CHAPTER III

THE USE OF MYTH IN RAJA RAO'S NOVELS:  
'LOOKING' AND 'SEEING'
Quite aware of the richness of Indian mythology, Raja Rao has exploited myth playing on its various gamuts with deftness and felicity. His is the digressional use of myth as he employs it in a meandering fashion. In the famous "Foreword" to Kanthapura (1938), Raja Rao claims, "Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was, and still is, the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story".

Raja Rao's novels are replete with the use of Indian myths. The myths, he employs, are mainly of three kinds:

(a) Puranic Myths
(b) Localised Myths
(c) Rites and Rituals

The Puranic myths pertain to the binary opposition of the good and the evil as exemplified in the characters of Rama and Ravana. The central myth Raja Rao employs in Kanthapura is that of Rama and Ravana. The polarities between
the good and the evil, as exemplified in Rama and Ravana, are used to describe the Gandhian struggle against the brutal force of the Red Man.

Kanthapura is mainly a rendering of the localised myth - the legendary history of a village in the western coast of India - which Raja Rao calls sthala-purana (p.5). Even localised myths such as that of Kenchamma have been made use of. By employing Indian myth of Time and Chronology and by mythologizing the historical characters, Raja Rao has telescoped the past and the present; the current of the past passing ceaselessly in the present, and gushing towards the future. Also, rites and rituals of ploughing, of worship and sacrifice abound in Kanthapur to give credence to the atmosphere of the novel.

As in Kanthapura, so in The Serpent and the Rope (1968), Raja Rao perceives links in a vast panorama of human experience but the mythical perception, here, assumes eclectic proportions. The recurrent mythical allusion in it is the binary relationship of Radha-Krishna, Satyavan-Savitri, Tristan-Iseult, which forms the dominant motif in the relationship between Ramaswamy and Savithri.

Ramaswamy's spiritual toothaches and his quest for self-realization gain an extension into infinity by being absorbed into the myth of Gautama Buddha. Some myths and legends have been utilized to bring home didactic lessons.
Rites and rituals also provide a definite frame of reference. Savithri performing certain rites in Ramaswamy's hotel room in London, washing his feet, performing arathi three times, and touching her head with kumkum invest the novel with an aura of mythology. The rakhi ritual has also been employed in the novel.

The myth of hunter and the bilva tree is central to The Cat and Shakespeare (1965). It has been used for substantiating the metaphysical musings of some characters. Myths like those of Sindbad, the sailor, Hanuman and Bhima have been utilized for establishing the identity of characters. Some myths have been used in a digressional manner for the sake of emphasizing a particular point in a story or delineating an aspect of a character with their help and, sometimes, as passing references.

Comrade Kirillov (1976) stands apart among the novels of Raja Rao as it is not loaded with myths and legends but contains a streak of mythical use. Mythical might is imparted to Comrade Kirillov's quest for self-realization by dovetailing it with the myth of the horse Kanthaka, carrying Siddhartha to his destination of self-realization. The myth of Parvati and Lord Shiva of Kailash is employed in a particular perspective of a story told by the narrator to Kamal Dev. The myths of Krishna, Goddess Lakshmi, Uttara, Ravana, Hanuman, Rama and Sita abound in the novel. And then there is also such an allusive stuff as myths are made of.
A brief survey of his four novels shows that Raja Rao is, perhaps, an outstanding exponent of the digressional technique. His is the method of mythologizing the contemporary reality. The reflections and life-responses of the characters in his novels always correspond to some archetypal pattern. By interweaving myths in his novels, Raja Rao attempts to create an impression that all human feeling is the same feeling, all human experience is the same experience and all human suffering is the same suffering. Cosmic truth, no doubt, is in the state of flux but all observations and experiences cohere into the same archetypal pattern.

Kanthapura

*Kanthapura* (1938), a novel of selfless action, depicts the theme of organized struggle for India's independence from the yoke of British rule. Apparently a novel of political resurgence, it bristles with many myths which Raja Rao has finely knit into his creative matrix. It is a fictional rendering of *sthala-purana* - the legendary history of a place or a village. Embedded in it are the localised myths of Goddess Kenchamma and her daughter, Himavathy. The well-known epic or *Puranic* myths are also revitalized in the novel as it dramatizes the philosophy of selfless action as expounded in the *Bhagwad Gita*. The polarities between good and evil as exemplified in Rama and Ravana are used to describe the Gandhian struggle for freedom against the brutal force of the Red Man. The
Indian struggle for freedom is equated with the great war of the *Mahabharata*, and Kanthapura becomes a veritable Kurukshetra. Raja Rao has mythologized even the historical characters like Gandhi to enact the war between the forces of good and evil, truth and untruth, love and hatred. The Indian myth of Time and Chronology has also been employed to present the change from one civilization to another as a continuum of cyclical process. Rites and rituals permeating the novel lend credibility to the suggestions of mythical parallels in it.

The contemporary Indian reality of freedom struggle in a small village is telescoped with the cultural experiences of the Puranic world. With the help of various myths, Raja Rao conveys vividly "the whole ethos of the Indian villagers". Indicating the tremendous significance of myth, he writes in the "Foreword" of the novel:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *Sthala-Purana*, or a legendary history of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by the village - Rama might have rested under this pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages throughout the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate... (p.5).

The very opening of *Kanthapura* captures the zeitgeist of the *sthala-purana* and the description of the divine presence of the Gram-Devi Kenchamma has a mythical semblance of the Puranic tales. The past mingles with the present and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of the grandmother always bright. The Kanthapurians are
ardent devotees of Kenchamma and sing hosannas to her which remind one of Durga-Stuti:

Kenchamma, Kenchamma Goddess, benign and bounteous, Mother of earth, blood of life, Harvest queen, rain-crowned, Kenchamma, Kenchamma Goddess, benign and bounteous. (p.10).

Kenchamma, the local goddess who always protects the Kanthapurians through famine and disease, death and despair is so much embedded in the consciousness of the Kanthapurians that they offer their first rice or their first fruit, prostrate before her and offer 'saris' and bodicloth for every birth and marriage. (pp.9-10). The villagers believe that Kenchamma actively participates during their hard times, blesses them and wards off their dangers and diseases. It is she who saves them from the small-pox and cholera. People offer "a sari and a gold trinket to the goddess and the goddess never touched those that are to live as for the old ones, they would have died one way or the other ... "(p.9). Even in the times of drought, Kenchamma helps the devotees by sending down rain and "she smiles on you a smile such as you have never before beheld"(p.9). She never fails her devotees in their grief but her area of benediction is confined to Kanthapura and she cannot help Ramappa and Subanna because she is "the Goddess of Kanthapura, not of Talassana and they ought to have stayed in Talassana and gone into Goddess Talassana to offer their prayers" (p.9). Depicting the influence of
the local deity on villagers, Henry Whitehead observes, "Shiva and Vishnu may be more dignified beings, but the village deity is regarded as a more present help in trouble and is more intimately concerned with the happiness and prosperity of the villagers".3

The story of Goddess Kenchamma's settling in Kanthapura finds a mythical parallel in the Ganga-Purana. As the divine river Ganga came down from the Vaikuntha (paradise) to this earth for the purification of the mortal remains of his cursed ancestors, so Kenchamma comes down from the Heavens to the rescue of Kanthapurians, who feel:

Kenchamma is our goddess, Great and bounteous is she, She killed a demon ages, ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives. Kenchamma came from the Heavens - it was the sage Tripura who had made penances to bring her down ...(p.8).

Now the fight that Kenchamma had with the demon who killed the young sons of the village and molested their young wives is again reminiscent of the Devi-Purana in which Goddess Durga kills the demon, Mahisasur. To give local colour to the Puranic myth, Kenchamma, too, fights the demon and kills him as the old woman, Achakka, describes:

And she wages such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth and that is why, the Kenchamma Hill is all red(p.8).

Such is the divine grace of Kenchamma that the villagers resign all their problems to the will of the Goddess so much so that they invoke her grace to destroy the British Government (p.136).
Thus the myth of Kenchamma has been used to explain the conflict between the good and the evil, and the whole complex of human activity is dominated by the goddess.

Several myths have been associated with the river Himavathy, the daughter of Kenchamma. The myth knit around the river Himavathy is also local in character and people draw inspiration and sustenance from it as Range Gowda says:

I drank three handfuls of Himavathy water, and I said, "Protect us, Mother!"... (p.258).

The villagers have an ardent faith in Himavathy and "sometimes people say to themselves, the Goddess of the River plays through the night with the Goddess of the Hill" (p.8). The river Himavathy exerts a rich influence over the destinies of the villagers with the majesty of Puranic gods and goddesses. The rare authenticity to the mythical nature of the immense powers of the river Himavathy is provided in the novel. The story of the river Himavathy is so mythically delineated that the river, while in high spate, stood silently to allow the last rites of the pious Ramakrishnayya to be performed, and after the completion of the last rites, it carried away in its fury all that remained of the holy Ramakrishnayya in the form of ash and bone(p.146).

Another legend that goes about the river Himavathy is that a thousand years ago, the robust Chandels of the warrior Rajput clan lived and loved at Khajuraho. The legendary father of Chandels race is Chandra, the moon-god. A myth recalls that as the pretty Himavathy, daughter of a priest of Benaras, bathed in the moonlit waters of Rati lake, Chandra descended from the heavens and embraced her in the manner of lesser mortals. As he was leaving, Chandra told her that she would
give birth to a founder of a valorous race. A son was born and one of his descendants performed a sacrifice here at Khajavahaka. His dynasty raised temples to venerate their gods at the height of Chandela power. They re-create not only the glories of the Chandels but also their intense spiritual passion.

Like Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1962), the divine power is everywhere in Kanthapura to direct, control, inspire and even sit in judgement over the innocent lives of the villagers. The same deep reverence, as one finds in Puranic tales, is described in the person of Kenchamma in Kanthapura who watches over marriage, funeral, sickness, death, ploughing, rain, harvesting, arrests and release of the villagers.

Raja Rao has created a veritable sthala-purana in this novel and the tale of Kenchamma is told in full detail to acquaint the reader of the local deity's influence. Moreover, the essential difference between the well-known Puranic myth and the sthala-purana demands the detailed description because of the reader's unfamiliarity with the latter "but as soon as the local legend has been narrated and established, its function becomes the same as that of a more well-known myth".

Raja Rao creates a sthala-purana in projecting the dedicated and selfless deeds of the local Mahatma Gandhi, Moorthy. "The impact of Gandhi", observes C.D.Narasimhaiah, "was that of a traditional religion" and many Gandhis emerged in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. To be a Gandhian was very heaven
in those days. Moorthy is one such Gandhi who revolutionizes the whole village. Mahatma Gandhi, like Godot in Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, does not appear as a person but his influence is a pervasive force throughout the novel and the character of Moorthy, the village Gandhi, is mythicized, and the rustics of Kanthapura spontaneously respond to Moorthy's religious views. Range Gowda exhorts the villagers to follow Moorthy's advice who is fit to lead the freedom movement in Kanthapura. The philosophy of these "soldier-saints" (p.181), known as Satyagrahis, is based on the doctrine of the selfless action as enunciated in the Bhagwad Gita. How slumbering Indian village is galvanized into action is significant, no doubt, but what is of greater importance, as Narsingh Srivastva feels, is "the metaphysic of selfless action expressed through Satyagraha".

The village women, too, think of Gandhi as the Sahyadri mountain, big and blue, and Moorthy as the small mountain. Moorthy's character is idealized in the novel to the extent of being regarded as a local Mahatma because a myth "necessarily deals with an idealised man or a man larger than life". Like Christ, Moorthy takes the sin of others upon himself, purifies his own soul through penance and conquers physical desires. The villagers speak of him as "our Gandhi" (p.109) and "the saint of our village" (p.135). Range Gowda, the village headman, describes Moorthy as "our Mahatma" (p.109).
As the name 'Moorthy' indicates, he is a true image of Mahatma Gandhi, who remains as invisible living presence throughout the novel and "the hero-anti-hero arises as a crucible of experience.- a local personality becomes a universal type". Even the hilltops of Himavathy echo the ever-inspiring slogan "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai, Jai Mahatma Gandhi Ki". And Moorthy is an embodiment of Gandhism who echoes his master's voice, with perfect fidelity and devotion. He carries the message of Gandhian principles of non-violence, truth and love, and the villagers venerate him so much that in house after house in the neighbouring villages, they have a picture of Moorthy taken from the city papers. He says to himself, "I shall love even my enemies. The Mahatma says we should love our enemies" (p.92). Again, he tells the elders of the village: "One cannot become a member of the Congress if one will not promise to practise Ahimsa, and to speak Truth and to spin at least two thousand yards of yarn per year" (p.103). He takes the lead in the performance of Harikathas and Jayanthis in the village, converts the pariah women into the followers of Mahatma Gandhi and inspires them to spin with Charkha. The Gandhian ideal of non-violence is practically preached by him at the time of his arrest when he exhorts his followers to contain violence (p.125). Moorthy goes through life like "a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and 'brahminc' " (p.12) as is evidenced in his exhortation to Rangamma:
The greatest enemy is in us. If only we would not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm, affection towards our fellowmen we would be stronger (p.96).

To explain the nature of redemptory suffering in human society, Raja Rao "takes the myth of suffering more directly self-imposed to absorb the evil of others." Moorthy, like Gandhi, feels that fasting is good for the mind and undertakes fasting for the purpose of penance and self-purification. He admonishes Ratna: "Pray with me that the sins of others may be purified with our prayers" (p.95). He thinks that he is not pure, that is why so much of violence has taken place at the Skeffington Coffee Estate. He purifies himself through fasting which, he feels, would enable him to practise Gandhian principles of love, truth and Ahimsa (p.90). Not only this, he preaches the adversary's conversion by the concept of self-purification and considers it a non-violent weapon to fight the British:

Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the police and the Revenue officials, but against the demoniac corruption that has entered their hearts, and the purer we are, the greater will be our victory for the victory we seek is the victory of the heart (p.100).

Just as in a myth, "some of the chief characters are gods and other beings larger in power than humanity", in Kanthapura, too, Moorthy is presented as an exalted being and his character as well as the whole situation is mythicized. In mythicizing the central character, Raja Rao adheres to the Indian classical tradition. By accepting obligations and higher values in an ideal character, man gains dignity and
serenity. "The serious ... (work)... which seeks enduring human significance should, thus, deal with the idealised man, because it seeks to make man more nearer to the ideal".12

Here lies an essential difference in the use of myth between Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Anand, for example, does not idealize the character of Bakha or Gandhi in Untouchable and even in Gauri, inspite of Gauri's correspondence with Sita in her passive suffering, her character is not mythicized in such an ideal manner. Rather Gauri rejects Sita's stance and explores a new way for herself because she is the twentieth century modern version of Sita. Anand explodes the Sita myth as Gauri does not invoke the Mother Earth to open and absorb her into her womb when her husband insults her. Instead, she turns her back on him, walks out of the village bravely like a tigress, and takes up the nursing job in Colonel Mahindra's clinic in Hoshiarpur. Anand pursues the myth for illuminating a character like Gauri or enlarging a scope of contemporary situation but rejects it as he feels that the same type of behaviour is not practicable in the modern times. Anand observes:

I define myths, ancient and modern, as the aspiration of a character to be and being is only important through becoming. The old being is irrelevant to our changed situations.13

As against this, Raja Rao almost substitutes the mythical characters with the contemporary ones in Kanthapura, and no actual distinction between the myth and the reality can be perceived in the novel.
The main myth of Rama and Ravana which has associations with the 'good' and 'evil' forces is used in the novel to portray the struggle for independence from the British rule. Since every Indian is quite familiar with the story of the *Ramayana*, the villagers understand Gandhi's fight with the foreign rulers in the mythical analogy of the battle between Rama and Ravana. Again, the freedom movement is equated with the *Mahabharata Yudha*. As the *Mahabharata* is charged with the divine powers of Krishna, *Kanthapura* is charged with redemptive, though invisible, presence of Mahatma Gandhi. He is given the status of an incarnation of *Kaliyuga*, and *Kanthapura* becomes "India in microcosm". The illiterate narrator, Abhakka, mingles the fact of subtler thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi in the contemporary situation with the myths, fables and legends of the yore embedded in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The legendary heroes are "inextricably linked up with the historical person", as Mahatma Gandhi is described as an incarnation of Rama and Krishna, born to free the Mother India from the tyranny of the demons, Ravana and Kansa.

The story of Mahatma Gandhi's birth on the request of Sage Valmiki to Lord Brahma is narrated in a mythical style by the *Hari-Katha* man, Jayaramachar, in a religious congregation. It invites comparison with the incarnations of Rama and Krishna as described in the *Puranas*. Jayaramachar narrates the *Katha* of the incarnation of the Mahatma who was sent by Brahma to this world for the destruction of evil and restoration of good (pp.22-23).
Thus, the Puranic style is employed to describe the birth of Gandhi which makes Iyengar feel that "the style of narration makes the book more a Gandhi Purana than a piece of mere fiction. Gandhi is the invisible God, Moorthy is the visible avatar". By mythicizing the character of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the freedom struggle, the whole struggle for independence is consciously mythicised by Raja Rao.

Mahatma Gandhi's character in Kanthapura has been highly idealized like that of Rama in the Ramayana. Like Rama, Mahatma Gandhi is described as a reincarnation of God. Rama was venerated by his subjects as an embodiment of virtues. Ravana was a foil to Rama; the former symbolized evil, falsehood, hypocrisy and greed, and the latter a symbol of truth and goodness. Ravana's subjects were living under the reign of terror as rape, loot and violence were everyday occurrences. Disgusted with the unbecoming action of Ravana, people gathered together and approached Brahma, the Creator, with a petition:

"A certain wicked rakshasa named Ravana greatly oppresses us", they said, "whom we suffer patiently because thou hast granted him a boon - not to be slain by gandharvas or Yakshas or rakshasas or gods. But now his tyranny becometh past endurance, O Lord thou shouldst devise some method to destroy him."

The Brahma, therefore, incarnated Rama to make people happy by steering clear the embodiment of evil by destroying the ten-headed Ravana.
In Kanthapura, "the impact of Gandhiji is seen as mythological" because he is described as the reincarnation of Rama who has taken birth to get back his Sita, i.e., political freedom. His psychological, rather than physical, presence in the novel lends a mythical aura around his saintly figure. As in Ravana's Lanka, so in Kanthapura, the vices, greed and hypocrisy were rampant. Since 1857, the British had been sucking the blood of innocent Indians and the exploitation by the British was as immense as it was during Ravana's regime. Like Ravana, the British had come to kidnap political freedom, strangulating all their emotions.

