CHAPTER V

RAJA RAO’S POSTCOLONIAL FICTION
Postcolonial fiction, coming from almost all the postcolonial countries, is generally characterized by the elements of hybridity, ambivalence, alterity, diasporic dilemmas, essentialism, ethnic conflicts, exoticism, hegemony, ideological conflicts, belief (or loss of belief) in metanarratives, mimicry, effects of colonial education on the elite class, and the conflicts of self versus other among other notions. Raja Rao’s writings span both the eras, that is, the era of colonialism as well as postcolonialism in India, and interestingly, his writings reflect the change in his perspective with the change of time. Although Raja Rao avoids writing forthright political novels as does Chinua Achebe, yet one can discern a fine thread of political comments in his fictional works.

Raja Rao is a realist and this characteristic trait is reflected in his writings quite recurrently. As he was influenced by Gandhi, there is much on Gandhi and Gandhian ideals in his works. He was moved by the pathetic condition of the common masses of India under colonial rule. All these sufferings and their factors are explored in his fictional works. Similarly, he was also moved by the condition of women in India, especially widows, and he wrote several stories reflecting their lives. Raja Rao was a serious scholar of ‘Advaita Vedanta’ philosophy and he includes his opinion on the subject in his fictions as well. The Hindu mythological term ‘Advaita’ means non-dualism soul in English. The philosophy advaita refers to ideology that God is the Supreme Being and He is the only reality- everything else is nothing but illusions. Sri Sankaracharya, one of the main champions of this philosophy, defines ‘Advaita Vedanta’

“Brahma Satyam
Jagan Mithya
Jivo Brahmaiva Na Parah” (qtd. in "Advaita Vedanta Philosophy")

It is roughly translated in English as “God alone is real. The world is illusory. The individual is none other than God” (qtd. in "Advaita Vedanta Philosophy"). The individual is the representation of God or ‘Brahmin’. According to this philosophy the reality of ‘jagat’, which means that this mortal world, is relative in comparison to the absolute truth of God, and thus this world and its existence is unreal compared to the absolute truth, that is, God. So this unreal word is an illusion like a dream, “which has its own subjective reality but which is illusory” in relation to the ‘Brahmin’ or individual self ("Advaita Vedanta Philosophy"). That is the kind of realism is encountered in his works.
Yet another characteristic feature of Raja Rao’s writings is that he was the most innovative novelist of his time. He experimented with a new genre in a foreign language. He also experimented with his own language and made it malleable to suit his purposes. R. Parathasarathy has the following to say in this connection in the introduction to *The Cat and Shakespeare*:

One of the most innovative novelists of twentieth century, Rao departed boldly from the European tradition of the novel, which he indigenized in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He put the novel to uses to which it had not perhaps been put before, by exploring the metaphysical basis of writing itself – of, in fact, the word. In the Indian tradition, literature is a way of realizing the Absolute (Brahman) through the meditation of language. (ix)

Raja Rao’s postcolonial works are not untouched by some of these notions and ideas framing his worldview. In the present chapter three of his well-known postcolonial works, namely, *The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare* and *Comrade Kirillov* are discussed with a view to analyze his idea on culture, identity, cultural conflict and cultural hegemony in postcolonial India.

But before venturing to analyze Raja Rao’s novels from particular cultural perspectives, it would be worthwhile to discuss the term ‘culture’ briefly.

**Culture**

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines culture as:

- the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time;
- a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.;
- a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as business). ("Simple Definition of Culture.")

And in a more serious deliberation on culture John Sutherland explains T.S. Eliot’s description in this respect:

If we take culture seriously, we see that a people does not need merely enough to eat but a proper and particular cuisine…Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living.’ So wrote Eliot in his treatise *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, in 1948. Eliot was consciously answering a question that his fellow Harvard graduate, the philosopher
William James, had posted in a lecture 50 years earlier, entitled, ‘What makes life worth Living?’ Culture, Eliot proposed, can fill the empty socket where religion used to be. And literature is a main constituent in a nation’s culture.

So, taking into consideration the definition of culture, it is commonly expressed in two forms, material culture and non-material culture. Material forms of culture are the aspects of culture visible in the appearance of a cultural or ethnic group associated with a particular culture, for instance, dress codes, looks, food habits and artifacts whereas, the non-material forms of culture are the aspects of culture that may not be directly visible to a customary viewer, like language, beliefs, religious practices, customs, traditions, values, ways of thinking, world view and social semiotics.

When the vision of culture, cultural conflict and cultural hegemony in Raja Rao’s postcolonial fictions is in discussion, it would be sensible to look in his fictional works keeping in mind the non-material forms of culture, like linguistic behaviour, way of life, philosophical thoughts, customs, traditions and values of Indian people. Though it is to be admitted that he draws a good picture of the material forms of Indian culture, too in his novels and strikes a sharp contrast with the material forms of Indian culture that he sees in conflict with the Western culture.

In all the three novels under discussion here, Raja Rao gives enough space to the description of material culture of India, especially south India, leaving ample scope for a good grasp of the features of India and Indian culture even to a cursory reader in a foreign country. The dress codes, food habits, landscapes, architecture, household goods, lithographs, art objects, musical instruments, people’s looks, artifacts, jewelry, holy places, temples, ghats (bathing places on different water bodies), rivers, and so on, have been paid enough attention to draw the picture of real India in a postcolonial setting.

In the forthcoming pages Raja Rao’s perspective of Indian culture, as expressed in his fictional works is discussed in details. How does Rao view the conflict of cultures as two different cultural forms, namely, Indian culture and Western culture? What happened when two cultures came in close contact, the one being the culture of the conqueror while the other being the culture of the vanquished? Naturally, the ruler shows hegemonic arrogance as regard to his culture. So, this is also important to study how Raja Rao perceives the cultural hegemony coming from the West, and more specifically, what his response to such a hegemony is.
Raja Rao may not be making a value judgment when he puts Indian culture in contrast with the Western culture, but of course, he gives the reader enough hints to believe that he insists on the superiority of Indian culture. The main protagonists of Raja Rao, namely, Moorthy in *Kanthapura*, Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Govindan Nair and Ramakrishna Pai in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and Padmanabha Iyer in *Comrade Kirillov*, are deeply devoted to the service of Indian culture (specifically, ancient Hindu culture of the *Vedas, Upanishads, Vedanta, Samkhya* and the like). All these central characters live for Indian culture, as depicted in these novels. They always speak in favour of it and try to inculcate the good aspects of this culture in their loved ones. They defend its tenets tooth and nail at all costs. It would be worth pointing here that all of these protagonists represent Raja Rao in one or the other form.

