metaphysical or philosophical reveal Raja Rao as a successful creative genius.