If Mahatma Gandhi is virtue incarnate like Rama, Jawaharlal Nehru is like Rama's brother, Bharata – an incarnation of political wisdom and devotion. To complete the analogy, Gandhi's visit to England to attend the Round Table Conference in 1931 hoping to return with Swaraj is likened to Rama's visit to Lanka and returning with his spouse, Sita, after killing the demon Ravana. And people find themselves in the same ecstatic mood as the residents of Ayodhya were, while anxiously waiting for the happy return of Rama and Sita. They hope that Gandhi will return with his Sita, i.e., Swaraja (p. 257). Thus Gandhi's trip to England is spoken of in terms of Indian myth and tradition and "the ever-present India mythos finally absorbs the characters and history it has all along been bathing and overwhelming."
The same sentiment is echoed in Raja Rao's story "Narsiga" which, too, speaks of the struggle for independence and this struggle is viewed by illiterate shepherd boy, Narsiga, in mythical overtones. Narsiga feels that the Mother India has been imprisoned by the Red Man, and feels that "the red man rules us. He takes away all our gold and all our food, and he allows the peasants to starve and the children to die milkless". Narsiga's joy at Mahatma Gandhi's release from jail is equated with Sita's release from Lanka:

The Mahatma is released. Leave the fields and rejoice. The Mahatma, you know, is going to fly in the air today like Goddess Sita when she was going back from Lanka with her husband Rama. He is going to fly in the air in a chariot of flowers drawn by four horses.

As in the story, "Narsiga", so in Kanthapura, the contemporary reality is mythicized. Mahatma Gandhi has not only been compared with Rama but he has also been identified with Krishna. The Hari Kanthadasa raises Gandhi to the level of a god by identifying him with Krishna:

You remember how Krishna when he was a babe of four had begun to fight against demons and had killed the Serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country.... Men followed him, as they did Krishna, the flute-players; and so he goes from village to village, to slay the serpent of the foreign rule (p.22).

The Kaliya tale is loaded with many meanings. The implication is that even the enemies fell and when an ignorant pathan wanted to kill him with a sword while the Mahatma was coming
out of a lecture-hall, putting his hands on the wicked man's shoulders, the Mahatma said:

Brother, what do you want of me? And the man falls at the feet of the Mahatma... there was never a soul more devoted than he. And the serpent that crossed the thighs of the Mahatma, a huge serpent too...(p.23).

Another story of Krishna goes that when the whole world was drowned in the deluge, Krishna was safe on a pipal leaf sucking his thumb. The idea implied here is that even if the British rulers destroy the whole world, Mahatma Gandhi will remain miraculously safe like Krishna. It is written in the Gita that whensoever there is a decline of righteousness, and unrighteousness is on the ascendance, Krishna-like incarnations come to earth to save humanity from evil forces. Mahatma Gandhi is significantly compared with Krishna as he, too, takes birth when the unrighteousness of the British rule tramples the noble Indian virtues. The epigram in the novel reads on identical lines: "When-so-ever there is misery and ignorance, I come".

Gandhi has further been compared with Shiva. The villagers in Kanthapura invoke the grace of Brahma, the Creator, by informing him that the British rulers whip them to make their women die milkless and their men die ignorant. They beseech the Creator to send them one of his gods so that he may incarnate on Earth and bring back prosperity to India. Then the Brahma pronounces:
Siva himself will forthwith go and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery ... The messengers of Heaven shall fly to Kailas and Siva be informed of it (pp.22-23).

In the Indian mythology, Shiva is considered to be "the lord of songs, the lord of sacrifices, who heals, remedies, is brilliant as the sun, the best and most beautiful of gods, who grants prosperity and welfare to horses and sheep, men, women and cows; the lord of nourishment... but, on the other hand, he is the wielder of the thunderbolt, the bearer of bow and arrows, and mounted on chariot is terrible as a wild beast, destructive and fierce".22

Mahatma Gandhi, like Shiva, a paragon of many virtues, makes attempts to bring peace, plenty and prosperity to India; he removes the shackles of the British slavery eradicating ignorance, blind beliefs and other evil practices prevalent in the Indian society. He is calm and considerate like Shiva and believes in the non-violent means to attain freedom, but like Shiva, he is capable of opening his third eye to destroy his enemies. As the seat of Shiva is on the Kailash mountain which is pure and undefiled, so Gandhi is also elevated and esteemed as a holy, saintly figure. Gandhi's idea of Swaraj has been compared with the three eyes of Shiva:

Siva is the three-eyed, and Swaraj too is three-eyed; self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar (p.20).

In these analogies between Gandhi and Rama, Gandhi and Krishna or Gandhi and Shiva, one cannot find exact points of correspondences, but, by their use, the whole situation as
well as the characters in the novel are mythicized where the past mingles with the present and the gods mingle with men. This is what K. Ayyappa Paniker also feels when he says that "the divine or the supernatural is deeply involved in the human and the natural predicament in Kanthapura".  

Mahatma Gandhi is not only compared with Rama, Krishna and Shiva but also with Harishchandra. Drawing a parallel between Harishchandra and Gandhi, Raja Rao writes:

Like Harishchandra, before he finished his vow, the gods will come down and dissolve his row, and the Britishers will leave India, and we shall be free, and we shall pay less taxes and there will be no policemen (p. 172).

The legend goes that Harishchandra used to give away lots of gold to his subjects. Once Viswamitra, after stripping him of wealth and kingdom, demanded a gift for which the devout king Harishchandra had to sell his wife and child and he himself started working on a cemetery under the supervision of Chandala. Harishchandra was so pious and honest that he demanded a piece of cloth from his wife who came to the cemetery to perform the last rites of her son, who was killed by the bite of a serpent. It was at this pious act of Harishchandra that Gods became happy and Harishchandra was rescued from performing his embarrassing duty. Mahatma Gandhi is compared to Harishchandra as he, too, resisted all temptations to uphold the principles of Ahimsa, truth and honesty even in the teeth of trials and tribulations.
The battle between gods and demons, suras and asuras, is a recurrent motif in the Hindu mythology. The asuras were powerful, sometimes, even more than the gods, and many times they triumphed, threatening Indra's throne in Heaven with chaos and confusion. But everytime Indra's throne was saved by some miracle or divine strategy and asuras caused their own destruction. Mohini, Bhasmasura, Ravana are the asuras who challenge god or goodness, and their plans end in smoke in due course of time. In Kanthapura, the British rulers are asuras or demons who challenge the goodness, truth and justice while maltreating Indians and keeping them in subjugation. The clash between the Satyagrahis and the agents of the British Government is emblematic of the clash between good and evil, between suras and asuras. The Skeffington Coffee Estate is the world of asuras in miniature. The morally corrupt British officers have let loose tyranny and injustice all around; while the coolies in the Skeffington Coffee Estate are afraid of losing their jobs, even their lives. Mahatma Gandhi is a sura who brings hope and happiness for them and the Satyagrahis represent the Vanar Sena, the vast army of Rama, struggling to bring back their Sita, i.e., political freedom from the British rulers, asuras. Good is victorious in the end and the whole freedom struggle culminates into a sort of mythological war between Rama and Ravana, suras and asuras.
Raja Rao has created an **asura** in the person of the agent of Swami also, who considers the British King as the "protector of faith" and contemptuously speaks against "all this Gandhi and Gindhi who cannot pronounce even a gayathri" (p.129). The agent of Swami attributes all progress and prosperity to the so-called benevolent British Government which, he thinks, can bring about Ramrajya - a state of prosperity for all. An **asura** as the agent of Swami is, he subverts the myth of Rama and Ravana and uses it for his devilish design of dissuading villagers from joining Moorthy's non-cooperation movement. Quite opposed to the main drift of the novel, the agent of Swami, an **asura**, compares the British Government with Rama, and Mahatma Gandhi with Ravana (p.128).

The Indian myth of Time and Chronology has also been employed in the novel. An extraordinary vision of the passage of time from the smallest wink of an eye to the vast length of the life-time of the Creator God Brahma is depicted in the **Puranas**. In the novel, Rangamma tells that "just as a day of Brahma is a million million years of ours, the day of stars is a million million times of our day" (p.46). A complete cycle of **Mahayuga** is composed of our Ages of unequal duration: **Krita**, **Treta**, **Dvapara** and **Kali**. The most significant in the scheme of Ages is the progressively decreasing length of years, which corresponds to a decrease in excellence and virtue among men and in the quality of human life. Every
creation of the world begins in the perfection of the Krita Age, progressively deteriorates throughout the Treta and Dvapara until its final disintegration and destruction at the end of every Kali Age only to give way once more to a re-creation in a new Krita and so on. The characteristics of human life in each of the four Ages are described against the background of decreasing felicity in all aspects of life. Raja Rao's "time module in Kanthapura can be easily seen in the life of the living village which, having evolved to Kaliyuga, dissolves towards the end like a Pralaya ...". Before the mention of Gandhi or Swaraj in the novel, the events in Kanthapura dwell on the existential plane conditioned by Karma which can be associated with that of the Krita or Treta Yuga. Gods and temples begin to influence daily life of the villagers after the idea of the consecration and the growth of the Kanthapurishwari's temple dawns on Moorthy when he sees the half-sunk linga. The young men of Kanthapura observe Sankara Jayanti, Sankara Vijaya, Harikathas etc. Then, the elements of Kali Yuga emerge stronger when people like Bhatta, Waterfall Venkamma and the agent of Swami start contributing to the cause of tyrannical and corrupt British rulers. Things fall apart in Kanthapura and the Kaliyuga is in full force when the selfish speeches of the Swami and the commercial activities
of Bhatta point out the fact that the anarchy is let loose upon the villagers. Bhatta does not see any monetary gain in Gandhi bhajans and so leaves for Kashi to live a comfortable life where he is told "for every hymn and hiccup one gets a rupee" (p.258). The evil influence of Kaliyuga is evidenced in Satamma's word:

After all, my son, it is the Kaliyuga floods and as the sastras say, there will be the confusion of castes and the pollution of the progeny. We can't help it, perhaps...(pp43-44).

In this Kaliyuga, the people in Kanthapura put up a heroic struggle for attaining freedom from the British yoke. The end of the novel is like the end of Kaliyuga with the Pralaya or inundation engulfing the whole village. All the villagers leave Kanthapura to settle in Kashipura. Range Gowda, the one-time head of the village, goes to Kanthapura only to find, "there is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura" (p.258). This is undoubtedly a change from one Yuga cradling into another, and the parlaya indicates the end of cyclical civilization and the preparation for the new beginning and the trumpet-call of this change is heard by Range Gowda in the end of the novel whose heart "beat like a drum" (p.258). Achakka, the narrator in Kanthapura, stands for a feminine creative energy whose voice becomes mythified to represent the macrocosm in the microcosm. Like Tiresias in T.S.Eliot's The Waste Land, she provides a vital link between the past and the present. She
represents the hopes and aspirations of all the women of Kanthapura. Being an unlettered woman, she mingles myth and fact in her natural manner of reflection and observation, and through her vision and range of knowledge, Raja Rao "adds to the intensity and vividness of his narration." 25 Passing through her Collective Unconscious, the contemporary moment becomes a moment of eternity in the mobile concurrency of past and present in her narration. Telescoping the past and the present, she begins and continues the tale of freedom struggle through the life-struggle in the village. When the civilization is completely destroyed in the Kaliyuga of Kanthapura, she continues to live like a floating presence and sees another civilization which is in the offing, and Kanthapura becomes a symbol of transformation. Achakka, like Shelley's West Wind, is a symbol of rebirth and resurrection and "the myth becomes so open-ended that dissolving itself continues to live again in another formulation, and not definitely concretized." 26

In an interview with Shiva Niranjan, Raja Rao states about his aesthetics as a novelist:

The aesthetics is that sometimes, I like to write like a PURANA. I like the PURANIC conception, in fact, that is the only conception of novel for me. I don't want to write like a foreign novelist. I am very much an Indian and the Indian form is the Puranic form. Form comes naturally to me. 27

The basic aim of Raja Rao to write on the pattern of Puranas is borne out by both the spirit and the narrative technique of Kanthapura. The tale of Kanthapura is told in
the Puranic fashion involving myths and legends; it also
has the breathless garrulity of the Puranas without
attempting at formal organization. His aim to write like
Puranas is unambiguously stated in the "Foreword":

The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana
48,000. Puranas there are endless and innumerable.
We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous
'ats' and 'ons' to bother us - we tell one interminable
tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts
stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another
thought. This was and still is the ordinary style
of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it
myself in this story (p.6).

Besides breathless garrulity of Achakka, the
narrator, there are devices employed in it which are
reminiscent of the Puranas. Not only the poetic snatches
like those of the Puranas are used but also the prose
descriptions of nature, surroundings and happenings
are given a lilting rhythmic touch. To illustrate, Kenchamma
"lies curled up like a child on its mother's lap" (p.191),
the dead body of Ramakrishnayya was washed and tied to
the bamboo and "behind the jack fruit the sun rose like
a camphor, censor alit, and when the waters were still
girdling in the gutters, the procession hurried on" (pp.145-146).
The description of Ramakrishnayya's death recalls the account
of the response of nature to the death of Karna in the
Mahabharata: "when Karna fell, the rivers stood still....
The earth uttered loud roars.... The mountains with their
forests began to tremble and all creatures felt pain".28
Ramakrishnayya's death is described in mythical tones:
And that might sister, as no other might, no cow would give its milk... and calves pranced about their mothers and groaned... Lord, may such be the path of our outgoing soul! (p. 101).

In The Waste Land, T.S. Eliot has used the mythical technique to criticize the present, and in Kanthapura, Raja Rao eulogizes and glorifies the present in order to impart the dignity and majesty of Puranas to the novel. Following the tradition of the Puranas, Raja Rao has used vision, mystical experiences, and gossipy tales in the novel. Moorthy sees the vision of Mahatma Gandhi in which he feels the touch of the Mahatma and "through that touch was revealed to him as the day is revealed to the night the sheathless being of his soul" (p. 54). The Satyagrahis lose their battle against the British soldiers but their mystical experience of "something ... has entered our hearts, an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri's night ..." (p. 255) invites comparison with the Puranic style.

Kanthapura is also replete with rituals with which Raja Rao conveys the whole ethos of Kanthapura. The old narrator, Achakka, describes the rituals and festivals of the village such as Sankara-Jayanthi, Rama-festival, Krishna-festival with mythical fervour and religious gusto. The festival of lights, according to Achakka, is celebrated in the month of Kartik "so that when darkness hangs drooping down the caves, gods may be seen passing by, blue gods and quiet gods and bright-eyed gods" (p. 118).
Long, detailed, poetic descriptions of nature are as characteristic a feature of the Puranas as they are of the Sanskrit epics. The Bhagwad Purana, especially, is famous for its lyrical descriptions of seasons; an example is the passage describing the sudden flowering of the universe heralding the birth of Krishna. Within its limited range, Kanthapura, too, can claim quite a few descriptive passages which are sensitive and evocative. Raja Rao's account of the coming of Kartik (Autumn) is a veritable prose-poem:

Kartik has come to Kanthapura, sisters - Kartik has come with the glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering Gods.... Kartik is a month of the gods, and as the gods pass by the Potters' Street and the Weavers' Street, lights are lit to see them pass by (p.118).

The performance of rituals also provides a mythical frame of reference. The villagers worship the benign and bounteous goddess Kenchamma who resides in the red hill and has a daughter in the river Himavathy. They offer her a sari and a gold-trinket to ward off the malefic influences. During the ploughing time, the villagers wait for the rohini star to "yoke their bulls to the plough" (p.157) and the whole operation of the ploughing is considered successful when the favourable omen of the Eagle - the vehicle of the Goddess Kenchamma - shows itself. The goddess Kenchamma is appeased in various ways and during the harvest period, the villagers light bonfires and sing and dance in Kenchamma's honour.
The whole life of the villagers in Kanthapura is dominated by rituals. When Moorthy is in prison, they sing bhajans with "cymbol, conch and camphor, clapping hands and droning drums, the perfume of the sandal paste flowers in the hair and in our eyes, Shiva's eyes" (p.156).

Fasting, an important ritual, is enacted in the novel as a sacrifice done in order to gain divine grace. It is referred to in the novel in the case of Moorthy and some other villagers just as it is mentioned in The Serpent and the Rope in the case of Ramaswamy, Madeleine and Little Mother. R.K. Narayan, too, employs the fast ritual in The Guide when Raju unwillingly undertakes a fast because of people's faith in the fast ritual to bring rain to the parched land of Mangala village.

In Kanthapura, Raja Rao also describes congregational worship ritual for appeasing Kenchamma (p.10). Kenchamma sanctifies the neighbouring region and Satamma feels that "it was our Kenchamma, she tore a rag from her sari fringe, and put into it a three pice bit, and a little rice and an areca nut, and hung it securely to the roof" (p.79). Ratna, too, vows to "offer ten coconuts and a Kumkum worship" (p.98) and falls prostrate before the gods in the sanctum for the recovery of Moorthy. While rice and coconuts are the symbols of fertility; kumkum, bangles and Sari are other traditional symbols of the prosperous marital status of a lady employed at various places in Kanthapura. A shaven head without kumkum is considered inauspicious, the lady being a widow. The difference between the colourful
sari and a white sari indicates the difference between
the marital status or otherwise of the woman.

Rituals are not only a means of establishing
the mythical atmosphere in the novel but also a "device
for concretising the 'point of view'." Achakka, the
narrator, is deeply steeped in the local lores and,
therefore, assimilates the contemporary reality of the
freedom movement in Kanthapura into a mythical structure.

In Kanthapura, Raja Rao makes an effective use of
myth to highlight the contemporary situation paralleled
against the timelessness. By interweaving various myths,
legends and rituals, he has made the struggle for political
freedom not merely a secular activity confined to a
particular time and place but has also transformed it
into the eternal drama between the good and the evil. The
old narrator, Achakka, mixes the real and the mythical
elements so artistically that the novel becomes a
"glorious myth ... as profound as a shastra, and as
prolific as a purana, yet in its brevity and verbal
economy, it excels in capturing excessive critical
imagination".