Moorthy in *Kanthapura* is a follower of Gandhi and his ideologies. He is well-versed in Indian literature and Indian way of life. He is so affected by the culture of his land that on a call from the Mahatma Gandhi he gives up his nice clothes and puts on rough khadi (locally hand-woven) garments. He also abandons his foreign education at the university and jumps headlong into the struggle for freedom movement. He devotes the rest of his life in educating the people of his village in the ways of Mahatma Gandhi and prepares a dedicated Gandhi brigade in his village. At his call, people put their lives at risk fighting a non-violent battle against the aggressors, the colonizers to be more specific. He sees in Gandhian principles not just a political philosophy but a philosophy of life. He ultimately becomes a seeker of Truth.

Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* is an *Advaita Vedanta* scholar, though for his research he is working on the history of the ‘Albigensian heresy’ that took place between 1209 and 1229 in France against the dualist religious movement called ‘Cathari’ (Madden & Baldwin). He is trying to find a link between “Bogomolites and the Druzes, and thus search back for the Indian background–Jain or maybe Buddhist–of the Cathars.” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 12). Ramaswamy is also a seeker of absolute truth. The title of the novel in itself is a reflection of Sri Adi Sankaracharya’s philosophy explicated as:

> “Brahma Satyam
> Jagan Mithya
> Jivo Brahmaiva Na Parah”. (qtd. in "Advaita Vedanta Philosophy")
Like, owing to human illusory sense perception, a rope may be mistaken for a snake in the dark, but when this illusion vanishes, one may realize the truth that it is nothing but a piece of lifeless rope.

Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* is a staunch follower of the Vishistha Advaita of Ramanuja, the founder of ‘Bhakti Movement’ (the path of devotion) in India. Although he likes to recite ‘Aho Aham Namo Mahyam Yasyame Nastikinchana’, which means, ‘Wonderful am I! Adoration to myself who love nothing’ (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 46), yet his firm belief is in God’s love for his creatures. He believes that God’s ways may look unpleasant to man at times, but His love is infinite. Here is an example from the text worth mentioning: “Govindan Nair always talks of a mother cat. It carries the kitten by the scruff of its neck. This is why he is so carefree. He says, ‘Learn the way of the kitten. Then you’re saved. Allow the mother cat, sir, to carry you,’” (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 101). Mother cat symbolizes God here, while the kitten is human mortals.

Thus, it can be construed that to Raja Rao Indian culture, especially the ancient Indian philosophy and the cultural values associated with it, are of supreme importance. Sometime, he even goes to the extent of extolling so much that readers may feel that Raja Rao is all for the Hindu cultural revival in India, at the cost of several other cultural practices and traditions, different from the mainstream Hindu cultural traditions, including the practices of the untouchables and pariahs. He seems to advocate for that culture as the mainstream which has never allowed a respectable life to the untouchables and the pariahs, and which has been the cause of much suffering to them. In any case, in the forthcoming pages in the present chapter these points will be discussed at length.

**Vision of Culture, Cultural Conflict and Cultural Dominance in Raja Rao’s Postcolonial Fiction**

It would not be an overstatement to say that Raja Rao visualizes India as the land of Hindus and the lives of her people permeated by the ideas of Hindu cultural traditions coming down from the ages of the Vedas. His point of view, as can be derived from the three novels analyzed here, appears to be that the world has experimented with so many theories and philosophies – social theories, political
theories, economic theories, and scientific theories to name a few – to find solutions to the problems the world has been facing perennially. Indian intellectuals have also pondered over human misery from time to time. They have also experimented with various thoughts, ideas and theories, and then have come up with various solutions to the problems of humans. The theories the Indian sages have come up with are capable of providing long lasting solutions to man’s social, political, economic and even spiritual problems.

In *The Serpent and the Rope* Raja Rao suggests that only material progress cannot bring happiness to humanity; man has to finally take refuge to spiritualism. Man finally realizes that the temporal world is not absolutely true and there has to be something beyond this visible reality. But, if dualism of subject and object, or the duality of visible world and the absolute reality beyond it is to be believed, there would always remain the question of their infinite separateness and imbalance in nature. The only solution to this conundrum is the theory of the error of perception which perceives the subject and object as two entities which in reality are one and the same thing. The author of this novel believes that the temporal world and the absolute consciousness are one and the same thing. The theory is propounded by Adi Sankaracharya as ‘Rajju-Sarpa-Nyaya’ in Sanskrit language, which means the rope and its illusion being a snake. Following is the illustration of his theory with the translation in English:

*Rajju-Sarpavad-Aatmanam*

*Jivam Jnatva Bhayam Vahet*

*Naham Jivah Paratmeti*

*Jnatas-Cet Nirbhayo Bhavet.* 27...

Just as the person who regards a rope as a snake is overcome by fear, so also one considering oneself as the ego (*Jiva*) is overcome by the fear. The ego-centric individuality in us regains fearlessness by realizing that It is not a *Jiva* but Itself the Supreme soul. (qtd. in Chinmayananda 54)

The question arises is if this is the case, why people do not realize it in their day-to-day life and thus suffer because of worldly emotions and consciousness. The answer is that to realize it, one has to realize the nature of reality, appearance and unreality.

At this juncture, it is also important to refer to the psychological term ‘subration’ as described by Eliot Deutsch in his book *Advaita Vedānta: A*
Philosophical Reconstruction to explain the dilemma and conflicts of the central characters of these novels.