So profoundly did Mahatma Gandhi impinge on the
Indian consciousness that Gandhi figures in a host of novels
like Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma, Anand's Untouchable
and The Sword and the Sickle, Venkatramani's Kandan,
The Patriot and Kamla Markandaya’s Some Inner Fury either as a main participant in the action or influencing the action staying in the background. But it is only in Kanthapura that the theme has been handled with such dexterity and mythical insight that Iyengar calls it a "Gandhi-Purana" as it bristles with the solemn dignity and majesty of the Puranas.

Though the myths and symbols emerge as the significant creative mode "to convey a meaningful world-view of human reality in terms of shared human experience" in his later novels like The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare and Comrade Kirillov, the appeal of Kanthapura lies in Raja Rao’s art of mythicizing the real events tumbling one after the other in breathless succession in the lives of Indian villagers by unfolding their religious sensibility. Though Thomas Mann, James Joyce and T.S.Eliot have also made conscious use of myth in their works, Raja Rao’s technique differs from them so widely and so intensely that he does not model his use of myth on any one of them. He uniquely deploys myth on the pattern of the Puranas which are full of stories within the illustrative story. Though the use of myth as sustained quantities of consciousness has been made by the Indian-English novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Sudhin N.Ghose, R.K.Narayan and Anita Desai yet Raja Rao’s deliberate and conscious employment of myths based on Puranas as a creative mode is not duplicated by any one of them.
The Serpent and the Rope

Explaining the mythical matrix of his novels, Raja Rao avers:

The book that has filled my imagination and come to me for years at every crucial point of my life, to interpret and to help, is the Ramayana. Buddhist texts have deeply stirred me. They did influence me at one time, with their poetry and rich humanity. But there is something of the Kshatriya in me and I always go back to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The Serpent and the Rope (1968) is loaded with myths, legends and folklore which establish the identity of Ramaswamy, Savithri, Madeleine, Lakshmi and a host of other characters, highlighting their situations as well as their relationships. In this novel, Raja Rao has heavily drawn on the Mahabharata, the Ramayana; and his method of weaving stories within a story reminds one of the Puranas. The protagonist, unlike the illiterate old Achakka of Kanthapura, is an intellectual who says that he "belongs to the period of Mahabharata."

In the novel, myths and legends not only establish a link between the contemporaneity and antiquity but also substantiate and concretize the spiritual probings of Ramaswamy. The myths of Radha-Krishna, Savitri-Satyavan and Iseult-Tristan play a dominant role in establishing a spiritual relationship between Savithri and Ramaswamy; and it is through these mythic figures that a human relationship is elevated to the spiritual heights. Though
the central myth pervading the novel is that of Radha and Krishna, there are references to the myth of Buddha which symbolize Ramaswamy's quest for self-realization. There are also incidental references to the Christian and the Chinese myths, which, though not integral to the novel, succeed in establishing a point of view. Rites and rituals, used in the novel, also provide a frame of reference.

The myths of Radha-Krishna, Satyavan-Savitri and Tristan-Iseult are so eruditely woven into the texture of the novel that they become a fit analogue to the relationship between Ramaswamy and Savithri. Even, the failure of Ramaswamy's marriage to Madeleine is delineated through the help of myths showing that womanhood is not essentially based upon physical relationship.

Self-realization through the agency of the Feminine Principle is one of the major themes of the novel. In Indian mythology, woman is conceptualized as Shakti, the possession of which "is the ultimate quest, the very highest prize. It is she who is ever desired, won and lost again in the endlessly revolving strife for the world dominion between the demon-giants and the gods". To facilitate his portrayal of woman as the metaphysical counterpart of man, Raja Rao refers to the mythological characters like Satyavan's Savitri in the Mahabharata (p.360), the fair Queen Sita of the Ramayana, the Rajput princess "Mira, the poetess" (p.43) whose Kanhayya
(beloved) is Lord Krishna and to Shiva and Pārvatī, manifestations of metaphysical truth (p.35). As in The Cat and Shakespeare, Ramakrishna Pai’s realization of the self is made possible only with the help of Shantha, the Feminine Principle, so in The Serpent and the Rope, it is suggested that womanhood is a vital entity, complementary to Ramaswamy and also essential for his spiritual development. These metaphysical concepts were discussed thousands of years ago by the Upanishadic sages on the bank of the Ganges (p.23).

Yagnavalkya had said to Maitreyi; 'For whose sake, verily does a husband love his wife? Not for the sake of the wife, but verily for the sake of the self in her' (p.24).

It is this assertion that convinces Ramaswamy that he does not love Madeleine "for the sake of the Self in her". Only much later in the novel does he realize the metaphysical importance of love. In their symbolic marriage in a London hotel room, Savithri echoes similar sentiments, and Ramaswamy recognizes his identity through the Feminine Principle (Savithri) in order to gain a true perspective of his quest for wholeness. Both Savithri and Ramaswamy achieve self-realization, as in them, the Masculine Principle is wedded to the Feminine Principle. On the other hand, the marriage of Rama and Madeleine proves unsuccessful and barren because Madeleine fails to be the true Feminine Principle - the feminine active principle, the efficient and material cause of the universe; the Maya that evolves the differentiated elements and beings. The death of both of their children symbolizes the Nishkala
Shiva - "the unchanging, sterile Absolute, devoid of every urge of energy towards procreation and cosmogonic transmutation. This is the Absolute as sublime lifelessness, primary and ultimate inertia, the supreme void; here nothing, whatsoever, throbs or stirs".  

The coronation of the Queen in the novel is also symbolic of the "apotheosis of the Feminine Principle".

During his convalescence after the lung operation, Ramaswamy muses on the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the figures of the queen merges into that of Savithri in his consciousness. In their last meeting, Rama and Savithri come to terms with the real nature of their relationship and Rama calls her "my queen" (p.364):

She touched me with the lip of her lips as though Truth had been there, just there and the moment was the whole of Truth (p.364).

Savithri's singing of the well-known song of Meera - "Mere tho Giridhar Gopal" - is significant as Savithri surrenders herself to Rama as did Meera to Lord Krishna. Thus the Queen of England is seen as the Feminine Principle that makes the universe move, and Savithri's enthusiasm to attend the coronation ceremony in London springs up from her devotion to the Feminine Principle. "To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha" (p.352). She is Iseult for Tristan and Savithri for Satyavan. "She is the Prakriti that makes Purush manifest. The matrishakti of Hindu mythology thus gains a universal significance through Raja Rao's panoramic application of it."
According to the Indian mythology, Shakti is the active creative principle and "Maya-Shakti is personified as the world-protecting, feminine, maternal side of the Ultimate Being, and as such, stands for the spontaneous loving acceptance of life's tangible reality. She is the creative joy of life... she instils into us - and she is herself - surrender to the changing aspects of existence. Maya Shakti is Eve, 'The Eternal Feminine'.

Now in the novel, the universe manifests the creativity of Maya:

Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind... the knowing in knowledge... woman is the meaning of the word... woman is kingdom, solitude, time... woman rules, for it is she... the universe... woman is the world. (p.352).

Maya-Shakti concept runs throughout the book and forms an intrinsic part of the artistic pattern of the Advaitic philosophy inherent in the analogy of the serpent and the rope. Having mothered the universe and the individual - macrocosm and microcosm - as correlative manifestation of the divine, Maya muffles consciousness within the wrappings of her perishable production. Because of this, "all women are perfect women for they have the feminine principle in them, the Yin, the prakriti" (p.311). Maya creates all the illusion that is prevalent in the Universe. The paradoxical position of the Shakti is described in the following manner:

The womb (bhaga) represents "the great Prakriti (Nature) yet "the Possessor of the womb (Bhagavan) is Shiva"(p.370).
Thus, the Feminine Principle, through which Ramaswamy realizes the Ultimate Truth becomes "the touchstone for measuring the truth and falsity of philosophies, political systems, ideologies, people". That Ramaswamy's quest for Truth is scaffolded on the Feminine Principle is abundantly clear in his relationships with various women in various forms - Madeleine, Savithri, Saroja, Lakshmi, Little Mother and Aunt Lakshmana (p.170).

The mythical parallels have been artistically suggested in the relationship between Savithri and Ramaswamy. Savithri in the novel follows the precedents set by the great ladies like Sita and Savitri whose names are synonymous with wifely devotion. It is in his relationship with Savithri that Ramaswamy realizes the appropriate path for his quest for the Ultimate Truth. Savithri's effacement of the self, her utter self-negation, her quest for anonymity results in the Ultimate discovery of the self, "Within this matrix of dharmic fervour, the women live and die and live again in the context of timelessness, ahistorically, without emphasis on the external personality". In The Cat and Shakespeare, Shantha is not married to Ramakrishna Pai but Pai realizes the Ultimate Truth through her, and not through his wedded companion, Saroja. In the same manner, Savithri, in her symbolic marriage to Ramaswamy, plays the same life-giving role in Ramaswamy's life. Their symbolic marriage becomes the mode of Rama's quest for the Ultimate, the marriage of two souls being the process of the marriage
of the self with the self.

Savitri, like her mythical counterpart, emerges triumphant in leading her eternal lover to the path of the knowledge of the Self. As an embodiment of the three aspects of the Feminine Principle (Shakti, Prakriti and Sri), Savitri symbolizes love and the power of devotion which can conquer death itself. Madeleine represents death for Rama because her relations with Rama happen to be merely on the physical level just like those of Saroja with Ramakrishna Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare. It is virtually impossible for Madeleine to stick to the impersonal conformity, imposed by Indian Dharmic considerations. That is the reason why she is unable to guide Rama to the spiritual path. In Savitri-Satyavan myth, Satyavan is revived after his death through the sincere efforts of his wife. In the similar vein, Madeleine, whose both babies die in infancy, represents death for Rama. And it is she who unwittingly helps Rama achieve his goal by her own conversion to Buddhism. Her failure as a wife is Rama's success as a pilgrim's progress. When Yama, the god of death, comes to take away the soul of Satyavan, he says to Savitri, "I am here because your husband's appointed span of life is over". Madeleine's failure as a wife and her conversion to Buddhism suggests that the earthly life of Rama has ended. His relationship with Savithri opens up new vistas for Rama in the spiritual realm in that she rescues him from his mundane grooves. Though she is married to Pratap, her relationship with Rama
has been lofty, sublime and spiritual, and it also generates
into Ramaswamy a new awareness of the Self which Madeleine
could not develop. Savithri remains a self-effacing,
self-negating person, and a cigarette boozing in a pub or
copulation with a male does not make anything to her, for
she becomes, unlike Madeleine's soul, atman beyond body.
In this way, "she becomes a "hypostatic presence" which
he had been looking for and she becomes as it were, a means
of his entry into a state where he transcends the dimensions
of the ego idea and annihilates time and place". Like
Satyavan, Rama is suffering from a disease with the difference
that it is not going to take Rama's life. It is Madeleine
who, by her conversion to Buddhism, goads Rama for death-in-
life, and paradoxically enough, prepares him for his salvation
and spiritual success. Savithri resurrects Rama from a blind
alley - from thoracoplasty operation. The dialogue that
follows between Rama and Savithri is reminiscent of the
dialogue of the mythic Satyavan-Savitri. Significantly,
Rama is convalescing from the lung operation at this time
musing on the self, the truth and life and death (p.360).

There is an attempt to glorify the Feminine
Principle not only through the character of Savithri but
also through that of Iseult. Savithri is the beloved
Iseult of Cornwell. Rama declares: "Love, my love is
the self. Love is the living of love" (p.309). On
Tristan's wedding night, he was filled with remorse as he
prepared to go to bed with Iseult of White Hands, remembering how tenderly he loves and sings for Queen Iseult, wife of Mark. Rama's account of his tender feelings towards both Madeleine and Savithri is curiously identical (pp. 242-243).

The Radha-Krishna myth is a dominant motif in the novel which amply reinforces the spiritual relationship between Savithri and Ramaswamy. Theirs is an archetypal relationship between the seeker and the sought; Savithri's love for Rama represents an enactment of myth of the eternal love of Radha and Krishna, and is symbolic of the seeker's unrealized longing for the Absolute. To Rama, Savithri is symbolic of Parvati and Radha; to Savithri, Rama is the symbol of Shiva and Lord Krishna. In a passage which recounts the sweet longing of the gopi for Krishna, of the soul for the divine, Raja Rao describes Savithri's yearning and devotion for Rama:

A Hindu woman knows how to worship her Krishna, her Lord. When the moon shines over the Jumna and lights are lit in the households, and cows are milked, then it is Janki's son plays on the banks of the Yamuna in Brindavan.... Krishna dances on the red earth. What Gopi my Lord, would not go to this festival of love? Women lose their shame and men lose their anger, for in Brindavan Krishna the Lord dances (p. 209).

Savithri's ritual marriage to Rama symbolizes the union of the Feminine Principle with the Masculine Principle. She comes to him in his hotel room in London and performs a mystic marriage. She washes his feet, and sobs. Rama, in turn, touches her head with kunkum and gives her coconut
and betelnuts. Whereupon she says, "I have known my Lord for a thousand lives, from Janam to Janam have I known my Krishna..." (p.212).

Rama is reminded of the moving myth of Radha and Krishna which suggests man's attempt to realize the Absolute so he cannot marry the real Savithri, a soul. That is why he is satisfied with the ritual marriage to Savithri which means infinitely more than Savithri's marriage to Pratap. Ramaswamy takes a promise from Savithri to go back to India and be a good wife to Pratap. The dialogue that ensues between Rama and Savithri is closely reminiscent of the Radha-Krishna motif (pp.367-368).

Ramaswamy's advice to Savithri to live with her husband, Pratap, is borne out by the mythical parallel of Krishna's advice to the gopis who cast off the illusion of family, abandoned their household duties and ran out to Krishna. Ramaswamy knows that Savithri is a married lady and it is her duty to regard Pratap's house as her Brindavan, the town associated with Lord Krishna and Radha for their adolescent love-making. He advised her to remain content as his disciple as the numerous gopis were advised by Krishna. He makes her realize the truth, and tells her:

The plane must accept the direction of the radar that there be no accident. Either you are a plane and you follow national and international conventions - or you don't fly (p.363).

Rama advises her further:

Know that to have pain is to give pain.
Rejoice Savithri, Rejoice in the rejoicement of others, that is the Truth (p.364).
Savitri recognizes that her *Dharma* is to be Pratap's wife: but spiritually, she is Rama's wife, Radha married to her Krishna (p.212). Thus, in the character of Savitri, Raja Rao depicts woman as the metaphysical counterpart of man, as the cosmic energy, vital to the *universe* - as the sound born of silence. Perfect union represents the final union with the Absolute. "As a man, when embraced by a beloved wife, knows nothing that is without, nothing that is within, thus this person, when embraced by the intelligent (Prajna) self, knows nothing that is without nothing that is within." Thus it is through a perfect understanding of the Feminine Principle that one can learn to annihilate one's ego to transcend the self and achieve realization. It is in his relationship with Savitri that Ramaswamy realizes the significance of the Feminine Principle for self-illumination.

After her symbolic marriage in a London hotel room, Savitri says to Rama: "I'll come when you do not need me." Thus their marriage is a fusion of two souls for achieving the Ultimate Truth which shows that both are servants of a higher ideal to which their individual inclinations are to be subordinated. Sensual love is sublimated into self-forgetful devotion.

The Ramaswamy-Savitri relationship also represents the union of *Prakriti* (Nature) with *Purusha* (God). According to the Sankhya's concept, *Purusha* is pure consciousness which is changeless and multiple; *Prakriti* is the primal matter of
creation and is inert and one. Though the two are diametrically opposed to each other, the evolution of the world takes place because of the union of the two. The extrication of the Purusha from Prakriti constitutes spiritual liberation according to the Yoga-sutras of Patanjali; and for working out this consummation, an eightfold path is formulated. "It is not enough to have rational or intellectual discrimination. The intellectual discrimination must mature into an experimental realization of the utter distinctness of Purusha from Prakriti." The union of Ramaswamy and Savithri symbolizes the union of Purusha and Prakriti and it is in her relationship with Rama that Savithri realizes the Ultimate Truth which she fails to perceive in her marriage to Pratap. Rama, too, realizes that "as civilization grows more and more terrestrial ... the feminine permanence will grow, as in America" (p.146). Womanhood is essential for the spiritual development of the individual, and according to Rama, the concept of womanhood provides an awareness of the Oneness of Truth and he invests it with an aura of sublimity. "Union is proof that the Truth is non-dual" (p.170). Rama also thinks that "Man sees himself in woman as essence ... If there were none other, you could not know that you are" (p.170). Without love or woman or the Feminine Principle, there would be no urge for truth or being or man or the Masculine Principle to realize the awareness which creates the world. In this way, "Rama's search for woman is one with his quest for self-knowledge. Both demand the death of illusion and the
realization that the seeming many are one; both climax in a revelation of Truth. Such reverence for women makes Rama realize his spiritual oneness with Savithri and he firmly believes that man finds his self in his woman and it is mainly on account of this that he loves her so deeply (pp. 170-171). Their relationship enables them to understand each other truly. Ramaswamy fails to realize the Ultimate Truth in his marriage to Madeleine; while Savithri is unsuccessful in probing the deeper Truth in her marriage to Pratap. Both Savithri and Ramaswamy feel alienated in their relationships with their spouses and their rootlessness is a corollary of their imperfect union of Purusha and Prakriti. Rama is convinced of the primacy of the Feminine Principle, the perfect union of Purusha and Prakriti in his relationship with Savithri who is his "immost creature... with no word or sometimes with just a word, she understood the curvatures of my silences and thoughts" (p. 234):

There is only one woman, not for one life, but for all lives, indeed, the earth was created... that we might seek her (p. 228).

He further says that he touched Savithri's lips as though they were made with light, with honey, with the space between words of poetry, of song. God exists in sex if he is anywhere in the cosmos. Rama says to Savithri, "how true it seemed we were to each other, a bit space between us, a presence - God" (p. 207). In his intimate
moments with Savithri, Rama has a wonderful experience and feels as if he were married to her for a long time. It can be considered that "in one sense, The Serpent and the Rope is a long and passionate plea for understanding the erotic base of all our spirituality".

Ramaswamy cites examples from the Hindu mythology which emphasize the utter compliance of the individual to the dictates of dharmic principles. He recalls the incident from the Ramayana in which "the fair, the pregnant Sita was sent away, for the dharma of Rama, the dharma of a king demanded it" (p.184). Dharma conditions Savithri into the acceptance of traditional life patterns. She accepts dharma as an intrinsic aspect of the law of morality. Her submissive attitude to dharma makes her "so truly indifferent, so completely resigned to her fate like all Hindu women—that for her, life was like a bullock-cart wheel... on a known pilgrimage,...Life's wheel is its own internal law" (p.197). Unlike Madeleine, Savithri recognizes her dharma: "To be a woman ... was to be absorbed by a man .... She wanted to surrender to Truth — and be free—life was too much sorrow, not joy was its meaning, but liberation" (p.187). She agrees with Rama's ideas about metaphysical inter-relationship between the Masculine Principle and the Feminine Principle. The principle of man as regulator of the kingdom and "woman as mistress and doctor of the household"(p.189) helps her dissolve terrestrial contradictions. She realizes that the cooperation of Purusha with Prakriti is essential for the evolution of the
to Purusha in this world, and eventually, to release it from bondage. Though married to Madeleine, Rama knows the real self in his contact with Savithri:

And the Lord knows himself because Radha is, else he would have gone into penance and sat on the Himalaya (p. 212).

Unlike Savithri, Madeleine fails to recognize the metaphysical significance of the bond of marriage which is fundamental to Rama's way of life. With her contradictions and dualism, she fails in her dharma, "she fails as a wife, is unfortunate as a mother and is unconvincing as a sadhaka, a Buddhist nun".

Nor is she sensitive to other concepts that are vital to Rama's life-pattern. For instance, she regards Benares as an obnoxious city with its "bits of floating human flesh and pyres of the dead" (p. 39), while to Rama, the eternal "city is where Lord Shiva is worshipped as the "great Saviour .... The blue-throated, the three-eyed granter of all desires.... The imperishable one" (p. 22).

Just as Lord Krishna's wives - Satyabhama and Rukmini - failed to establish a spiritual bond with Krishna, in a similar way, Madeleine is unable to rise to the level of spiritual love where physical marriage and satisfaction in marriage do not matter. She cannot become non-dual like Savithri and so is unable to accept marriage as a sacrament and even regards mere touch as unholy. Rama describes her attitude as such:

Touch was always distasteful to her. So she liked the un-touching Cathars, she loved their celibacy. She implored me to practise the ascetic brahmacharya of my ancestors (p. 15).
Her association with Rama is rendered sterile and futile as, in her complex and confused attitude towards life, she un successfully attempts to seek an escape from it and adopts the way of the denial of life, of renunciation and asceticism; she fails to understand that "in rejecting man, a woman rejects womanhood and creation and thus condemns herself". Madeleine embraces Buddhism as a way of escape from personal frustrations born out of her maladjustment with dharmic principles. In her attempt to provoke Rama to "practise the ascetic brahmacharya", she proves untrue to the Feminine Principle. Her insight into Buddhism is "more intellectual, psychic than religious" (p312). Once she takes recourse to Buddhism, she snaps all her ties and shuts the door on the world. She becomes a nun and there is no place in Hinduism for the nun "because the nun is also categorised as adharmic". The reason for this is due to her single, celibate, infertile state which is "an inversion of Truth" (p.379). For Madeleine, "spirituality consisted in mortification of the flesh while what needed to be mortified, transcended that is, was the self in her ... so as to pave the way for the self to lose its identity and rejoice in the knowledge of the Absolute." In her failure as a wife and by her conversion to Buddhism, Madeleine helps Rama realize, though unwittingly, the Ultimate Truth.

There are frequent references to the Ramayana in the novel. The myth of Rama's fight to win back Sita from the clutches of Ravana is again rationalized from a dharmic
angle (p.183). Rama's victory over Ravana is essentially a triumph of good over evil, and the exile of Sita is also considered imperative from a moral angle as the dharma of Rama, "the dharma of a king, demanded it" (p.184). In many respects, Rama of the novel has kinship with the mythical Rama of the Ramayana, who is considered the seventh Avatar of Vishnu. If the Rama of the legend is portrayed with bow and arrow, Rama of The Serpent and the Rope is "a Sagittarian by birth" (p.19). In the Bhagwad Gita, it has been stated that Krishna takes birth from age to age to help mankind. It is significant that Rama in the novel is regarded by both the French and the Indians as kingly, almost a godly figure. Just as Sita accepted Rama and all his doings, Madeleine, too, is attracted towards the spiritual Ramaswamy. The quotation from Bhavabhuti's Uttara Rama Charita (p.328) invests the relationship of Ramaswamy and Madeleine with an elemental quality and provides it a universal dimension. Bhavabhuti's Uttara Rama Charita is the story of the later part of Rama's life when he banished Sita. Rama's marriage to Sita is a failure like the marriage between Rama and Madeleine in the novel. Initially, there are moments of bliss and happiness in both the relationships but eventually, Ramaswamy and Madeleine fall apart, as did the mythical Rama and Sita. Uttara Rama Charita reveals the pattern of life itself; when Ramaswamy chants the verses of Bhavabhuti, he communicates the eternal to Madeleine, which she fails to follow in the
beginning, but at the end of the recitation, Madeleine understands him better. In this way, it is shown in the novel that all human suffering is the same suffering and all experiences are identical. Thus a concrete and particular situation in The Serpent and the Rope gains an extension into infinity by being absorbed into a corresponding situation in mythology.

References to the myth of Gautama Buddha are too obvious to be overlooked. Ramaswamy, in a way, is the modern version of Siddhartha. He renounces the world and sets out on a quest for self-realization as did Buddha, the ninth and the last incarnation of Vishnu, who rode away on his horse, Kanthaka, to keep his tryst with destiny, more than two thousand years ago.54

The Serpent and the Rope is a "spiritual quest of a Jeeva for truth".55 The sub-conscious mind of Ramaswamy is frequently haunted by the hurrying hooves of Siddhartha's Kanthaka, and references to the situation recur in the novel. As in Comrade Krillov, the narrator R. muses to play the role of Kanthaka at Padmanabhan Iyer's door. Similarly, while convalescing in Bangalore, Rama reflects how "Kapilvastu is the true home of mankind; each one of us has a Kanthaka at his door" (p.287). Rama is, in a way, a modern Buddha who leaves India and sets out on a long spiritual voyage. In the beginning, his ideals are worldly enough as he falls in love with Madeleine, marries her and hopes to settle down to the comfortable life of a Professor in
an Indian University. When Savithri's anguished cry reaches him through her letter, "Tell me Rama, tell me truly and as before God "Come, and I'll come...I feel besieged - the Turk is at the door. Help me to jump into the pyre..." (p.292), Rama comments:

Of course, there was a charger waiting for me. It would not take me to the Turk. Its name would be Kanthaka and I would change my royal garments by the Ganges, admonish him to return and let the people of Kapilvastu know that he, Kanthaka, was a noble steed that had led Gautama the Sakyan to the banks of the Ganges, and thus started him on the pilgrimage from which there is no returning... (p.292).

Rama fails to reconcile himself with the effect of Savithri's marriage to Pratap. During his visit to India, Rama stays in Bombay, and in sheer desperation, plunges into the plump arms of sex-starved Lakshmi. But soon he realizes that he has taken a wrong turning and the Buddha story reminds him of his evil ways. He says, "I booked my seat on the plane somewhat secretly" (p.296). Kanthaka, Siddhartha's horse, has been transformed here into Rama's seat in the aeroplane, though its role is the same. The story of the renunciation of the world by Buddha in order to seek salvation draws the curtain on the Lakshmi episode and he returns to France. The discovery that Madeleine has now taken to Buddhistic ascetic practices helps him further in the direction of his spiritual goal. Eventually, he takes a divorce from Madeleine and finds most of his worldly ties cut off. He hears the call of his Guru, the Abode, the Truth, and forgets all that he has done or suffered and regards it all as a mere illusion. He longs for something. His return to India,
thus, becomes an entry into his origins, ancestral and familial, an entry into the myths, poetry and philosophy of India. The Mundaka Upanishad says, "If you would know the eternal, humbly approach a Guru devoted to Brahman". All Hindu schools of thought maintain that the submission to the direction of a teacher is essential if one is to attain the knowledge of God. In The Cat and Shakespeare, the same idea of complete surrender to the will of God is pronounced by Govindan Nair in an analogy of the Mother Cat - The Feminine Principle (Marjara Nyaya). Ramaswamy decides to move to Travancore because he is a seeker after metaphysical truth - the Truth of birth and death, the truth of man, discovering his Godhead:

I have no Benares now, no Ganga, no Jamna. Travancore is my country, Travancore my name .... Truth indeed is He, the Guru .... No. He is beyond definition. He is, and you are not (p.405).

Thus the myth of Gautama Buddha employed in the novel has rich symbolic overtones. The wheel of Rama's life is turned, and like the Buddha, the Enlightened One, he has the visionary perception of his Guru and his spiritual voyage is nearing its harbour. The rich mythical associations are embedded in the Kanthaka symbol and make the novel "a sustained piece of symbolism".57

However, it is difficult to agree with H.M. Williams when he says that "in imploring the Buddha to return, Rama is asking (hopelessly) Madeleine to return to Him".58 The argument seems to mislead in that in the end of the novel, a new beginning, a spiritual beginning is reached when Rama
disCOVERS his Guru and his Guru becomes Kanthaka who had taken the Buddha on his pilgrimage. The question of Rama's harking back to Madeleine does not arise as he has already snapped all his worldly ties and has gained an enlightenment like the Buddha after reaching the luminous world of his Guru (p.403).

Raja Rao, in one of his observations, confesses that he consciously wrote The Serpent and the Rope on the Puranic pattern. For its being episodic and digressive, there are numerous beautiful stories within the central story in the style of the Mahabharata. A number of legends, episodes and an interminable succession of digressions have been used to point out the moral in the novel. Ramaswamy's erudite mind can perceive links between various cultural influences enabling him to draw sources not only from myths and legends of his Indian background but also from those of different civilizations of the world. He can also discern parallels between them and forge a link between the past and the present by comprehending the essential oneness of history. The novel illustrates the religious orientation of the Puranas which often results in the delineation of a series of visions, initiation tests, mystical experiences, ordeals and miracles. The ordeal of the forty-day fast undertaken by Madeleine and the miracle attendant upon it and the vision of his Guru vouchsafed to Rama in the end are all presented with fervent credulity which closely follows the pattern of the Puranas. It does not, however, advance the action of the novel and can be culled out without impairing the structural unity of the novel.
Raja Rao often uses myths and legends to "highlight the situation of characters or the relationship between them." Several Indian and Christian myths have been blended in order to establish the identity of the characters in the novel. Savithri is, at one place, equalled to the princess who comes out of the Budumekaya (pumpkin) and takes the hero back with her. The myth of Budumekaya is closely related to the action of the novel as it highlights the relationship between Ramaswamy and Savithri in a significant manner. In this myth, a young Prince, who was put into exile by his step-mother, followed a rolling pumpkin through a forest. Suddenly, the pumpkin crashed against a rock and beautiful princess came out, led the prince to his glorious destiny and, ultimately, they got married. It is significant that Rama remembers this myth when he is going to meet Savithri who is coming from India to France for the first time. Ramaswamy here looks "like some hero in a fable" (p.208) and feels that Savithri is a real princess by birth and her presence fills the atmosphere with a peculiar aroma. Rama constantly seeks sameness, unity and the impersonal, whereas Savithri responds to the idea of oneness of everything as he is deeply drenched in Sankara's philosophy. As a result of this unity, they get married, and their marriage is often elevated to the spiritual heights.

Madeleine, too, contemplates, behaves and acts in terms of myth only. When Rama is in India, Madeleine describes
her yearning for Rama using the mythical analogy of Penelope and Ulysses. She says, "Like Penelope, I sat on the sea-shore weaving my web. When will you come, O Ulysses?" (p. 39). Now Ulysses in the Greek mythology did not like to waste away his life in inactivity and he always wished to set out in search of new pastures. He did not wish to waste the remaining years of his life like the lotus-eaters in a land which had little scope for his heroism and valour. Ulysses could also overcome his emotional attachment for his wife and son. This myth of Ulysses bears faint echoes of Siddhartha who, too, resisted temptations in search of his goal. In the similar way, Rama, in the novel, leaves France and sets out on a long journey of self-exploration. For him, India represents the idea of the Absolute and in order to know and to become one with the Absolute, he sets out on a spiritual voyage. His wife, who is expecting at that time, fails to dissuade him from going to India - the India of Brahma and Prajapathi, of Varuna, Mithra and Aryaman, of Indra, of Krishna, Shiva and Parvathi, of Rama, Harishchandra and Yagnyavalka" (p. 246). Rama's successful resistance to temptation is reminiscent of Siddhartha who also left his sleeping wife, Yashodhara, in search for the Absolute reality.

While explaining the impersonal principle of kingship of King George VI of England, Ramaswamy equates him with Bharata of the *Ramayana*. Here two isolated incidents, the exile of Rama and the exile of Edward VIII, one belonging
to myth, the other to History, are artistically fused. Raja Rao finds an exact parallel to the current situation in England with an Indian myth when the protagonist glorifies King Edward who abdicated his throne in favour of his younger brother, and the younger brother considered himself a keeper of his throne like Bharata, the younger brother of Lord Rama in the *Ramayana*. Thus he establishes the fact that the "kingship is an impersonal principle" (p. 204). Thus it is evident that Ramaswamy is agile in perceiving parallels between legends and forging a link between the past and the present by "comprehending the essential oneness of history". 61

There are also incidental references to myths and legends, which, though not integral to the structure of the novel, are successful in establishing a point of view. After the death of her second child, Madeleine is a sad and a dejected woman, but she realizes her helplessness before the inevitable destiny. The suffering of a grieving mother goes straight to the heart of the reader when she writes to Rama "I shall now be a good Vassista" (p. 289). Madeleine's desire to embrace Buddhism is also borne out of her mythical being as she desires to be good, kind and compassionate to all living beings, even insects and plants.

Again, when Savithri visits Rama and Madeleine at their palace, she feels that their villa is like a palace, and they, too, feel so for she walks about it like a princess who has transformed a small villa into a palace. She says, "we make objects, objects don't make us" (p. 124). In order
to clarify this metaphysical truth, Raja Rao uses the Chinese myth of Wang-Chu and Chang-Yi(pp.125-126). The metaphysics of the Chang-Yi is based on the concept of 'Chi' which means "breath or air" and 'li' meaning moral principle and inwardly discernible to the extent that the obscuring 'chi' is refined by moral training. Since 'li' is the same within and without, one is inwardly aware of moral principle as soon as one discerns it in a situation.

Ramaswamy comes in contact mainly with Madeleine, Savithri and Lakshmi, but like a true Vedantist, he remains detached from all of them as he knows full well "to be free is to know one is free, beyond the body and beyond the mind.... Impurity is in action and reaction"(p.382). This concept of detachment is illustrated through the Puranic story of King Durvasa and Radha. The narrative style of Achakka in Kanthapura undoubtedly invites comparison with the Puranas. And the breathless garrulity and verbosity in The Serpent and the Rope is also reminiscent of the Puranas as the narration goes on and on in a seemingly never-ending stream. The Puranic style of narration in this novel is essentially an advance over Kanthapura because Ramaswamy is, unlike Achakka of Kanthapura, an erudite young scholar who perceives links between the antiquity and contemporaneity more brilliantly and aesthetically and thus constitutes a new literary awareness.

There is also the story of Jaganath Bhatta's love for Shahjehan's daughter. References appear here and there to Karna, Uttara, Satyavarta and other characters of the Mahabharatha.
Embedded in the novel are also the myths of Shiva, Parvati, Nandi, the Bull and numerous allusions to Christian myths. The Yagnavalkya-Maitreyi dialogue in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, to which there are repeated references, forms a refrain in the novel. The final reference to Yagnavalkya-Maitreyi is made at the very end of the novel where it is indicated that it is only through a Guru and in a true spirit of humility that the nature of the Self can truly be comprehended. Thus the novel is "an attempt to portray the struggle of the individual to realize what he is - the Self." In tracing the relationship between the Indian and the Christian myths, the parallel between the begging bowl of Lord Buddha and the Holy Grail of Christ is perceived. All these various myths are not deviations but interpretations of the relationship of different characters in the light of mythical parallels.

The novel is replete with rites and rituals as well. References to the *rakhi* ritual abound in the novel as Rama declares:

> You feel the responsibility of a brother to every woman on this earth, whosoever she may be and in whatever part of the world left to himself, the Indian would have rakhi tied by every woman he met, feel her elder brother, protect her love (p.155).

Now the word "Rakhi", which is derived from the Sanskrit "Rakshika" (an amulet or charm worn as a Protective) occurs in the Vedic literature. There are historical instances to show that the practice was not confined to brother-sister relationship alone but assumed a wider dimension by the exigencies of time. For instance, Kunti, the mother of the
five Pandavas, tied a rakhi to her grandson Vir Abhimanyu, and Draupadi tied it to Lord Krishna who was not even distantly related to her. According to the Bhavishya Purana, the practice of rakhi began when Maharani Shachi, Lord Indra's wife, who possessed occult powers, tied a protective knot containing rice and Sarsav (rape-seed) on the right wrist of her husband to help him in his crusade against the demons and as a result of that, Lord Indra succeeded in crushing his foes. The rakhi ritual also enjoins on the Brahmins the renewal of their investitures. On this occasion, they take a pledge to rededicate themselves to the cause of Vedic dharma and rise above mundane pursuits. They pray:

O God, the purifier, Thou fillest my heart with love.... Thou art most beautiful and lusterous, worthy of being ascertained through the Vedas. Grant us the Supreme Joy of Thine, which pervades all the five organs of cognition and wherewith we acquire the wealth of knowledge.

In the ancient times, rakhi was more or less a talisman which symbolized the good wishes of a person for the protection and well-being of the object of his or her affection. The Bhavishya Purana says that the protective knot worn on this occasion relieves one from various diseases and evil influences. He who adores it every year becomes immune to calamities.