Subration is the mental process by which one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience…From the standpoint of the subject, to subrate means to undergo an experience – practical, intellectual, spiritual – which radically changes one’s judgment about something. (Deutsch 15-16)

In such a state of mind one rejects his/her previous experience or notion of an object which is replaced by a new consciousness or experience of the same object. He or she believes that his/her previous understanding of an object or situation was essentially wrong and the current realization is the true meaning of the object or experience in terms of being more logical. Deutsch explains that prior to the experience of subration, the nature of reality, unreality and appearance needs to be grasped. He theorizes:

- **Reality** is that which cannot be subrated by any other experience.
- **Appearance** is that which can be subrated by other experience.
- **Unreality** is that which neither can nor cannot be subrated by other experience.

(15)

To further clarify this mental consciousness, Deutsch presents the simple analogy of a living person with his/her exact wax replica in a museum. A human replica in a wax museum can be initially mistaken as a living person by someone. But when he/she realizes that it is in fact a wax figure, the individual rejects the previous judgement and replaces it with a new a realization “which, one believes, conforms with reality” (16). This mental process is called ‘subration’. The same analogy can be drawn in between the serpent and the rope in the *The Serpent and the Rope* where the rope can be mistaken as a serpent in the dark until one confronts the light of reality.

Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* undergoes the process of this consciousness, which Deutsch terms as ‘subration’, when he feels utter emptiness at the later stage of his life. He feels that what he took to be reality till that time is not reality at all. As a follower of Advaita, he is already familiar with the theory of the non-duality of the individual soul and the absolute consciousness. Now he practically realizes it. As the novel opens, Ramaswamy traces his lineage to Upanishadic sage Yagnyavalkya (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope*) and he is proud of this myth in his life. He has inherited the knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads from his forefathers.
and he is himself very much interested in *Advaita Vedanta*. He feels that there is much delusion and misery in human life. The cycle of birth and death is a bondage, and since everyone identifies oneself as individual souls, there arises ignorance. To Ramaswamy, the aim of human life is self-realization and he believes that this realization can be perceived as an individual soul, which is just like a wave in the great sea of Absolute Soul. Ramaswamy says:

> And the history of philosophy – remember that in the eighteenth century even scientists were called “les philosophes” – is nothing but a search for a clue to this problem: “If I am real, then the world is me.” It also means that you are not what you think and feel you are, that is, a person. But if the world is real, then you are real in terms of objects, and that is a tenable proposition. The first is the Vedantin’s proposition – the second is the Marxist’s – and they are irreconcilable.’ (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 370)

But, the problem is that in France Ramaswamy is a European Brahmin, neither completely Brahmin nor Buddhist nor a Christian. He is a hybrid creature, as noted by P. Dayal:

> Ramaswamy’s ancestral spiritual compulsions impel him to observe Vedantic discipline while his liberal European upbringing evokes the desires for erotic freedom. He, therefore, oscillates between matter and spirit, pleasure and truth, between the call of the flesh and the love of God. ("The Serpent and the Rope: From Vedanta to Tantra" 31)

He changes himself in line with the culture and religion where stays. He is aware of the tenets of *Advaita Vedanta* and he knows what he should do, but he does not do it. Ramaswamy’s persona is dominated by ‘lust’ and ‘ego’ the most dreaded enemies in the path of self-realization. He is polygamous and has an incestuous crush for his young step mother and teenaged half-sister Saroja, “Saroja was a strange sensation for me. Here was a mystery which I had never observed before: the girl becoming woman,...” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 51). Ramaswamy, it seems, can justify all his actions in the name of advaita (non-dualism) which prioritizes metaphysics over morality.

Raja Rao, it appears at the outset, extols ancient Indian culture and Indian cultural traditions, especially the brahminic traditions, and the belief that India has been a world Guru, and thus he believes that India can once again become world Guru, but only through the path of spirituality, shunning materialism, since
materialism is not true happiness. The novel opens with a lament on the lack of interest in ancient Indian culture among modern Indian youth:

I was born a Brahmin – that is, devoted to truth and all that.

‘Brahmin is he who knows Brahman,’ etc. etc…. But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalkya, my legendary and Upanishadic ancestor, have really known the Truth excepting the Sage Madhava, who founded an Empire or rather, helped to build an Empire, and wrote some of the most profound of Vedantic texts since Sri Sankara?” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 1)

Ramaswamy is a scholar of history but he preaches *Advaita Vedanta* and he makes serious efforts to promote Indian culture and tradition across the world. His discussions with Madeleine and her family member are always scholarly and thought-provoking. It is through him that Madeleine learns the deeper meanings of Indian social and philosophical thought. His love for India is such that he expects his French-Spanish wife to imbibe Indian culture. Of course, she is herself interested in the Indian way of life, even in the material culture of India. After his second visit to India when Ramaswamy goes back to France, he is so deeply affected by the all-pervasive Indian spirit and zeal that he expects his wife to dress up like an Indian woman; rather he imposes it upon her.

This particular point in the novel creates a doubt about Raja Rao’s perception of Indian culture. It appears that his model of Indian culture is biased to some extent and he tends to tilt towards the mainstream brahminical culture, as if it is identical with Indian culture as a whole. He seems to suggest that for all the ills of not only Indian society but also of the world society at large, the path hewn by Indian culture is the best path. This is rather a polemical view since ancient Indian culture, particularly the mainstream Hindu culture, has been reinterpreted by the Hindu nationalists as suiting to their interests. The ancient traditions, customs, rituals and practices have been interpreted to come down as it is from the time immemorial into the present. The practices are visualizes as sanctioned by the major Hindu scriptures, sages and great thinkers. But the distressing point to note there is that a large part of the Hindu society has been denied proper place in those cultural practices, and therefore, they are not considered as part of the Hindu society. The marginalized people of Indian society have had no right to property, no right to education, no right to perform worship, no right to learn and recite scriptures, no right to enter Hindu temples, and so on.
In other words, they can exist in the Hindu society only as the lowest rung, serving all other castes and classes. If there is a revival of the mainstream Hindu culture, there will be a revival of all these disturbing practices and all that which need to be abandoned will be relived and the structure of the Hindu society will remain as it is forever. Raja Rao’s fiction points to this disturbing trend, although it is not clear whether he himself believes in the revival of the Hindu cultural practices or he is just drawing a realistic picture of the emerging Hindu nationalism.