In the medieval times, with the onslaught of foreign invaders, the practice of tying rakhi extended beyond the bounds of family as in the case of Rani Karmavati of Chittor who sent rakhi to Humayun, soliciting his help against Bahadurshah, the ruler of Gujarat. The legend of Rani Padmavathi's tying a silken thread with Gold on it, to Emperor Akbar" (p.156) is narrated by Ramaswamy in the novel. Rama searches for some rakhi in his room that Saroja had given to him (p.156).
Kumkum, which is considered very auspicious, is a symbol of spiritual union between husband and wife. Rama offers sari, coconut, Kumkum to Madeleine but she is disappointed to know that the gift is from Saroja, and not from Rama. Rama is spiritually married to Savithri who comes to him in his hotel room in London, there she performs a "mystic marriage" (p. 211).

There are also references to the rites performed by Rama on his mother's death whom they take away to the burning ghats with a lot of Kumkum on her. Rama is shaved completely:

I (Ramaswamy) remember how... I used with til and Kusha grass to offer the manes my filial devotion. For withal... I was given the holy thread at seven - because my mother was dead and I had to perform her funeral ceremonies.... So with wet cloth and an empty stomach, with devotion, and sandal paste on my forehead, I fell before the rice-balls of my mother and I sobbed (pp. 5-6).

This description gives a clue to his feeling of a void in himself that he has missed something in life. The feeling of his being an orphan and his sobbing in a hotel in the Pyrenees at the thought of his mother are indicative of his mood of melancholy and an escape into fantasy: "I am an orphan. Am I always going to be an orphan?" (p. 8). Again, a dip in the Ganga and Rama's journey to Benares for this purpose is evocative of a shared popular belief in the rituals that abound in the novel. After having a dip in the Ganga, Rama feels so pure that he wonders why any one could die or go to war. Rama likens Madeleine to a devotee who "would want her Shiva or Krishna to be big and grand, that she might make a grand abhishekha with milk and honey and Ganges water" (p. 82).
Moreover, the eternal Ganga is an evocative symbol which has been invested with rich mythical associations. Raja Rao has remarkably presented the tender view of death through this symbol. The holy Ganga is a primordial symbol as it derives its source from the head of Shiva. With a sweep of symbolism, Raja Rao likens Little Mother to the holy Ganga who sleeps as though the waters of the Ganges were made of sleep. Carrying from the times immemorial the ashes of Indians of the North and the South, the Ganges becomes not only a vital symbol of the eternity of the whole being but also a symbol of the regeneration of the world, a symbol of the Hindu trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh - (the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer) - and also becomes a paradox of sorrow and truth. The same idea of the Himalaya as Truth has been illustrated by R., the narrator, to his friend Kirillov's son, Kamal Dev, in Comrade Kirillov. Raja Rao feels, that by dying, by returning to the Ganga, one merges with the eternal Truth which brings one closer to the truth-state of the Himalaya; and by this merger, one achieves peace that passes understanding by getting liberated from the spatio-temporal boundaries, the cycle of birth and death, from the profane time to the sacred time, from illusion to reality. "It is in the context of the symbolism of the Ganga", observe Som P. Ranchan and B.M. Razdan, "that one has to understand Ramaswamy's feeling himself to be a pagan in going down the Ganga with a sentiment of worship for this grave and
knowing river, and his offering of a handful of water to Ganga for his son, Pierre: "I took a handful of Ganges water in my hand, and poured it back to the river, it was for Pierre." 64

Raja Rao's intention is to show that the Indians do not disintegrate but disengage their sorrow as it is universal and impersonal. Raja Rao, not unlike Whitman, feels that death opens up large vistas and it should not be grieved over and afraid of as it is a universal phenomenon; it is the energy of life and the vitality of the self - a bond between life and after-life. In such an affirmation of life, which is a variation of the Feminine principle, Raja Rao feels the sorrow of death (p.155).

The myth of Shiva and Parvati is also employed in the novel to establish the Ramaswamy-Madeleine, and Ramaswamy-Savitri relationship. Both Ramaswamy and Savithri shed their lower self and come together as Shiva and Parvati did - the Absolute in union with the Absolute. The desire to possess is the attribute of the self steeped in ignorance, and all marriages in the novel amplify the truth of it. Even the Himalaya is "like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable and yet very intimate there where you do not exist" (p.42).

All polarities, whatsoever, stem from "the supernal non-dual duality of this timeless, world-central scene of bliss, between Shiva and Parvati" (p.35). According to the Indian mythology, "Kailasa is the mountain of the heart, where in the fire of life, the energy of the creator is quick with the ardour of its eternal source and at the same instant throbbing
with the pulse of time. Here God and Creative are
consubstantial; Eternity and Life one and the same. 65

After building the inner sanctuary, Ramaswamy says,
"And now I must find a statue of Shiva, a Linga"(p.54).
Initially, Ramaswamy's love for Madeleine is a kind of
worship in which one can become oneself by becoming the
other. When Rama shows Madeleine the huge flat stone that
lay like a squat Nandi at the edge of his garden, Madeleine
remarks:

True, how very like a bull he is. You thought
of Shiva, and so here is Nandi.... And She plucked
some grass and gave it to him, saying, Now, Bull, eat!' (p.55).

Since the moment Madeleine comes to know about Ramaswamy's
God, Nandi - Lord Shiva's beloved bull at her door - and the
Shiva Linga, she never passes by the door of the garden without
either touching the huge lump of the bull or caresssing him.
She even pours water on the head of the Shiva Linga. This
is the "first stage of spiritual transformation that takes
place in Madeleine on account of her dedication to Rama". 66
Nandi, Parvati's companion and only Shiva's vehicle,
determines the duplicate-representation of the power and
energy of the Deity. Nandi, the vehicle of Shiva, is a
manifestation on the animal plane of the divine individuals
themselves. And sometimes, the bull "gives Madeleine happy
news, for example, that she would have a son — and that was
about Pierre"(p.239). Similarly, Ramaswamy and Madeleine
have their elephant, and they enjoy going on the hill, seated
on it. At times, when Madeleine thinks of avoiding unpleasantness, she consults the elephant and her face beams with wonder because here is not any question which the elephant cannot answer. Both Rama and Madeleine adore the Nandi at the door and the Elephant elsewhere in the vicinity and impart a godly halo to them. But such is not the case with Monsieur Scarlatti, for whom the stone bull at the door is a mere piece of huge, bulging stone. He can never think of feeding it with grass as Madeleine and Rama do in full reverence and devotional zeal.

The Serpent and the Rope is loaded with mythical parallels. Such is the rare skill and craftsmanship of the novelist that various myths, legends, and rituals have been endowed with an underlying design that holds together all the digressions. The protagonist of the novel is an erudite "Brahmin" (p.5) and possesses an endless stock of mythical parallels to the situations in which he, along with other characters, is placed. In fact, Ramaswamy is at once a contemporary and a mythical figure. Madeleine feels that Rama is "either a thousand years old or three" (p.140). The various myths employed in the novel of Radha-Krishna, Satyavan-Savitri, Tristan-Iseult throw light on the spiritual union between Ramaswamy and Savithri. It is only with the help of myths that one can understand the richness of our cultural heritage as depicted in the novel. Moreover, personal relations among various characters become more meaningful when they correspond to some mythical figures. The myths of Radha, Savitri and Iseult weigh so heavily on the sensitive
mind of the protagonist that the novel turns out to be a glorification of the Feminine Principle.

David McCutcheon feels that "the major fault of the book is its philosophical garrulousness." It is true that the role of myth is naturally subordinated to the metaphysical musings, but the mythical allusions, which Raja Rao uses to elucidate and substantiate Rama's reflections, form an integral part of the thematic design of the novel. To isolate the metaphysical meditations which constitute the real subject-matter of the novel is to impair its structural unity and design. It is difficult to agree with Mulk Raj Anand when he questions the very subject-matter of the novel:

After the first novel, he, Raja Rao becomes an anti-novel novelist, self-consciously using the philosophical essay as part of the bardic recital form. The reflections on moral importances begin to weigh on the novel, almost in the manner of D.H.Lawrence, as in large portions of The Serpent and the Rope. The subject-matter of the novel cannot and should not be questioned. Again, it becomes difficult for the reader to cooperate with Anand in respect of the imposition of any sort of limitation on the selection of theme by any creative artist. Raja Rao has made it clear on numerous occasions that writing novel is a kind of Sadhana for him. It is a mode of prayer. His is the basic quest for the Ultimate Truth. In an interview with R.Parthasarathy, Raja Rao remarks, "I think I try to belong to the great Indian tradition of the past when literature was considered a Sadhana."
If we gauge how far the novelist has succeeded in conveying the subject-matter of the novel, we realize that the mythical allusions have certainly enriched the novel. But by employing various myths as a creative mode and by perceiving parallels between the contemporaneity and antiquity, Raja Rao has succeeded only in capturing and conveying the theme of metaphysical quest for self-transcendence.

The Cat and Shakespeare

"You only see what you want to see. But you must see what you see. Freedom is only that you see that you see what you see." 70

This is a crucial lesson from the Guru to his disciple. The subtitle, "A tale of modern India", and the epigraph from Sri Atmananda Guru;

There is the scent of the beauty (form) of a flower. But who knows that flower really is ? point to a deeper meaning in the novel. Raja Rao calls it a metaphysical comedy, "a book of prayer" - a teasing tale is evident in "page after page with words becoming images, images fusing into myths, myths manifesting as symbols and all organizing the material of the novel into a rich and complex presentation". 71

In The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao uses the rich Indian mythology as well as the history and culture of Brahman - the Impersonal Absolute and identification with it, whereas in The Cat and Shakespeare, the myths and symbols emerge as the creative mode of his technique
to convey Advaita-Vedanta - the total surrender and resignation to the will of God to achieve the ideal of Knowledge. Here, "the larger natural symbols of The Serpent and the Rope have been adapted to a deeper and more intensive examination of Truth, now sought in the familiar domestic details of the ordinary work-a-day life - houses, walls, cats, coffee, illness, and so on".  

There are, at least, three ways in which the myth and symbolism have been used in the novel; they substantiate the metaphysical musings of some characters, they establish the identity of characters, and they are used as a part of the digressional technique. The quest for the Ultimate Reality is enacted in the person of Ramakrishna Pai and his achievement in this quest is superior to that of Govindan Nair, Saroja or even Shantha.

Raja Rao has employed the philosophical analogy of the cat and the kitten to affirm the ideal of total resignation to the will and grace of the Absolute Reality, the benign Cosmic Mother. Now the followers of the Visishadvaita School of Thought believe in the doctrine of Prapatti - self surrender. "In Vaisnavism, the two schools of Vadagalai and Tengalai came into existence in South India based on the differences regarding the questions of human effort and divine grace and the status of the divine female principle, Sri". The Tengalai advocates total surrender to God including one's responsibility of quest for salvation. The idea behind this philosophy is explained in the analogy of
a cat carrying its kitten (cat-salvation) - (Marjara-Nyaya).

The Vadagalai, on the other hand, advocates the continuous human efforts in addition to the divine grace. The analogy used by the Vadagalai is that of a young monkey holding on to its mother while moving from one place to another (Markata-Nyaya). Thus a dual response is unfolded in the cat-kitten relationship: one is the complete surrender of the kitten to the care and grace of the Mother Cat, and the other is from the side of the Mother Cat which takes full responsibility of carrying the kitten softly in its mouth from place to place, the latter being completely dependent on the former. These two aspects of the Truth are amply explained in the novel through the analogy of the Mother Cat that modern inventions do not so much need a father, but without mother the world is impossible, and the mother is noble as she sympathizes and protects her children as does the Mother Cat to the kitten holding them in her mouth (pp.11-12). Again the idea of complete resignation to the will of God is expressed through the analogy of the Mother Cat who watches the kitten, and when they are about to fall, she picks them up by the scruff of their neck (p.68).

The cat-salvation theory is well illustrated in the characters of Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. And the image of the Mother Cat, carrying the kitten, grows into a complex symbol embodying in itself the theme of woman and the theme of total surrender to an experience leading to a gradual realization of Truth. The knowledge of Truth provides
a proper perspective by which one views the complex problems of life and death.

Ramakrishna Pai, the uninitiated, finds himself unable to understand the Cat Principle which is the second and the final stage of his spiritual realization, the first stage being the realization of the Feminine Principle. On the other hand, Govindan Nair, the completely initiated, reposes unshakable faith in the Mother Cat and this faith gives purpose and peace to his life. What John, Govindan Nair's colleague in the Ration Office, stresses is Nair's implicit faith in the Cat Principle by way of which he feels carefree and protected (p.74).

Govindan Nair is a staunch exponent of the idea of total surrender to the grace of God - the Cat Principle. His faith in the Mother Cat enables him to face the calamities that befall him, including his son's death. With perfect equanimity he faces the trial in the court but, eventually, he escapes the clutches of law by the grace of the Lord. His is the ideal of complete resignation to the will of God, himself acting as a kitten carried by the Cat (p.10). When the judge asks Govindan Nair as to how he should know the truth, Govindan Nair replies, "By being it"(p.103). His conviction is unshakable in that the Mother Cat showers all the bounties and blessings:

To speak the truth, no body can give.  
Only the mother cat can give (p.51).

In his normal life of stresses and strains, it is his very nature, a state of total surrender that provides him peace and enlightenmet:
Ah, the kitten when its neck is held by its mother, does it know anything else but the joy of being held by its mother (p.11).

In the initial stages, Ramakrishna Pai does not understand, much less imbibe, Nair’s faith in the Cat Principle as he confesses:

Even Usha says she can understand him. I cannot, Shantha can, and the cat seems to understand (p.99).

An ill-paid clerk as Pai is, he dreams of building a big house. He sincerely perceives the grace of Lord descending on him, which others, like Boothalinga Iyer, fail to do. Pai annihilates his ego so that he might see everything beyond the wall of Maya. Pai, like Ramaswamy, the protagonist of The Serpent and the Rope, realizes that the world is either unreal or real - the serpent or the rope. The wall of illusion, which he has to cross over and which Nair and the Cat have always been crossing, is the barrier of Maya - which "envelops all creation" and can be overcome only through self-surrender. Pai’s first stage of spiritual development is Shantha; and the second protective motherhood as embodied in the Cat. It is only after understanding Shantha - the Feminine Principle - that he is able to understand the Mother Cat. The feline and the feminine wisdom actualize Pai’s realization of the Ultimate Reality.

As the hunter had the vision of Shiva, Pai also sees the vision of the cat after the death of Boothalinga Iyer, the vision of life as harmony, reconciling diversities and opposites (pp.115-116). In metaphysical terms, this is
the kind of spiritual experience as it "presents the Divine Principle as perfection incarnate and shows how the ego into which the self degenerates in the world must die when one surrenders oneself to God and recovers the true self which is an internal mode of God."  

Like the hunter, Pai sees the vision in which Shantha becomes to him a human embodiment of Truth in the form of beauty (p.115). Towards the end of the novel, Pai "suddenly hears the music of marriage" (p.119). As marriage signifies oneness with the Divine, so Pai visualizes in the Cat Principle - the Ultimate Reality - and is blessed.

The cat is a symbol of "Divine wisdom and love; it further represents a Guru, paraclete, albeit in a feminine form." Govindan Nair and Ramakrishna Pai realize the Ultimate Reality in their pursuit of the Cat Principle; other characters like Shantha and Usha also approximate to the Cat Principle, though they fluctuate between the uninitiated state of Pai and the initiated state of Govindan Nair in their perception of the Ultimate Reality. The clerks in the Ration Office and Boothalinga Iyer are denied the grace of the Divine Principle. Since they live in the world of illusions for whom rats exist and cat is a "meow-meow" business, and marjaram as "shy, unclean, unfaithful" (p.74).

The central image of the Mother Cat in the novel is an apotheosis of the Feminine Principle. "Sakala Shiva", says Zimmer, "is in the state of actualization because he
is in bodily contact with his own universal energy, the Shakti, the Goddess, the feminine active principle, the efficient and material cause of the Universe." Shakti-Maya is the energy of the Absolute making itself manifest, its static repose transmuted into procreative energy. It might be said that the Goddess represents clearly enough, by her feminine nature, the life-bearing, life-nourishing, material principle. According to the ancient Indian mythology, there is a tree (ashoka) which is supposed not to put forth blossoms unless touched and kicked by a girl or a young woman as they are regarded as human embodiments of the maternal procreative energy of nature, the diminutive doubles of the Great Feminine Principle of all life, vessels of fertility, life in full sap, potential sources of off-springs. A Tantric hymn eulogizes the goddess as "the Primordial one /Mother of countless creatures /Creatrix of the bodies of the lotus-born, Vishnu and Shiva/who creates, preserves, and destroys the three worlds." The Cat and Shakespeare can be considered as a hymn in praise of the Feminine Principle. Shantha, Pai's mistress, who is shown carrying baby, "is symbolic of the Feminine Principle or matrishakti like Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope." Pai feels, "why not always be pregnant and four months carrying." (p.27). Shantha in pregnancy looks beautiful like Panchali of the Mahabharata (p.54). "The symbolism of Earth-Mother's endless powers of procreation", avers Harish Raizada, "is further enforced by
Pai's vision of the cat nursing her kittens in an attic.

The mother instinct lives also in the Cat-Protector (p. 11).

Like the hunter who was busy in sending down leaf after leaf of bilva tree on the Shiva image, Pai also expounds the theme of the Feminine Principle; Shantha being the first storey of his house and Saroja, the ground floor. Pai goes into raptures in expounding the theme of the Feminine Principle:

Man is protected. You could not be without a mother. You are always a child. The wife is she who makes you the child. That's why our children resemble us men (p. 35).

Hence, "wifehood, of all states in the world, seems the most holy ... it creates" (p. 32). It is the woman who makes man realize what he is (p. 34).

Ramakrishna Pai's is a quest for the Ultimate Reality and his wife, Saroja, is such a mundane mind that she becomes a stumbling block in Pai's quest. She chases the chimera of logic of two and two making four as against Shantha's understanding the silence (p. 30). Discarding his wife, Saroja, at Pattanaur, Pai proceeds towards that grace, that illumination which helps man to be a part of this world and also gives him a peep into the Ultimate Reality. The various metaphysical questionings and probings arising in Pai's mind help him realize the Ultimate Reality:

I like women. Not that I like all sorts of women. I like woman, in fact. What is woman, you may ask. Well, woman is Shantha - and Shantha is not just a woman, she is woman.... Shantha also loves... (p. 22).
Moreover, Shantha does not insist on marriage as she believes that "marriage is not a fact, it is a state. You marry because you see" (p.118).