All these factors are kept in mind in analyzing Raja Rao’s vision of culture, cultural conflict and cultural hegemony as outlined by him through the storyline, characterization, dialogues and settings in the three novels, chosen here for a critical study.

**The Serpent and the Rope: A Brief Overview**

*The Serpent and the Rope* was published in 1960. The novel narrates the story of a young south Indian intellectual Brahman named K. S. Ramaswamy, referred to in short as ‘Rama’ in the novel. Rama is a student of history. He goes to France to conduct research on the Catharist heresy of the Albigensians. His objective is to trace back its origin in the Eastern, possibly Indian, culture. In France Rama meets Madeleine Rousselin, a young girl interested in Indian culture and tradition. Madeleine also shares his intellectual interests. They fall in love and after three years the couple gets married. A son is born to them and they name him Pierre Krishna, but the child suffers from bronchopneumonia and dies after seven months. At this time Rama has to return to India as he receives the news that his father is on the death-bed. Following Hindu rituals and traditions, after his father’s death, Rama takes his stepmother (called ‘Little Mother’ in the novel) and her young son, Sridhara, to Benares to perform obsequies of his father. He is charmed and poetically charged at the sight of the Hindu holy city. His attitude towards India also undergoes a change.

At Benares, Rama is introduced to Savithri, the daughter of a smalltime king Raja Raghbir Singh of Surajpur. Savithri is betrothed to Pratap, the son of another smalltime king. He is an Indian Civil Service officer, but Savithri does not fancy him very much. Since Rama has been to Europe and married to a French woman, he is supposed to have a deep understanding of love, and therefore, he is requested to look into the matter of lack of love between Savithri and Pratap. Rama does not find
anything significant in Savithri in their first meeting. He returns to France. He has taken along his mother’s toe-rings and a saree given to him by his sister, Saroja for Madeleine. But Madeleine is very upset to learn that the saree for her is not brought by Rama. They painfully realize that there has come up a certain kind of change in their relationship, and they try to overcome it through physical union, although it may not be more than a temporary fulfillment. The conflict of culture between the East and the West thus becomes apparent in Rama’s character when his immediate visit to Benaras in India has changed his personal equation with his wife Madeleine who represents the Western identity at that point in the storyline.

This is when Savithri from Benares visits them. Rama goes to London where Savithri studies English at Cambridge. They develop a deep love for each other. In the hotel room Savithri worships Ramaswamy as Lord Krishna and imagines herself as Radha, which is a mythical immortal love story in the legend of Radha-Krishna. Rama gives her his mother’s toe-rings he has brought for Madeleine. As a family tradition, toe-rings are passed from generation to generation, from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Symbolically, Rama and Savithri are thus wed permanently according to the Hindu religion and its cultural practices.

Rama returns to France after this incident. Madeleine is pregnant again and the baby is expected soon. But, again, Rama has to go to India at this crucial moment to attend his sister Saroja’s wedding. Madeleine delivers a stillborn baby boy in his absence. Rama receives the news with equanimity of emotions as a believer in Advaita philosophy. But, Madeleine is left heartbroken at the death of her two sons, and for consolation she takes refuge in Buddhism. Rama returns to France and Madeleine chooses to live with him despite her acceptance of the Buddhist Order. Rama suffers from chronic consumption, and so Madeleine takes care of him, even observing ritual penance fasting for forty-one days for a permanent cure for Rama’s illness. Rama is hospitalized in London later on, and during this time Savithri visits him in the hospital. This is the time when the coronation ceremony of the young queen of England is held in London. Rama watches the ceremony with Savithri and feels that the queen is merging into Savithri in his consciousness.

At this juncture, Madeleine realizes her body to be a composition of eighteen aggregates (as propounded in Buddhism), and she renounces all worldly attachments, including her marital bond with Rama. They arrange for a divorce. Rama is left with no place to call his own; none to go to. He is filled with anguish and remorse and goes
into profound introspection. After three days of deep contemplation he finds himself enlightened with the realization that he needs a spiritual guide. He decides to seek the blessings of his spiritual guide at Travancore in India for self-realization, and thus, his spiritual quest comes to an end. All the major characters in this novel, namely Ramaswamy, Madeleine and Savithri suffer from identity crisis which is created because of the clash of European culture and Indian culture in their lives. According to Poonam Jhinjha’s analysis of cultural conflicts in *The Serpent and the Rope* both Ramaswamy and Madeleine fail to maintain their relationship more because of the differences emerged from their inter-racial marriage than their personal equations.

The relationship between Rama and Madeline, the eventual failure of their marriage is a reflection on the nature and consequences of an inter-racial marriage. Rama and Madeline are both evolved beings. But they fail to remain united in their journey of life. Ramaswamy is profoundly rooted in his culture. His wife Madeline does not partake of his inner-self whereas in Savithri he finds a perfect spiritual companion as in spite of her modern ways she wears kumkum, choli, black beads which are essentially Indian. (*The Serpent and the Rope* 4)

*The Serpent and the Rope* appears to be an autobiographical account of the narrator’s life, the events in the life of a young intellectual Brahman, Raja Rao. His French wife also seeks spiritual solace and truth in India, France, and England. Although one can argue that an author’s life and his/her creative works are two different things, yet it is interesting to note the presence of autobiographical elements in *The Serpent and the Rope*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has the following entry on the life of Raja Rao:

Descended from a distinguished Brahman family in southern India, Rao studied English at Nizam College, Hyderabad, and then at the University of Madras, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1929. He left India for France to study literature and history at the University of Montpellier and the Sorbonne. Also while in France he married Camille Mouly, in 1931. He returned to India in 1933—the same year that, in Europe and the United States, some of his earliest stories were published – and spent the next decade there moving among ashrams. He also participated in the movement of Indian independence and engaged in underground activities against the British. Rao returned to France in 1948 and subsequently alternated for a time between
India and Europe… His first marriage having ended in 1949, he married twice more, in 1965 (to Catherine Jones) and 1986 (to Susan Vaught). ("Raja Rao")

It cannot be merely coincidental that the subject matter of the novel is also quite similar to the narrator’s first marriage and its disintegration. The subject acquires a more impersonal appeal as it puts the Eastern and Western cultural traditions in contrast, though the author has avoided being judgmental as many writers handling this subject commonly tend to be, glorifying Indian tradition without even going into the merits of Western thought. Raja Rao has been inconclusive even on the subject of divorce of Ramaswamy and Madeleine. The novel brings together ideas from various literary forms and philosophical systems from both the traditions, which is further reinforced by the style of narration.