Just as the hunter gains realization as a result of his complete identification with Shiva, eliminating his ego and resigning himself to the will of God, Pai, here, annihilates his ego in his relationship with Shantha and gains Knowledge. Though there is little verbal communication between them, they understand each other properly. It is also a recognition of Shantha's own self, because, just as Pai remarks, "for a woman, love is not development. Love is recognition" (p.24). Theirs is the highest and holiest relationship, though, in the worldly sense, they are not married (p.32).

Shantha's devotion, dedication and total surrender is analogous to a devotee's resignation to the will of the Almighty or the Female Principle. Just as the hunter's bilva tree becomes a medium of self-knowledge, Pai's search for the Female Principle also becomes a medium of self-knowledge. In this sense, he can be compared with Ramaswamy, the protagonist of The Serpent and the Rope, who feels the necessity of his identification with the Female Principle for self-illumination. All women cannot contribute to the cause of man's self-realization. The relationship between Pai and Saroja is rendered sterile because she busies herself in mundane matters like amassing a fortune for her son, Vithal. Thus, Saroja can be associated with the material world, whereas Shantha
with the spiritual one. For Saroja, love is possession; but Shantha thinks that it is recognition which makes Pai think that she worships him (p.23). Shantha knows that she belongs to Pai, therefore, all that belongs to her belongs to him. The basic truth about Shantha's life is that unlike Saroja, hers is a sincere desire to give, all that she has, to her man and child, because she belongs to him and makes no distinction between his belonging or her belonging (p.34). Thus the bliss and harmony achieved through perfect love and complete surrender hints at the Advaitic truth of the unity of all things. In The Serpent and the Rope, Ramaswamy, like Ramakrishna Pai, fulfils his quest for the Ultimate Reality not through his wedded companion, Madeleine, but through Savithri who, like Shantha, is the perfect embodiment of the Feminine Principle.

The Feminine Principle is also emphasized in the Sankhya system of Hindu Philosophy, according to which, there are two basic entities constituting Ultimate Reality - Purusha and Prakriti, spirit and matter. Purusha is pure consciousness which is multiple and changeless, whereas Prakriti is constituted by the three gunas, viz., sattva, rajas and tamas. When the three constituents of Prakriti are of equal force and perfectly balanced, evolution does not take place. It is only when their balance is upset that the process of evolution begins. Though Purusha and Prakriti
are diametrically opposed to each other, the evolution of the world can take place only when they are harmoniously united.

In the novel, the Advaitic idea of Purusha-Prakriti relationship is suggested in the pure and perfect harmony between Ramakrishna Pai and Shantha. Shantha says to Pai:

I am your proof. You are only seen by me. Who could know you as I know you? - You made me say I am (p. 94).

Shantha says that the mother is "necessary for all children" (pp. 93-94) and the mother is also the proof of fatherhood, Pai also muses on the fact that he is Usha's father (p. 64). Not only the Sankhya system of Hindu mythology but the Kumari tantra also emphasizes the significance of the Feminine Principle:

The whole world is embodied in the woman. One should be a woman oneself. Women are gods. Women are vitality.¹⁸¹

The Puranic myth of hunter and the bilva tree describing how a wicked hunter gains the vision of Shiva by unknowingly dropping leaves of bilva tree on the image of Lord Shiva is used here to substantiate the metaphysical musings of Ramakrishna Pai. This myth is central to the novel as it helps understand the relationship between Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. As Pai is reminded of the Puranic myth of the bilva tree when he looks at it in the compound of his rented house, he wonders whether God will bless him, as Shiva did in the case of the hunter,
by enabling him to construct the three-storeyed house that is his life's dream. It is at this moment that Nair introduces himself and, as if by telepathic understanding, he lays bare what is lurking in Pai's mind:

You are an innocent, I tell you God will build you a house of three storeys - note please, I say three storeys - here, just where you sit (p.12).

Nair does not seem to need any verbal communication from Pai: there is, perhaps, inward understanding, a sort of spiritual kinship. This myth is repeated at several places in the novel to show how the worship, unconsciously performed, bears fruit for the hunter. "It is not the way you worship that is important but what you adore" (p.9).

The ultimate goal of all mankind, the aim and end of all religions is often taken as the re-union with the Ultimate Reality. The goal is one but the paths and pursuits are so many. Pai has his own belief of achieving the Ultimate Reality by devoutly following the hunter's path. Nair leaps across the wall and the bilva leaves fall on him, while Pai cannot even see on the other side of the wall through which it seems like the sound heard and not the word understood" (p.13). Perhaps, this wall demarcates the diametrically opposed attitudes of Pai and Nair towards the Ultimate Reality - an essential dualism. Nair has a perfect equanimity as he reposes faith in the Cat Principle where there is a perfect bliss. But Pai tries to attain Shiva's grace by constant prayer, by half-baked and half-understood mystical ponderings rather than give in to the principle of the Mother Cat (Mariara Nyava) to gain the protection of the
Almighty. Obviously, the wall represents the dividing line between the world of Reality and that of appearance – the serpent and the rope.

The building of the house, "three-storeyed high", is another symbol which adds a significant dimension to Pai's quest for the Ultimate Reality. The house-building activity runs like a refrain in the novel. The dropping of the bilva leaves can be compared with Ramakrishna Pai's desire for building a house (p.9). In the beginning, he is sceptical whether or not his wish of building a house can be fulfilled. Nair, whose faith is in the Cat Principle (Marjara Nyaya) assures him of its construction (p.13). However, towards the end, we find that Pai's dream gets fulfilled, but he has to wade across two earlier stages in the fulfilment of his dream. These two stages can be associated with the two storeys of the house corresponding with Shantha and the Mother Cat. Of the two, Shantha plays a crucial role as it is only by understanding her (the first stage) that Pai can understand the Mother Cat (the second stage).

The two storeys of the house carry the rich and evocative mythological and philosophical overtones. The two storeys can be compared with two stages of realizing God – Saguna and Nirguna. This can further be explained in terms of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman-Atman. Brahman is both Nirguna (attributeless) and as Saguna (with attributes).
These are two forms of Brahmans and not two Brahmans: Brahman as it is in itself, and Brahman as it is in relation to the world. In this connection, what Vinoba Bhave says is relevant for our purpose. These two ways of devotion - **Saguna** and **Nirguna** - are the two stages of realization of God that Pai experiences in the form of Shantha and Mother Cat - the feminine and the feline wisdom. The first stage (Shantha) makes Pai realize that without the Feminine Principle, there is no possibility for him to realize the Ultimate Reality. Pai's quest for Shantha is the first stage of his house-building activity, a medium of self-knowledge, a perfect blend of **Prakriti** and **Purusha**. It is only after his realization that Pai is able to understand the Cat Principle. Shantha is a **Saguna** way of devotion, whereas the Cat is a **Nirguna** way of devotion. The latter stage cannot be achieved without a complete realization of the former.

Ramakrishna Pai always cherishes the hope of building a house. Even Govindan Nair helps him realize his goal with bricks and stones as stone gives permanence to objects. This house of stone, suggests Nair, will last five thousand years and will stand in the ruins of old Trivandram (p.33). There is a confrontation of opposites - permanence and transience, mutability and continuity. The money invested in building a house corresponds to the eternal human values embedded in the Collective Unconscious.
That is why Raja Rao identifies repeatedly the houses with their owners. About Shantha, it is said that "in fact, her house is she" (p.23). Again it is mentioned that "our houses must look like us, just our ancestors build temples in the shape of man" (p.8).

The house-building activity can be regarded as a symbol of self-perfection where the three storeys (Tamas, Rajas and Sattvas) correspond to the higher qualitative level. The building of each storey enhances Pai's awareness and his spiritual progress. When Pai and Shantha, together with their children, Usha and Krishna, are able to see the Arath procession going on the either side of the wall, the two storeys of a metaphysical evolution, sushupti and swapna, may be said to have been built, and the limit of perfection in the third storey, the "openness" (p.118) into open space, points to the third stage, jagritti - "the state of serenity, clearing, happiness which appears only as absolutely blending with divine substance." 85

In Ash Wednesday, Eliot describes three visions: darkness, twilight and light. Like the devotee in Ash Wednesday, Ramakrishna Pai does not hope to turn again from the path of Ultimate Goal and so he invokes the mercy of the Ultimate Reality by praying to the Lord to teach him to care and not to care and teach him to sit still in meditation of the Mother Cat. The total surrender - "Our Peace in His Will" - is advocated by Nair, and Pai also
realizes this Truth belatedly - the Truth of Mother Cat (Marjara Nyaya). In *Ash Wednesday*, the image of a man, standing at a turning of a stair and constantly looking down at the comforts and pleasures of the world, is delineated. Symbolically, it means the working out of the spiritual salvation. In the same way, the same mood of introspection and metaphysics is struck in *The Cat* and *Shakespeare* as it is also concerned with the penitential side of spiritual life, which begins stage by stage with the process of self-examination and self-exploration. This novel, too, depicts the struggle of the human soul trying to work out its own salvation, adumbrating the doctrine of total self-surrender (*prapatti*). Both Saroja and Shantha are the agents of purgation and purification for the spiritual seeker, Ramakrishna Pai, as leopards are to his counterpart in *Ash Wednesday*.

The house-building activity in the novel also stands for mundane pleasures - momentary, transitory, and fleeting. As in *Ash Wednesday*, the devout pilgrim decides to worship the "blessed face" of the beloved to visualize the "Lady of the Silences" - Ultimate Reality - so in the novel, Ramakrishna Pai thinks of the three-storied house, the two storeys of which (Saroja and Shantha) contribute to and aim at the third storey of the quest of the Eternal. Both *Ash Wednesday* and *The Cat* and *Shakespeare* hint at the fact that there is no place of grace for those who do not visualize the Ultimate Reality. Both represent the struggle of the
devotee or spiritual seeker on his way to divinity; the spiritual seekers like Nair and Pai entrust their life and everything into the hands of God, resign themselves to the will of God for selfless devotion as they realize full well that self-surrender and extinction of the ego are the pre-requisites for spiritual progress. Raja Rao, perhaps, feels that in this sinful world of a "A Tale of Modern India", the spiritual seeker cannot go beyond the third stage. That is why Pai does not include the fourth stage of realization of the Ultimate Reality, i.e. *Turiavastha* (super-consciousness), a stage that comes after the first three stages - *Sushupti*, *Swapna* and *Jagritti*.

Ramakrishna Pai, like the wicked hunter who gained the grace of Shiva accidentally, is a man of the world, desiring to become the man of property like Srinivasan Pai, the contractor. An ill-paid clerk as he is, his recurrent longing for the house evokes a sense of futile longing for the worldly possessions, and as a result, his spiritual strength is enervated by his indulgence in hedonism. However, he frequently refers to the myth of hunter and the *bilva* tree for the invocation of the grace of God. Treated on spiritual and divine level, his house-building activity is also significant as he tries to achieve the Ultimate Reality by crossing the necessary stages of *Tamas* and *Rajas*. The white house is significantly named "Kamla Bhavan"(p.5),
white being the colour of purity, and is associated with Saraswati. According to the ancient Indian mythology, Lakshmi and Saraswati are the two consorts of Vishnu. The garden outside his house is a place where there is no wall of duality but *Advaita-Vedanta* - "Thou art that" - and so a mystical experience is felt by Ramakrishna Pai in the garden:

When you can walk to the next garden, you can say, I love the cat (p.92).

To love the cat is to love one's own true self. The wall also becomes a symbol here separating the visible from the invisible, the appearance from the reality.

While the myth of the hunter and the *bilva* tree is used in the novel to substantiate the metaphysical musings of Ramakrishna Pai; other myths help establish the identity of characters. As in *The Serpent and the Rope*, the myths of Savitri-Satyavan, Radha-Krishna and Tristan-Iseult have been used to facilitate our understanding of the relationship between Ramaswamy and Savithri, so in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the tale of "Sindbad, the Sailor" suggests the subtle distinction between Saroja and Shantha. By means of a tale of Sindbad, the Sailor, the ordinary words like 'give' and 'take' acquire a rich associative capacity and tremendous symbolic significance (p.23).

Saroja's materialistic approach brings into relief Shantha's spiritual attitude. Savithri plays the same ennobling role for the spiritual realization of Ramaswamy in *The Serpent*.
and the Rope. Shantha sells her land for enabling Pai to purchase a house for himself, whereas Saroja worries more about the coconuts than the health and happiness of her husband. Jinn's act of giving all the royal treasure invites close comparison with Shantha's selling off her land for the sake of her lover, who feels that "her giving is complete" (p.23).

Another myth used for identifying characters is that of Bhima and Hanuman in order to point out the essential difference between the attitudes of Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. Pai's credibility as Nair's friend is established when the latter brings Astavakra Samhita - a famous text book of pure Vedanta which Govindan Nair reads out to Pai by way of explaining what Brahmin is. Pai does not understand much of it, but even then tries to assimilate what is being read out to him.

According to the Indian mythology, "the terrible Bhima was a man of vast size, and had great strength. He was wrathful in temper, given to abuse, a brave warrior ... coarse in taste and manners". Now in the novel, Govindan Nair is a "terrible man, huge in his sinews but important in his thought" (p.13). Nair has got the strength of Bhima but not his 'coarse' taste and manners. Nair is described as Bhima, "A hero of Mahabharata who is helped by Hanuman, a figure in the Ramayana to find the flower of paradise" (p.36). Bhima, we know, was the brother of Hanuman and was able to fly with great speed. By his power of flight and with the help of Hanuman, he made his way to Kuvera's
heaven, high up in the Himalayas. By associating Govindan Nair with Bhima, Raja Rao gives a slight variation to the ancient myth. Hanuman helps Bhima in the ancient mythology but here, Nair (associated with Bhima) helps Pai (identified with Hanuman) in finding the "Flower of Paradise" — the Ultimate Reality — by advocating the Cat-kitten philosophy (Marjara Nyaya).

The symbol of water as the unique exclusive circle of natural existence is again drawn from the ancient Indian mythology. Raja Rao makes it clear that it is only by understanding the Cat Principle, the symbolism of the three-storeyed house and the philosophy of infinity of eternal water circulation that one can be able to realize the Ultimate Reality. A dialogue between Govindan Nair and the Woman indicates that water is life, its eternal flow penetrates everywhere, in the flow of the river, in the stream of the tap, in a drop of rain, in the melting design of a snow-flake (pp.50-51).

This dialectical exchange of ideas is quite characteristic of the Advaita-Vedanta philosophy which points at the Eternal Truth that the man must entrust himself to the Ultimate Reality — Marjara Nyaya (Cat-Principle) — and without resistance, flow down the stream of life which will bring Govindan Nair the ultimate attainment of happiness blended with divine substance.

Raja Rao also makes use of myths in a digressional manner for the purpose of clarifying a particular point of a story, delineating an aspect of a character or a situation,
or merely as a passing reference. For example, the myth of Shiva and Parvati is used to shed light on the relationship between Ramakrishna Pai and Saroja. In the Puranas, Shiva and Parvati are generally described as engaged in making love to each other as seated on the Mount Kailash discussing the most abstruse questions of Hindu philosophy. But in the novel, Pai is astonished to see Shiva seated in the centre without his divine consort, Parvati, in the Chidambaram Temple:

Strange how we transform all things into ours ... the image of Shiva occupies the place of the heart. Then what is the place Parvathi occupies ?(p.8).

Shiva's mythical allusion helps him feel that Saroja, his wife, is not Parvati; perhaps, Shantha is spiritual enough to occupy a rightful place in the heart of his temple.

The Indian myth of Kamadhenu is also alluded to in the novel. Kamadhenu, the sacred cow, had sprung up during the churning of the ocean by Devas and Asuras, and is believed to grant anything one wishes. Here the Ration Office is compared with Kamadhenu. The comparison between the two is far-fetched and unconvincing in that the Ration Office gives some items of everyday needs, whereas Kamadhenu is believed to fulfil all human wishes. Perhaps, Raja Rao uses a mock-heroic vein by juxtaposing the levity and the gravity to point out the absurdity of modern life.

There are also references to three myths of Lord Ganesha's rat, Subramanya's peacock and Shiva's bull.
These vehicles of the gods determine the duplicate representation of the power and characteristics of the gods and the reference "becomes specified by the determinant, or parallel symbol, added underneath." The reference to Ganesha's rat is more significant than that of Subramanya's peacock or Shiva's bull. The rat is tiny, insignificant creature, but for being the vehicle of Ganesha, it assumes mythical overtones. Ganesha forges ahead through obstacles as its determinant, the rat, represents the power of Lord Ganesha to vanquish every obstacle of the way.  

The Maharaja going on his Arath procession and dipping the sword in the sea is reminiscent of the King Harshwardhna of the seventh century who used to go in a procession to Prayag after every five years for penitential purposes. Again, the Arath procession is emblematic of sincere contrition and honest confession in order to perceive the Ultimate Reality. Shantha voices forth the sentiment when she dreams of the three-storeyed house:

> Why not be satisfied seeing the Arath from our roof and vaguely perceive the Maharaja dipping the sword into the sea? You can count the tiers of the temple spire, too (p.113).

Shantha feels that after realizing all the three stages of life, one should annihilate one's ego to achieve the Ultimate Reality. The sea is described as a symbol of Ultimate Reality for which Shantha aspires sitting at the top of the three-storeyed house.

At places, digressional myths used in the novel for embellishment, are not seminal to the thematic design.
These myths are: "the Pandya waterfall, Mother Bhavani's secret trysting place with Lord Shiva" (pp. 13-14), the myth of Creation in which "the god lay in his seven-headed serpent; his one wife at his feet and another rising from his lotus navel-blue he lay and in deep sleep" (p. 61) (in Purush Sukta in Rig Veda, Vishnu is described as such with Lakshmi and Saraswati); Shantha's comparison with Panchali or Damayanti which she disowns, and the crowned cat treated as sacred Bastet in Egypt (p. 87). In Ahcarya Mayukh and Aahnic Sutravali, it is written that by meditating on the names of Sita, Tara, Mandodari and Panchak, all sins vanish away. Perhaps, that is the Female Principle which Pai worships to achieve the desired goal.