But, it is also not essential to read the novel as an autobiographical account of Raja Rao’s life, rather such a reading would be a reductionist attempt. It would deflate the deeper significance of this work of art, deflecting the attention from the issues the author has raised, especially concerning the impact of colonization in the youths of postcolonial India. The marriage of Ramaswamy and Madeleine may be read as an allegory representing coming together of the East and West, and their divorce representing separation because of their irreconcilable cultures.

Once again, the oft-quoted and clichéd expression of Rudyard Kipling needs to be mentioned at this juncture. It is: “Oh! East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, / Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat;” (qtd. in Hampson 11). Madeleine is madly in love with Rama, and she deems herself very fortunate that she has married a Brahmin boy from India since she is an Indian by her soul. But is there a future of this relationship? No. Their marriage ends up in divorce, and quite soon too. Moreover, the offspring born out of this union also do not survive long. The elder one dies after seven months of his birth, while the younger one is born dead. Over and above all this, frustrated Madeleine converts to Buddhism for consolation, a religion that left India long ago. The separation from India and Hinduism is complete with Madeleine accepting Buddhism. Buddhism arose in India as a reaction to extreme ritualism in Hinduism. Gautam, the Buddha, rejected ritualism and even the concept of God as a path to salvation, and ultimately the two religions ended up having two different worldviews leading to two different cultural streams.
It can be safely stated that Madeleine leaning towards Buddhism, leaving aside the path of Hinduism, is symptomatic of the irreconcilable nature of Hinduism with any other religion and culture. There is a bridge between the cultures, but it is never crossed, “The bridge was never crossed. Madeleine had a horror of crossing bridges” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 11). Although it is often claimed that Hinduism is a way of life, and therefore anyone can accept it, yet it can be implied from the events in *The Serpent and the Rope* that one can never become a complete Hindu; one can be only born as a Hindu.

The next important question to ask while reading the works of Raja Rao is: Does the author visualize a future of relationships that Indians attempt to establish with Westerners? The answer is no. Indians remain glued up to Indian culture and cultural values, and however hard they try to imbibe the values of an alien culture, they inadvertently fail in their attempts. Indians feel comfortable only in Indian cultural ethos. Ramaswamy respects Madeleine’s faith and her world view. He visits churches and studies various aspects of Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, but he finds peace and serenity only when he visits Benares, Hardwar, the Ganges, the Sarayu, and holy places and pilgrimages in India.

Culture is an expression of composite feelings, emotions, fears, anxieties, and the ways to deal with conscious, subconscious and unconscious phobias and manias. Culture is also the collective wisdom of a cultural or ethnic group which may not be expressed overtly, but to be derived inductively from actions and reactions of people. Therefore, one cannot acquire a culture; one is born into a culture. One’s cultural values provide one with the assurance of guidance in difficult circumstances. They assure one of immortality and absolute peace. Ramaswamy attains peace only when he realizes that what he took to be a snake is only a rope, and for further guidance he needs to seek the blessings of his spiritual guide at Travancore. Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* finds absolute happiness and satisfaction in the philosophy of life that it is futile to struggle against circumstances beyond one’s control. What one has to do is to surrender oneself to the will of the Absolute Reality, a philosophical tenet coming from the *Vishishta Advaita* teacher Ramanuja. Padmanabha Iyer of *Comrade Kirillov*, as the narrator describes, wastes his time in futile search for happiness of the masses in the US, the UK, the USSR and finally in China, whereas the narrator believes that Gandhian philosophy of life provides easy ways to such a happiness through a bloodless, non-violent revolution. That is what Mahatma Gandhi
tries teach the Indian masses and also, he does not preach anything new to the India populace.

Such a system has been existent, in place, in Indian cultural ethos not only for centuries but for millennia. Gandhi just brought a revival of what was already there. Gandhi preached non-violence, equality and social justice. All the great religions and sects in India do the same – Buddhism preaches non-violence, equality and social justice; Jainism does the same, Hinduism does the same and even Christianity, the religion that originated outside India, does the same. That is the point Raja Rao is trying to put forward- return to one’s roots, and he/she will find peace and absolute truth. Equality and social justice will follow since the basic foundations of Indian cultural ethos are equality and social justice.

Looked from a different perspective, the life of man in the civilized world is an ongoing struggle for various things and for numerous reasons, for instance, to attain knowledge, to derive material pleasures, to become famous and may be to attain salvation. But the problem is that as man gets more and more of his desires fulfilled, his desires also go on expanding, and no matter how much pleasure he enjoys, it always remains short of the expectations. Even if one goes on striving for more and more knowledge, towards the twilight of his life a man feels an emptiness, and accumulated life experiences as mere illusions. Man becomes restless at this state of affairs and most often he gives up in despair. This is what is found in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Ramaswamy gives up all efforts in the end when he is disillusioned with life and seeks the guidance of his spiritual teacher, though he was himself an erudite scholar of *Advaita Vedanta*.

Raja Rao, as mentioned previously, glorifies the thoughts and values enshrined in ancient Indian philosophical traditions with a clear hint that there is a need to revive those values because over time and because of certain other reasons, like colonialism, common people have forgotten those values. Or perhaps because of cultural hegemony they have developed inferiority complex. And under the influence of inferiority complex the common people have themselves undermined their cultural values. Rao believes that these common people need a complete revival of their own culture and not any alien culture which may not suit their lives. ‘Return to the Vedas’ is what the author seems to suggest.

There are no overt instances of cultural hegemony in *The Serpent and the Rope*, but of course, there are covert hints that the Western mindset is hegemonic and
Indian intellectuals felt the pressure of this hegemonic and dominant discourse of colonialism which needed to be countered, and those raw reactions of Indian people owing to inferiority complex invariably created an imbalance and tension. For instance, the narrator paints the picture of Madeleine as an unreality, an abstract creature: “Madeleine was so lovely, with golden hair – on her mother’s side she came from Savoy – and her limbs had such pure unreality. Madeleine was altogether unreal. That is why, I think, she never married anyone – in fact she had never touched anyone” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 10). The description completely undermines Indian sense and sensibility and clearly displays a sense of inferiority in the narrator’s approach. His own skin colour and looks, which in a way is a metaphor for Indian skin and looks, are nowhere compared to the beauty of Madeleine which makes her absolutely desirable and even condescending in her attitude: “she never married anyone – in fact she had never touched anyone” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 10). It speaks volumes about the attitude of the narrator towards women. The sense of a woman being touched by someone generates the feeling like she is defiled. This is a typical Indian sensibility imposed upon Western culture where virginity of women has never been a very serious issue, whereas in India this has been the main issue when it come to a woman’s identity, all other issues are connected to this single agenda.

The alterity in the mindset and approach of the narrator, creating an absolutely different ‘other’ in the form of Madeleine, a metaphor for Western cultural ethos, vouchsafes readers’ attention. Madeleine, to the narrator, is the alter ego of the Empire which is pure, white, desirable and unapproachable.

It is Madeleine who contrasts their skin colour:

I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything, such is the pride of caste and race, and lying by Madeleine it was she who remarked, ‘Look at this pale skin beside your golden one. Oh, to be born in a country where tradition is so alive,’ … I (Ramaswamy), however, being so different, never really noted any difference. (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 17)

So, the same skin colour here are perceived in two different ways- much-loved in the Western eyes of Madeleine and not so worthy to be noted in Indian culture, represented by Ramaswamy. But, ultimately, it was the skin colour that brought about his doom.
As a critique of Indian culture, Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope* also deconstructs various myths prevalent in India, especially in the Hindu society, like the myth of eternal love, a Guru, holy Benares, Benares-born bride, Maya (illusion), woman being the other half of man and the myth of husband as a representative of the eternal ‘purusha’ (a male) and woman as ‘prakriti’ (nature) in the cosmic principle. For instance, the myth of eternal love, and man being ‘purusha’ and woman being ‘prakriti’ is deconstructed when Savithri marries Pratap, her fiancé, instead of Rama with whom she has played as prakriti, the cosmic nature. Rama, ‘the eternal purusha’ is so frustrated and disappointed at this turn of events that he repents he lost the chance of taking Savithri in his arms. The idea of ‘love between two souls’ is utterly lost at this point and he satisfies his lust for Savithri by indulging in sex with other woman!

**The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India:**

*The Cat and Shakespeare* was first published as a short story ‘in the Summer 1959 issue of Chelsea Review, New York’ titled ‘The Cat’ as noted by R. Parathasarathy in his introduction to *The Cat and Shakespeare* (ix). The story was enlarged and brought out in the present form published by Macmillan, New York in 1965. *The Cat and Shakespeare* is an allegorical comic novel set in Trivandrum, the capital of the then State of Travancore. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the narrator Ramakrishna Pai goes from Alwaye to Trivandrum and builds a house there. It is worth noting here that the protagonist of *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswamy, in the end decides to leave for Travancore to seek the blessings of his spiritual guide. For this and for some more notable features, critics consider *The Cat and Shakespeare* as a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*, Sudhir K. Arora being one of them. Raja Rao is quoted in this regard: “*The Cat and Shakespeare* is a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*, and that it takes up the theme of metaphysical quest at the point at which Rama’s story has carried it, and shows the next step in this quest” (qtd. in Arora 154). Another critic P. Dayal agrees to this view of Raja Rao, too: “It is interesting to note that Ram’s search for the guru in the preceding novel is materialised in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, as his successor Pai finds the guru in Govindan Nair who is a tantric adept” (“The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tantric Prayer" 61).
There are two popular ways, suggested in Indian mythology and philosophy, to get rid of anxiety and sorrow – *jnana yoga* (the path of knowledge) and *bhakti yoga* (the path of devotion). *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankaracharya is the path of knowledge, whereas, *Vishishta Advaita* of Ramanuja is the path of devotion (Boliaki 328). The path of knowledge is difficult as not everyone can understand the illusory nature of the world to realize the real nature of the self as Absolute Brahma. The path of devotion is easy since even a layman can understand that total surrender to God’s will leads to salvation. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* Raja Rao, it seems, has developed a strong faith in the path of devotion of Ramanuja. There’s not much of a story line in the novel, and there’s not much of a philosophy either, only diverse kind of grandiloquent philosophical discussions are found in *The Serpent and the Rope* on the issues of truth, God, salvation, and so on.

*The Cat and Shakespeare* is the story of the life of ordinary mortals, leading an ordinary life, though one of the major characters and the narrator, Ramakrishna Pai here, too is a south Indian Brahmin. Ramakrishna Pai is a clerk. His neighbor, Govindan Nair, is also a clerk. Both of them work at the revenue office. Govindan Nair helps Ramakrishna build a house. Ramakrishna lives away from his wife, Saroja. One morning all of a sudden he finds strange boils all over his body. Allopathic medicines fail to cure his disease. Shantha, a Nair woman, gets some traditional Ayurvedic medicine for him which proves to be very effective. In the absence of his wife, Shantha takes care of him, and thus, they develop an illicit liaison. Govindan Nair does not hesitate to visit a brothel with his friend Velayudhan. But in his characteristic way, he ends up blessing the girl as if she were his own daughter. Govindan Nair is also charged in a bribery case, but he defends himself in a fantastic manner and is acquitted.

The character of Govindan Nair is presented as a man who remains unperturbed in any situation, under any circumstances, even in the events of the death of his own son. His philosophy of life is to surrender ourselves at the will of God since He is the one who takes care of us, like a cat, when transferring her kitten, catches them by the scruff of their necks. The kitten have nothing to do but surrender themselves to the infinite love of their mother as they know that between the teeth of their mother they are at the safest place on the earth.