The central motif of The Cat and Shakespeare is the quest for the Ultimate Reality. As the title indicates, the world of Shakespeare seems to suggest the world of illusion, the realm of Maya, whereas the world of the Mother Cat stands for the Ultimate Reality. Various myths like the bilva tree and the three-storeyed house are certain stages for reaching the goal, the vehicles for "apprehending reality, of spiritual voyaging". The theme of illusion and reality, as described in The Serpent and the Rope, finds its further development in The Cat and Shakespeare. That is why Nancy Wilson Ross feels that in it, the myth and fact meet in a "land and people nourished by a still-living mythology and personally viable metaphysics, coming in that delusive reality, which for many Indian minds, is only a timeless illusion".
In this "metaphysical comedy", Raja Rao shows how the feminine and the feline felicities coincide for the realization of the Ultimate Reality, and for its achievement, one must resign oneself to the will of God - Adavaita-Vedanta. In Kanthapura, this realization comes through the Gandhian principle of Satyagraha because Moorthy is a man of action. In The Serpent and the Rope, it comes through jhana as the protagonist is an intellectual, but in the case of Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair (who are men neither of action nor intellect), the realization comes through the path of bhakti (devotion) and prapatti(surrender). Complete submission to the will of God and the extinction of ego is suggested through the significant symbol of the Cat Principle (Marjara Nyaya).

Above all, the reference to Shakespeare in the title is "symbolic of Govindan Nair's humanism, and catholicity of temper" and is, therefore, vitally connected with the central theme of the novel. The Cat Principle has been shown as a way of deliverance from the mysterious and complex world of Shakespeare. In Raja Rao's own words, "Shakespeare is some one who has gone beyond duality, and as such he is a universal symbol". But another symbol, the Cat, with all its rich associative capacity, resounds with frequent echoes of Nair's perception of reality, though it does not resolve various tensions, nor is it treated profoundly.
Moreover, Raja Rao seems to have failed in finding a suitable objective-correlative in the symbol of the Cat as it falls short of the burden of thought and the mystical realization of it. The conflict of intentions and attitudes, the complexities and profundities of life could be dramatized through a greater elaboration of the conflict between devotion to and complete reliance on the Mother Cat and also through better revelations of her mysterious ways in achieving the Ultimate Reality. For example, the detection of the real signature in the file and the cat's presence in the court strain the credulity of the reader. Rather than acting as catalysts of an enlightened awareness of the Ultimate Reality, they border on the ridiculous. A sufficient dramatic intensity of philosophical ideas could be created through the symbol of Cat. When the cat, the symbol of the Divine and the Absolute, is visually presented in the novel, the intensity and emotional appeal of the symbol fades away and it appears trite and uncalled for. It dilutes rather than heightens the imaginative appeal of it being a profound truth. The physical rather than the psychological presence of the cat seems to be an error of judgement on the part of the novelist.

More like an expanded metaphor and less like an objective-correlative, the novel is just like an Upanishad; part narrative, part speculation, part dialogue or discussion. Though various myths and symbols have been employed as a
creative mode for establishing the identity of characters and elucidating a point-of-view, the deep truth of total surrender for achieving the divine grace of the Ultimate Reality - Advaita-Vedanta - remains "too elusive and the plot too thin as the "action" of the novel meanders through the haze of Govindan Nair's moods and words, catty, chatty and often unpredictable". But, is it the only 'action' possible to a tale which deals with the enigmatic questions of Truth, Beauty, Woman, Death and Divine Grace? The reader, in fact, weeps at every page of this 'book of prayer' not for what he sees but for what he is forced to see.

Comrade Kirillov

The mythical mode in Comrade Kirillov is more a part of a digressional technique rather than a medium for highlighting any metaphysical idea. The narrative does not offer any sustained mythic parallels, but some of them have been deployed with a view to highlighting, modifying, explicating or elucidating the significant traits and aspects of the main characters like Padmanabhan Iyer alias Kirillov. While the myth of Siddhartha has been used predominantly for tracing the confused state of Kirillov's being, there are minor mythical allusions of Rama, Hanuman, Sita and Ravana, Krishna and also the historical legends of Bhaskara, the great Indian mathematician, writing his famous work, Lilavati, as a puzzle-book for his widowed daughter.
The symbolism of the horse, Kanthaka, carrying Siddhartha to his destination of self-realization used here is reminiscent of the Siddhartha myth as R's wish for the conversion of Kirillov from Communism to Vedantism. The myth of Parvati and Lord Shiva of Kailash is also introduced in the novel as a story told by the narrator, Raja Rao, to Padmanabhan Iyer's son, Kamal Dev.

Raja Rao himself appears in the novel as R, presents his own character as a foil to that of Padmanabhan Iyer alias Kirillov, who is a split-personality. The author consciously mythicizes himself as an agent of Kirillov's self-realization - his conversion from Communism to Vedantism. Standing by the door of Kirillov's house, he has a mythical sensation of becoming a "Kanthaka under the porch" (p. 90). By implication, the narrator takes upon himself the task of bringing the estranged Indian, Comrade Kirillov, to the Siddhartha myth as Kirillov is "totally oblivious of this dichotomy (sic) in his personality between his basic Indianness and his Europeanized intellect". Comrade Kirillov, like his mythical parallel, Siddhartha, leaves his wife, Irene (sleeping in the grave) and son, Kamal, and sets out on his pilgrimage not, however, to Bo-tree but to Moscow for his self-realization through his Communist creed. It becomes evident that even in modern times, the Siddhartha myth has a rich associative capacity and immediacy of appeal.

The novelist modifies the myth to suit his own purpose. Like Siddhartha's father, R., too, wishes that
instead of subscribing to the creed of communism, Kirillov should have his firm roots in Vedanta. But Kirillov is steadfast in the pursuit of communist ideals. He is "pining among thirsty souls for the vision of the messiah, but time led him to more busy meditations... And it was his messianic awaiting that Kirillov first set his foot on the American soil (p.9). His dream of establishing "the new Benaras" (p.9) at California fades away and he is disillusioned by the theoleptic magic with the loss of his faith in Annie Besant's movement of freedom and spirituality. He tries hard to free himself from the worldly shackles to discover one God, one worship and one morality in communism, (pp.39-40). For him, "marxism is a pathological obsession" and he turns out to be a critic of the Vedantic philosophy.

As in the case of Siddhartha, so in Kirillov also, the astrological predictions are of utmost significance. What Irene, and the narrator think about Kirillov and his life can be termed as astrologer's predictions about his intrinsic love for India and his ultimate conversion to Vedantism. Kirillov is a bundle of contradictions to all outward appearances. He denounces everything Indian, while in the heart he loves India with a "noble, delicate, unreasoned love" (p.86). Irene, his Czech wife, does not take long to perceive that his real roots lie in India. She records at various places in her diary that P. is passionately in love with India and once he sets his foot on the Indian soil, all his "occidental veneer will scuttle into European hatred" (p.113). As a reaction to this, she herself imagines India
The narrator also feels that Kirillov's Communism cannot compete with Vedantism which, according to him, is the highest and holiest form of philosophical system as it most satisfactorily recognizes the fundamental reality about the Cosmos. The narrator is sure that Kirillov's Indianhood will definitely shatter his communism and he will discover himself some day. R. points out the essential difference between his Vedantism and Kirillov's Communism:

He was wonderful - Kirillov was but his logic and mine belonged to different dimensions. Vedanta alone has the courage of the ultimate - it lovingly uncovers the limits to your own ignorant authority and asks for more inquiry into your biological, psychological and psychic self, delimiting you bit by bit into acute dissolution, when, intensified in your desperate anonymity, you surrender yourself to that which is ever your "I". And in that is-ness there is none that you are brother to. Love has no brother, only lovingness has (p.73).

Siddhartha's father did not desire that his son should renounce this world, whereas R. desires Kirillov to renounce his world of Communism and sees "great hope for Iyer as a person seeking the state of non-becoming and imagines him as another Buddha".

Unable to confine himself within the cosy and luxurious precincts of the palace, Siddhartha decided to abandon it one night in the company of his faithful attendant, Channa, to see the brave new world, much to the chagrin and disappointment of his father. During his wanderings, he encountered four incidents which altogether altered the pattern of his thinking: These four encounters, commonly known as Four Signs in Buddhism, are - an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a mendicant
holy man. His first perception of life's grim realities left Siddhartha miserable and puzzled, and reflecting on these seemingly unanswerable conundrums, he chanced to look into the face of a holy man. As Siddhartha saw, in the serene face of the recluse, the only hope for his growing pain and bewilderment, so Kirillov finds in R., a catalyst of the mumbo-jumbo of his ideas, a deliverer and a lighthouse. As Siddhartha was not happy in spite of all joys and delights, Kirillov also is not happy with his belief in Communism. That is why the narrator observes that Kirillov is overwhelmed with "dialectical despair" which might one day compel him to shift from his inadequate Communism to Indian Vedantism.

As the Four Signs in the life of Siddhartha proved to be a turning point in his life, Kirillov's meeting with Sri Raman Maharishi at Trivannamala also proves to be of great importance as it is here in the Ashram that he gets the first glimpse of self-enlightenment (p74). After his meeting with the Maharishi, Comrade Kirillov leaves the world of Communism and sets out for the quest of his spiritual self leaving his wife and his son. "Each Buddha has to have a son before renouncing the world and so the birth of Rahul was a sign to Siddhartha that the moment had come for departure." R. conjures up a vision wherein he sees Kirillov leaving his wife (who is expecting her second baby) for the sake of obtaining enlightenment:
I told you Kirillov was an Indian - and his Indianhood would break through every communist chain. Meanwhile, Kanthaka is hungry for space. ... Silence reigns over the cold British Isles, and in the lurking cloud-banks of the vanished night, Kanthaka takes a leap into Indian space. ... Kirillov walks up to lonely Bo-tree and sits looking at his navel. "Until that be found, I shall not arise" (pp. 91-92).

Just as Siddhartha, after deep meditation, obtained enlightenment and became Buddha, so Kirillov, enlightened after his conversion, becomes Padmanabhan Kirillov (p. 61). Kirillov realizes that India is not a country like France, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic. Having realized the intrinsic significance of the Vedantism, he is now concerned with the abstract or spiritual values rather than materialistic and mundane ones. Both the Buddha and the naked Sadhu Mahavira renounced all the worldly attractions and temptations and were fully devoted to the realization of their Ultimate goals. Kirillov is "too clean in his habits, almost ascetic in his spare ways, gentle, reliable, learned, his face growing in beauty with age... " (p. 72). R. feels that Kirillov's dialectical coldness, his razor-edge honesty would lead him to an intellectual death and mocks at his Buddhistic philosophy of Nirvana (p. 72). The narrator is different from Stavrogin of Dostoevsky's The Possessed as much as Padmanabhan Iyer (Kirillov) is from Kirillov of Dostoevsky's. The novelist does not opt for the suicide of Kirillov, but feels that the Communist and the Sadhu have spiritual equivalences. Kirillov becomes capable of free-thinking and if he does not tether himself to a dogma of Communism, he would be able to find "radiance in the Buddhist Path of Non-Becoming" (p. 72).
During Buddha's meditation, the fierce hosts of Mara, the tempter, assailed the meditation of the one about to be enlightened as he was sitting beneath the holy tree. "They brandish weapons, fling uprooted trees... and attempt by every means to break the calm of his meditation. By threats, they strive to arouse in him some fear of death, the trace of an impulse of self preservation.... Simultaneously, the charm of life - all its loveliness - in the guise of divine women is displayed before him; so that the allure of the senses should move him...".  

As Buddha remained unmoved by the tempter and resisted all temptations with a perfect equanimity, so does Kirillov in the novel. When he takes his typically ancient Indian decision to tread a spiritual path, Mara appears in fearful fascination:

"Go, go, Mara" ... "I know of your doings ... Go, you many-mouthed, many-armed, you multiple monster, Mara!" (p.92).

Kirillov is called the "Sanyasi of Benaras" (p.72) and, like Buddha, his spirits are enlightened. R.feels that Kirillov
can achieve enlightenment by working the Law of non-becoming, walking to the holy pilgrimage at Benaras, and by wandering the vast land of Hindusthan (pp. 92-93). Now Kirillov seems to realize how great ideas and great lives transcend the barriers of time and place and give rise to the new ideas as happened in the case of Albegensian heresy originating from Buddhism (p. 79). If Siddhartha, by attaining spiritual enlightenment, could become Buddha - the dominant influence in Asia - and give rise to Albegensians in France, Kirillov could also spread his enlightened faith far and wide. He realizes that noble spiritual ideas never die as they give birth to newer ones (p. 80).

The myth of Parvati and Shiva of Kailash is narrated in an inimitable Puranic style. The narrator goes to Kirillov's home town, Trichinopoly, with Kirillov's son, Kamal, and takes him to the places of pilgrimage in South India reaching Kanyakumari. The narrator sings the story of Parvati's penance at Kanyakumari with full-throated ease and tells Kamal Dev how Parvati was charmed by the splendid beauty of the last rock of India. Parvati made Kanyakumari her permanent abode:

Unmarried, she ever awaits the marriage that will never take place. Shiva, in disgrace, went back - he weeps. He woos her from the Himalayas. She has not changed her mind. At the tip of India stands Parvati, she is India (p. 126).

Parvati is not always a figure of overt power. "She may appear in tenderly appealing aspects ... daughter of Himalaya, a personification of the towering mountains that guard India's
northern boundaries". The narrator initiates Kamal Dev into the Hindu religion by dressing him in "sacred silk" (p.127), gives him his silver waist-hand and sandal on his face, shows him Mother Kanyakumari. Between the lamps and the bright Goddess, they hear "the leaping adoration of the ninth moon ocean" (p.127). The endless waiting of Parvati at Kanyakumari is as much for her Lord Shiva as "it is for estranged sons of the motherland who have gone away to material dualism".

Quite a few critics are of the opinion that the novel portrays the idealized India of the past, especially, in the narration of the Kanyakumari legends. But the fact is that the myth of the endless waiting by Parvati at Kanyakumari has been properly woven into the main theme of the novel as it shifts the focus to the ancient, mythical India from the war-torn materialistic West. Symbolically, it presents the narrator's faith in India and its abiding values and is also intended to acquaint Kirillov's son with the vast cultural religious and mythical heritage of India. The use of the myth is seminal because, in his ambivalence, Kirillov becomes a drifter leaving his son in India to delve deep into the rich mythical and cultural mores. By implication, it signifies that Kamal Dev would seek his destiny in India to attain the Ultimate peace - which the confused Kirillov has not been able to get. He shuttles between Moscow and Peking, from one despair to another distress. The story of Kanyakumari obviously hints at the eternal India which has
withstood invasions of different ideologies in the past and which promises to hold its own in the future as well. 107

In the earlier stages of Kirillov's career, the references to Shiva and Parvati become synonymous not with the particular myth but with any Indian God or Goddess:

Hurrah to the Hindu Kush /The Volga and the Ganga be Unified in twin matrimony /We pitch our tents on Muscovy /For Benares has fled From Shiva and Parvathi /Hurrah to the Hindu Kush / (p.53)

The song refers to the unification of the Russian river, the Volga, pointing out the communistic vision of Kirillov with an Indian river, the Ganga; Kirillov feels that communism can spread from India to Russia and China through Afghanistan (pp.52-53).

The naming of Kirillov's son, Kamal Dev, after a flower has distinct religious and spiritual associations. Kirillov hopes that they "would now have a boy, and he would be a boy, and he would be an Indian. He would be proud of his heritage, for by then, Communism would have purified this ancient, this glorious India of mine.... If it were a boy, he would be called Stefanovitch - the first name of General Potemkin" (pp.58-59). But when the boy is born, he is called "Kamal and not Stefanovitch, because the naming of Kamal Dev "symbolically suggests the hero's nexus with the ancient Indian tradition to which he rightfully belongs in spite of all his Marxist convictions". 108
References to other myths and legends abound in the novel, which, though not integral to the main theme of the novel, help in understanding various characters. In her diary, January 3, Irene makes reference to the prince Uttara in the *Mahabhartha*. Irene makes fun of the Gandhian satyagraha movement in which any person who regularly spins two hundred twenty yards of yarn per day or performs some other more as advised by Mahatma Gandhi can be inducted as a volunteer. She is afraid that such zealous recruits would be useless in the freedom movement because they may boast of great deal of their valour and courage but this courage might dry up when the time for real action comes. In this context, Irene refers to the story of Uttara from the *Mahabharatha*. Prince Uttara, the son of Virata, started with great deal of enthusiasm to a place where Kaurvas had rounded up the cows. But the moment he saw the Kaurva army drawn in battle by Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Duryodhana and Karna, his courage gradually began to dwindle. His mouth went dry and his hair stood on an end. He shut his eyes with both of his hands and shuddered with the thought of fighting single-handed with a well-equipped army led by the world-renowned warrior, Uttara. The followers of the Mahatma, by implication, may also experience Uttara's feeling and their selection should be on the same standard.

Another myth of Rama and Sita is referred to in the diary of Irene. Irene is pregnant and Kirillov is happy.
because the doctor has confirmed her pregnancy. His happiness has been compared to the happiness that Sita had when she was in a family way. Irene points out to a simple fact about woman that her natural joy is in the womanhood, that is, when she is pregnant. Like Shantha in The Cat and Shakespeare and Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope, the pregnant Irene also stands for the Feminine Principle or matrishakti.