Govindan Nair is also a very unconventional man in his approach to life. He looks at the cat from an altogether different perspective which none else can admire.
Cat is usually a pariah animal, not much in favour as a pet in India. Brahmins even associate a cat with bad omen, and if a cat crosses one’s path when one is leaving the house for something auspicious, it is considered a bad sign. But Govindan Nair declares a cat to be a supreme animal. Why? P.P. Mehta has tried to suggest an answer to this query. He observes that:

The important question to ask here is how Govindan Nair has been able to look at the cat, a pariah animal in this altogether unconventional light.

Bhootalinga Iyer, an orthodox Brahmin, regards a marjoram (cat) as “shy, unclean, unfaithful.” The sight of a cat in the morning, or it crossing your path from right to left was a bad omen which could be counteracted only by going back home and visiting the sanctuary and begging the gods to bless you… But, is this not being slave to one’s tradition? (Mehta 40)

Is the change of theme from an exalted philosophical seeking of spiritual truth in *The Serpent and the Rope* to an ordinary, mundane life of common people miles away from the grand ancient India philosophies in *The Cat and Shakespeare* symptomatic of a change in perspective of the lives of the people of India? Perhaps yes. It appears to be a lament of the author on the apparent ‘degradation’ of the standards of life among Indian masses as regards learning, knowledge, spirituality, morality, truth-seeking behaviour, greatness of ancient Indian culture and so on.

The postcolonial Indian scenario does not make the author happy or proud of the achievements of freedom fighters. Mahatma Gandhi, whose ideals Raja Rao followed, had launched the struggle for India’s freedom with lofty ideals, whereas those lofty ideals were lost somewhere in course of time. Yet another very disturbing incident in Indian history has been the division of the country into two nations, India and Pakistan. During partition and in its aftermath, there was a lot of bloodshed which neither Gandhi nor Raja Rao ever imagined to happen in India. The apparent cynicism of Govindan Nair is the cynicism of Raja Rao.

An analogy with Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* can be drawn at this juncture, because Chinua Achebe is also disillusioned with the condition of Nigeria in the aftermath of independence when some clever politicians usurped the independence of people and lived a life of corruption and luxury. The common people in Nigeria became cynical about the economic and political progress of their country in the post-independence scenario. Of course, Raja Rao’s cynicism is of a different kind and the reasons behind it are also quite different.
In *The Cat and Shakespeare* the reader is face to face with the lives of clerks, revenue-board offices, ration-shops, bribery, crime, criminal courts, brothels run as health clinics and so on in contrast to the world of intellectuals and truth-seekers like, Ramaswamy and Madeleine, discourses on the tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism, Catharism, and Christianity, the poetic raptures at the beauty of the Himalayas and the Ganges and the descriptions of the Cathedral of Aix in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

This is a real-life painting of the postcolonial situation in India – people have no time and interest in the exalted philosophical ideals of life as the successive governments at the helm have reduced them to mere puppets worried only about collecting their daily bread, spending more time in long queues at the ration-shops than caring about *Advaita* or *Dvaita*!

Raja Rao’s pride in Indian culture and his attempts at countering the hegemony of European culture is discernible in his choice of narrative styles, literary tradition and themes for his stories and novels, and that is obvious in *The Cat and Shakespeare* too. R. Parathasarathy notes that Raja Rao has indigenized the European genre, the novel:

One of the most innovative novelists of the twentieth century, Raja Rao departed boldly from the European tradition of the novel, which he indigenized in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition. He put the novel to uses to which it had not perhaps been put before, by exploring the metaphysical basis of writing itself-of, in fact, the word. (ix)

The next point as argument for Raja Rao’s counter-cultural hegemony is his use of the colonizers’ language and putting it to use to portray Indianness, Indian literary traditions, Indian sensibilities and complete Indian ethos in the alien language. What he wrote was literature in English, but entirely independent from English literature. R. Parathasarathy adds in this regard that, “The preface to *Kanthapura* is revolutionary in its declaration of independence from English literature, and it has, as a result, become a classic stylistic guide for non-native English writers everywhere” (xi).

*Kanthapura* is not just a story of Gandhi’s struggle for Indian independence reaching remote corners of India, but also a call for the revival of Indian traditions, told in an ancient Indian folk narrative form, the puranas. Raja Rao himself dubbed it as a purana, *sthal-purana*:
There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich _sthala-purana_, a legendary history, of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by the village... the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate... One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell.

(qtd. in Parathasarathy xi-xii)

The incidents in _The Cat and Shakespeare_ are comical and the central figure, Govindan Nair, is almost a comedian. But hidden behind the lines of comedy is Indian postcolonial condition in a disturbed state. This is not the India freedom fighters like, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhashchandra Bose, Bhagat Singh and Lokmanya Tilak had visualized. This is not the India the author has dreamed. Raja Rao avoids political writing, but the pain he feels at the condition of masses in post-independence India cannot be missed in the musings of Ramakrishna Pai:

And off it goes – something. What is it that is gone? What is time? What is death? In fact you could ask what is life. You issue a ration card. Your house number, numbers of the family, are all indicated: you are class A, B, C or D. You buy what you want and when you want, but only what is available. Governments are notoriously mismanaged. A railway car might have gone off to Coimbatore containing rice for Cannanore or Conjeevaram. What matters is that the station begins with a C. Cannanore, Conjeevaram, Coimbatore.” (Rao, _The Cat and Shakespeare_ 83-84)

**Comrade Kirillov: A Brief Overview**

_Comrade Kirillov_, a novelette, was written prior to _The Serpent and the Rope_ but published in English in 1976 (Mathur 117). The novelette is not a very serious deliberation on the communist movement in India, especially in Kerala, as is suggested by its title, but yes, it does offer a peep into the life of a Malayali Brahmin, Padmanabha Iyer, who converts to communism influenced by Dostoyevsky’s writings, specifically _The Possessed_. Apparently, Raja Rao is himself influenced by Dostoyevsky so much so that the epigraph found in _Comrade Kirillov_ has been excerpted from _The Possessed_: 
Stravogine: Tell me, have you caught your hare? To cook your hare you must first catch it; to believe in God you must first have God…Do you believe in God?
Shatov: I, -I will believe in God. (qtd. in Rao, Kirillov)

Kaushal Sharma notes that the conversation between these characters is an indication of the failure of communism, a philosophy of godlessness, which is unacceptable to Raja Rao:

This conversation takes place between Stravogine an egotistical aristocrat and his former disciple Shatov, an ill-mannered person. They are absorbed in discussing the fate of Russia after the proposed revolution. Shatov gradually becomes disillusioned, though initially he had great hope from the revolution not only for Russia but for the entire world. (74)

The name ‘Kirillov’ also appears in The Possessed, a character is named ‘Alexis Kirillov,’ although Raja Rao’s hero Padmanabha Iyer alias Comrade Kirillov is more akin to Dostoyevsky’s Shatov in The Possessed. This point is significant for further discussion on the novel as Shatov can be noted here commenting “I will believe in God,” thus, giving a hint that he has lost faith in the Godless ideology of communism, or rather, in the Russian Revolution itself. This point is further discussed later in this chapter. Comrade Kirillov is a thin novel, even thinner than The Cat and Shakespeare, and the storyline is still thinner.