Man is concerned with abstractions and ideals as Lord Rama was in the ancient myth. When Sita was in a family way, she was not permitted to stay in Ayodhya as her chastity was doubted by a washerman because she remained in the captivity of Ravana for a long time. Even though she had given the proof of her purity by going through the crucible of fire. Though convinced of the fact that Sita was pure, Rama had to abandon her because it was not a question of his wife alone but it was a question of the ideal of the state. Rama wanted to present himself as an ideal before others with his becoming kingly virtues. What mattered most for him were ideals and abstractions and not his own benefits. Kirillov is also a man of ideals concerned as he is with the sacred aim of benefiting others through his thoughts and deeds. Irene remarks, "The real man is the one who runs after abstractions" (p.117). Defining the real woman, Irene says that the real woman is she who "catches or tries to catch the man who is trying to catch abstractions" (p.117). What she means to say is that the woman who finds
a man of ideals and abstractions, is lucky. Man may not achieve anything but the mere fact of trying to achieve some ideal is good in itself. Sita, though abandoned by her husband, did not go in for another lover because of her fidelity and faithfulness to Lord Rama. Irene seems to compare herself with Sita in being true to Kirillov, but she contrasts Sita with Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman of Greece, who burnt the topless towers of Ilium. Here Irene seems to praise the Indian woman for her virtue of being faithful to her husband as against the shifting loyalties of Helen of Troy. 111

Mahatma Gandhi does not remain only a reincarnation of Rama and Krishna as he was in Kanthapura, but also becomes the Christian Messiah. Kirillov disapproves the Gandhian pacifism which is utopian and antithetical to Marxism. To him, the advent of Gandhism upsets Marxism; and "Mahatma Gandhi should have been born in the Middle Ages. He should not have troubled us with his theology in the rational age of ours" (p. 37). Gandhi's non-violence is not outrightly rejected but his place in the Indian freedom struggle is certainly questioned. Irene compares Gandhi with Rama and points out that Mahatma Gandhi is not as good a strategist as Rama was, because in the case of Rama's strategy to triumph over Ravana, there was an element of surprise and wonder. 112 But Gandhi's programmes are always pre-planned, regulated and announced in advance. Irene writes in her
diary that Gandhi's Satyagraha movement is a "piece of gross childishness and that he has not read his Ramayana well though he reads chapters of it everyday" (p. 99).

There are several allusions in the novel suggesting the myth of reincarnation of God and the widespread Hindu beliefs that whenever the earth is full of sinners, a messiah is born to set everything right. Padmanabhan Iyer has also been associated with such an incarnation. A number of expressions pointing out the mythic parallel between these incarnated gods and Padmanabhan Iyer's incarnation have been used in the novel. Raja Rao refers to "P-not yet to be called Kirillov, as pining among thirsty souls for the vision of the messiah" (p. 9) and "since the days of the great incarnations of Krishna and Rama, the Messiah would rule" (p. 10). Here Raja Rao is equating Kirillov with Rama and Krishna, who defeated and killed Ravana and Kansa and brought an end to their tyrannies. Comrade Kirillov would also be an incarnation and would throw the British out of India (p. 10). But unlike Rama and Krishna with whose births many supernatural stories are associated, Comrade Kirillov is a different kind of messiah who "will be born in steel furnace (at Mongolostrokok) and ten will be his arms of pointed steel. His armor will be our seriousness, and statistics will prove history" (p. 24). The ten arms of steel bring further correspondences with Ravana who had ten heads and was very powerful. Arms of steel also suggest not only Kaliyuga but also the age of iron, machinery and industry. Another noticeable variation struck in the incarnation
myth is that unlike Krishna and Rama, Kirillov does not fulfil the expectations of people without embracing death. He is not an immortal figure like them but a mortal like Mahatma Gandhi. The narrator, R., feels that Kirillov had brought a great change in the country but would have to bear a heavy price of his life for this transformation (pp.26-27).

Both Rama and Krishna had ventured out to kill their enemies in the adolescent period of their life. Saint Vishwamittra had visited Dasharatha that some of the demons were disturbing him in his worship and he wanted the valorous services of Rama and Lakshmana to defeat them. Reluctantly, Dasharatha allowed Rama and Lakshamana to go and kill asuras who were disturbing the meditations of saints. Krishna, too, was adolescent, when playing with a ball, he had to go and jump into the ocean to slay the Kaliya serpent which had gobbled up the ball. Even in his early age, he had killed this demon though the people were astonished to see the miracle. Raja Rao refers to the adolescent period of Kirillov, "The master was indeed there, and born but he was too adolescent for his prophetic destiny; time and theosophical workings would ultimately reveal the messiah" (p.9), which invites comparison with the adolescent feats of Rama and Krishna.

In order to throw light on the character of S., Irene comically raises S. (a Sikh) above Christ and Marx and for this purpose, myth is used in a mock-serious and ironic vein. In her diary of 22nd April, she writes, "S. loves children, and they adore him. Paradox: To withdraw into oneself seems to make anyone everyone. Christ never understood it. Nor did
Saint Marx for that matter" (p.102), which implies that by engrossing himself completely with the members of his family, S. has withdrawn from external activities and thus become a part of them. Christ did not care so much for his family as he did for others and, therefore, could never become a common man. The same is the case with Karl Marx whom Irene ironically refers to as Saint Marx because Karl Marx also cared for labourers of the world and their numerous problems, whereas S. (a Sikh) seems to believe in the principle that charity begins at home. By comparing S. with Christ and Saint Marx, Irene, on surface, seems to have elevated his character. But it appears that she is implicitly satirizing the myopic concern of S. which is diametrically opposed to the broad aims and higher ideals of Jesus Christ and Saint Marx.

Raja Rao has made use of myths and symbols in the novel and they become significant because of their apparent spontaneity and appeal to the Collective Unconscious. By making use of private symbols like 'the barrel', Raja Rao conveys an impression about Kirillov's twisted psyche whose "sensibility is always under stress because of his blind faith in Communism". Kirillov uses a "round, full barrel" (p.8) to sit on instead of a chair. Now, the description of Kirillov seated on a round barrel is reminiscent of the Buddha seated on the lotus. The description of Marxism being preached from a "round barrel" as an equivalent of the ancient Indian lotus-throne is laced with irony.
The peculiar parabolic shape, which Kirillov's necktie assumes because of the curve given to his chest by the indrawness of his nature, symbolizes the twist of his thought and psyche (p. 30). At another place, his necktie appears like a snake, it hissed and curbed in ritual approval (p. 45). The narrator even imagines Kirillov addressing the tie as "You, you, my noble, secret friend... my noble companion, I have none but..." (p. 32). Kirillov's necktie with its peculiar parabola is an excellent objective-correlative of the twists and turns of his own complex mind as he heroically tries to reconcile dialectical materialism with Advaita-Vedanta. The necktie is also a symbol of the cross - the contradictions and conflicts of Communism - which he bears most of the time on his shoulders. Thus, symbolism and myths play a significant role in the central design of the novel.

One cannot fail to notice some remarkable correspondences, thematic or otherwise, between Comrade Kirillov and The Serpent and the Rope. There are parallels between Irene and Madeleine as far as rituals are concerned. Irene receives from her Indian father-in-law the choli-piece, kumkum and a gold coin from the household treasury just as in The Serpent and the Rope, Madeleine receives a sari and toe-rings from her step mother-in-law. The narrator is a Gandhian and a Vedantin (like Ramaswamy) and loves the Nirvana-Astaka of Sankara and also sings enthusiastically
just like Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope*:

Manobuddhi shankara cittani naham
cidanada rupah Shivoham-Shivoham (p.86).

Like Madeleine, Irene refuses to settle in India and denies Indian values and rituals, a trait which almost forced Madeleine to seek refuge in the Buddhistic idea of Nirvana. Kirillov visits India in the middle of the novel like Ramaswamy and his whole perspective of life is metamorphosed. The debate on Indian metaphysics, Albigensions and the Cathars of *The Serpent and the Rope* is also repeated in *Comrade Kirillov* out of sheer enthusiasm rather than for the immediacy of the fictional context.

The Sanskritic quotations, far from smacking of a virtuosity, are almost pedantic and a part of Raja Rao's "technical legerdemain to secure facile 'Indianness':" If *The Serpent and the Rope* explores Indianness on a personal level, *The Cat and Shakespeare* explores it on a social level, and *Comrade Kirillov* explores it on a political level. In all these three novels, the quest for roots is enacted through different methods. *Comrade Kirillov* is the story of an Indian intellectual-turned-communist, and whose quest is beyond the perimeters of human existence much in the manner of Moorthy (*Kanthapura*), Rama (*The Serpent and the Rope*) or Govindan Nair (*The Cat and Shakespeare*). All this energizes Kirillov's consciousness which astonishingly absorbs all details of myth and legend and forges links between the past and the present, between various historical incidents and epochs.
Although the style of the novel is inclusive and referential, it is "inadequate as a substitute for living sensations". Again, the point-of-view in the novel is given a simplistic treatment and is not transmogrified in artistic terms. Moreover, the crux of the novel is how Kirillov's essential Indianness triumphs over the sophistication of his European intellect, how Vedantism triumphs over Communism, the head over the heart, the thrust of which strains the credulity of the reader, when, instead of coming back to India, Kirillov ends as a drifter and has nothing positive to offer either to India or to the world, though he partially fulfils his newly attained faith in India by sending off his son, Kamal Dev, to India. Had Kirillov himself told the tale of Shiva and Parvati to Kamal Dev at Kanyakumari (which the narrator does), it would have been quite convincing. Then Kirillov's Marxism would have appeared to be a result of intellectual discipline, and his innate faith in Vedantism would have triumphed over his cultivated faith in Communism. It is difficult to agree with M.K. Naik when he says that Kirillov, with all his ambivalence, is "saved from being a house divided against itself". Had it been so, Kirillov would have come to India with his son, Kamal Dev, to reaffirm his faith in Indian values. That he goes to Peking gives the impression that his quest of Vedanta is not complete, his faith in Indianness is yet to be affirmed for its revival and survival.
Perhaps, Kamal Dev, too, thinks that his father is still divorced from the values embedded in the ancient Indian mythology. That is why after gathering the diamonds and rubies of Parvati's wedding-shells in blue, stones in green and jasmine-like marbles from the marriage garland, Kamal decides:

I will send them to Daddy ... to Peking where my Daddy is (p.127).

What Kamal Dev decides to send to his father is, perhaps, a specimen of his assimilation of Indian essences and values. Kamal Dev's faith in the Indianness would have gained wider perspective and broader sweep had Kirillov visited India along with his son and "heard the leaping adoration of the ninth moon ocean" (p.127).

Kirillov is essentially a character caught in the mighty ideological contradictions of the modern world and also torn between his intellectual convictions and psychological pulls. As a split personality, he fails to resolve the different pulls and pressures in him. The dichotomy of his character does not permit him to belong fully to India, and the novel ends with the report of his final departure to Peking. His conscious mind seeks an escape, wins over the sub-conscious, as does the rational side over the emotional. Kirillov's conversion to Vedantism is half-hearted and has not come full circle because of his lack of belongingness either to occidental ideology or to oriental commitment.

In the end, he remains as rootless and alienated as he was in the beginning of the novel. His divided consciousness
is resultant of his double commitment swinging its pendulum from rational to emotional, from conscious to unconscious. However, the middle-of-the-road position of Kirillov is delineated through the dexterous use of various mythical parallels without which the novel would have lacked its lustre, cohesive force and artistic appeal.
REFERENCES AND NOTES


8 Meenakshi Mukherjee, pp.141-142.

9 Mulk Raj Anand, Roots and Flowers: Two Lectures on the Metamorphosis of Techniques and Content in the Indian-English Novel (Dharwar: Karnataka University, 1972), p.35.


12 Quoted by Meenakshi Mukherjee, p.141.


14 C.D. Narasimhaiah, Raja Rao, p.43.


21 Ibid., pp. 116-117.


24 John B. Alphonso Karkala, p. 78.


26 John B. Alphonso Karkala, p. 80.


39 Meenakshi Mukherjee, p.143.


41 Savitri of the novel bears the echoes of the mythical Savitri, wife of Satyavan, who married Satyavan knowing full well that her husband is fated to live for one year more. When on the appointed day, Yama appears to take away the soul of Satyavan, Savitri follows him, always insisting on having the life of her husband restored. Ultimately, she succeeds in bringing back the soul of her husband to this earth "against all odds, Satyavan (The Truthful), and won him back from Yama, the God of Death" (p.360).

Love of Iseult for Tristan is analogous to that of Savitri for Satyavan, or that of Radha for Krishna. Tristan marries Iseult of White Hands, daughter of the Duke, "for her name and beauty" but makes her wife only in name. Iseult, with whom Tristan is in love, is bound to him by an imperishable love. Though she is not married to Tristan yet she is spiritually one with him. In the same way, Rama becomes Tristan, and Madeleine is the unloved Iseult of White Hands.


Beatrice Menezes, p.10.


Beatrice Menezes, p.11.


Siddhartha left his sleeping wife, Yashodhara, and his son, Rahul, at night and set out in the quest which ultimately led him to self-realization. Initially, he was worldly enough to get married to Yashodhara and lived happily with her, free from the knowledge of care and want. But after sometime, filled with the thought of the insecurity and futility of all worldly happiness, he felt a growing dissatisfaction and unrest with the vanity of life which paved a way for his enlightenment.


60 Harish Raizada, p.198.

61 Meenakshi Mukherjee, p.143.


63 Sama Veda, 11/V.1-2, XVI, 3.

64 Som P. Ranchan and B.M. Razdan, p.45.

65 Heinrich Zimmer, p.199.


71 C.D. Narasimhaiah, Raja Rao, p.131.


77 Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.205.


79 Harish Raizada, p.200.

80 Ibid., p.200.


82 Vinoba Bhawre, Talks on the Gita (Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1974), p.131. The Saguna devotee serves the Lord through the Indriyas, the organs of perception and action, the Niroguna devotee thinks constantly of the good of all the world. The first appears absorbed in outward service, but he meditates constantly within. The other seems to do no direct service, but within him, a great service is going on.

83 The house-building activity of Ramakrishna Pai has mythological overtones too. A reference is made to the Mahabharata about the construction of a house with lacquer which throws light on the characters of Ramakrishna Pai and Nair about their quest for the Ultimate Reality. In the Mahabharata, Duryodhana had plotted with Karna and Sakuni to build a palace with combustible material like jute, lac, ghee, oil, so that when the Pandavas live there, the house would be set on fire and they would be reduced to ashes.
According to Sankhya philosophy, the three gunas constitute the very substance of Prakriti - Sattva (serenity), rajas (energy) and tamas (gravity). In other words, when the 'contemplative power' (sattva) of the thinking substance is freed from the defilement of the 'active power' (rajas) and the 'force of inertia' (tamas), and has no further task than that involved in transcending the presented idea of the difference between itself (sattva) and the life-monad (purusha), and when the interior seeds of hindrances (klesa) have all been burned, then the 'contemplative power' (sattva) enters into a state of purity equal to that of the life-monad (purusha).

E.J. Kalinnikova, "Ancient Indian Philosophy and Raja Rao's Works", Perspectives on Raja Rao, p.27.


Ibid., p.50.

Heinich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.71.

There is a story in which all the gods were to compete in a race to go around the whole earth in the shortest period of time. And Ganesha, even though his vehicle, the rat, was slow-going and small, won the race. As Ganesha, instead of going around the earth, went around his parents, Shiva and Parvati, considering them the most superior ones. That is why Ganesha along with his vehicle, rat, is worshipped at the beginning of every important function. In contrast, the cat is an ominous symbol and is also an enemy of Ganesha's rat - Boothalinga Iyer's attitude towards the cat, though not akin to the central theme of the novel, is described as such: "For him, a cat, a marjaram was a Pariah animal.... Also, cat's hair if it fell into your milk was worse than gall... so altogether the cat was not a creature to be thought about. A rat, yes, it was the vehicle of 'Lord Ganesha' himself. In every temple you could see a Ganesha and under every Ganesha there was his vehicle, the rat, like Subramanya had the peacock or Shiva the bull. But the cat, which God ever rode a cat?" (pp.74,75).

H.M. Williams, Studies in Modern Indian Fiction in English, Volume II, p.128.

92 Harish Raiizada, p.200.


95 This point is made by Harish Raiizada in "Point of View, Myth and Symbolism in Raja Rao's Novels", Perspectives on Raja Rao, p.201.


98 Siddhartha's inner turmoil becomes so intense that he is impelled to abandon "for ever his sheltered, luxurious life, to leave his beautiful young wife, Yashodhara and his first-born son, Rahul, to go forth along a desperate quest for Truth. Not daring to bid farewell to any member of the household, not even his wife and son, he stole away, during midnight, knowing that he could have no rest until he found for himself the cause and cure of man's suffering, wrong-doings and mortality. The silent leave-taking from a beloved family is known in Buddhism as the Great Renunciation.

99 W.J.Wilkins, "The Buddha Avatara", Hindu Mythology (Calcutta : Rupa and Co., 1975), p.233. Before Siddhartha's marriage to Yashodhara, the young Siddhartha, possessed of an eager spirit and inquisitive mind, used to be engrossed in meditations on the problems of life and death. "Nothing is stable on earth", he used to say : "Nothing is real ... There must be some supreme intelligence where we can find rest".

100 P.K.Rajan, p.52.


106 One such instance is that of Vineypal Kaur Kirpal, p.49.

107 This view is also expressed by V.V. Badve cf. "Raja Rao's *Comrade Kirillov*", *New Quest*, No.14, March-April 1979, p.127. It is further reinforced in the blurb of the book "India is too powerful and too deep in an Indian to allow him to lead an alien life. She loves her children too much - and as long as Lord Shiva is in Kailash and holy Ganga flows from His hair; Indians will not betray their land..."


110 Elsewhere in the novel, Raja Rao remarks: "History, said the Mahabharata, is like the collyrium of the feminine eye - your perspective becomes more beautiful, and your nostrils have the camphor of the antiseptic. Death, the Moscow deaths, were the antiseptics of history - you kill for the beauty of your eyes" (p.46).

111 Helen had amorous activities with her numerous paramours. While still a maiden, Helen was carried off by Theseus and she gave birth to a daughter. Later on, she chose Menelaus from amongst a number of suitors and gave birth to one child. In the absence of her husband, she was eloped by Paris to Troy. After the death of Paris, she was married to Deiphobus but again she betrayed Deiphobus and came back to Sparta with Menelaus.
C. Rajagopalachari, *The Mahabharata* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968), p. 156. For example, Ravana could never entertain the idea that Rama could cross over from Rameshvaram to Ceylon because there was no bridge but Hanuman with his army of monkeys built a bridge over the sea which helped Rama to march his army to Ceylon to rescue Sita. The same element of surprise and wonder is discernible in the action of Hanuman when he launched a "commando attack on Ceylon" (p. 99) and set it on fire. Hanuman jumped from India to Ceylon in one bound; he tore up trees, carried away the Himalaya and performed many other exploits. He flew to the Himalayas, from where he brought medicinal herbs with which he healed the wounded companions, and killed thousands of people who assailed him.


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