The narrator is not given any name in this novel; he is simply called ‘R,’ and he is a correspondent of The Hindu, a popular newspaper published from Madras. Padmanabha Iyer, a young Brahmin boy, is chosen by Annie Besant and the Theosophists to be sent to America for education and groomed as a Theosophist and a companion of J. Krishnamurti. He goes to California. Padmanabha Iyer marries a Czech girl named Irene, a working nurse. Irene shares his communist ideals. The readers notice here a streak of similarity between this story and the story in The Serpent and the Rope as in the latter novel the protagonist Ramaswamy goes to France for education and marries a French girl named Madeleine. Madeleine shares Rama’s interest in Hinduism and the Indian way of life. Rama is influenced by Advaita philosophy of Adi Sankaracharya, while Iyer of Comrade Kirillov is impressed by socialism. He starts reading books on socialism and gets so much impressed by their ideology that he prepares himself to become a communist. He admires the British Labour Party very much and visits England. After his full-fledged
conversion into communism, he is called ‘Comrade Kirillov.’ The couple, Padmanabha and Irene, is blessed with a son, Kamal. After a couple of years, Irene dies in childbirth and their two-day old daughter also dies. At this juncture, Kamal is sent to Trichinapalli to his grandfather for care and upbringing. Padmanabha, now Comrade Kirillov, is unperturbed by this misfortune and leaves for Moscow, the Mecca of socialism. The last that is known of Kirillov is that he left for Peking, and at this point the narrator gives up on him.

This novel by Raja Rao is apparently a parody of the false communist ideals of the Indian communists. It is not that Raja Rao did not like communism as an ideology, but he did not approve the Indian protestations of communism as he felt that it was empty of ideological commitments. The protagonist in the novel, Padmanabha Iyer, is a Brahmin by birth and he remains a Brahmin for life. Which means that as regards theoretical grasp of communism and socialism, he is very good at it, but as regards the practical aspects, he fails. He cannot accept equality of men by heart. Naik’s observation is quite apt in this regard, “While his intellect subscribes to Marxism, his heart obstinately continues to wear its Brahmanical sacred thread though he hates to admit the fact” (39).

Raja Rao’s faith is in Indianhood, and therefore, the narrator in Comrade Kirillov predicts that his Indianhood would put an end to his faith in communism. There may be several interpretations of this statement as Raja Rao has not been straightforward in explaining what he exactly means by Indianhood. Is it the mainstream brahminical tradition to which Padmanabha Iyer originally belongs? Or is it a different cultural trend started by Mahatma Gandhi in which all men were equal in caste, creed, religion, region and opportunity, therefore, there was no need of bloody revolution as was required by Marxist ideals to establish the commune of the proletariat? It is not very clear.

Comrade Kirillov brings forth the ambivalence in the nature of Indian diaspora. They live in alien countries, like the US, the UK, Canada and even erstwhile USSR, but their heart and mind are always in India. They wish to make material progress in the fields of scientific and technological developments in the West, but cannot forget the spiritual and social attractions of their country of birth. They are charmed by the materialistic abundances and thus like to emulate the West, but they hate its extreme materialism. So, on some occasions they are ready to fight for the idealism and spiritualism of India. They hate the stagnant nature of Indian ethos –
stagnancy at every quarter like, social, economic, political and intellectual levels. Therefore, they wish to run away from the scenario, but they love its spiritual, traditional and moral side, which is an antithesis of the West to a certain extent.

Shatov in *The Possessed* is disillusioned with Russian revolution as it failed to deliver the expected results, for the obvious reasons related to the iron-curtain dictatorial regime of Stalin, whereas, Raja Rao seems to be disillusioned with the postcolonial developments in India, and quite soon too. “Kirillov will die – but India shall be free. Kirillov will kill himself - but the new communist state will rise. Man is a biological equation and Marxism has no traffickings with individuals. All men in Marxism have anonymous names and death…” (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 26). The initial version of *Comrade Kirillov* was published in French (translated by Georges Fradier) in 1965, just roughly two decades after India got freedom from the British. It show how soon Rao got disappointed with the new India after the colonizers left the country.

It would not be out of place if some of the major issues that Raja Rao has chalked out in his dominant characters in *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare* and *Comrade Kirillov*, are looked at in detail.

**Ambivalence, Impact of Colonial Education and the Postcolonial Native Identity**

There are such situations at every step in the three novels that raise the issue of ambivalence in the dominant characters. The major characters in the novels – Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope*, Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and Padmanabha Iyer in *Comrade Kirillov* – are drawn as ambivalent characters. They marvel at what they feel is better in an alien culture, but they also visualize its corrupting influence upon them. They now and then look down upon some of the aspects of their own culture, but its uniqueness and suitability to their conditions of life also surprises them in the extremes. Ambivalence of these men towards women, religious injunctions and the social issues prevalent around them is discernible. It is not difficult to find such instances in the novels where these intellectuals treat women as inferior creatures, but at the same time they extol their virtues. Govindan Nair visits a brothel, taken there by his friend Velayudhan. But
instead of satisfying his carnal desires, he pities her condition and blesses her like his sister or daughter:

‘Your husband will come back,’ he said.

‘They shot him,’ she said.

‘No, they did not. I have the ration cards of all the soldiers. I have his name, I am sure, in the office. Our working hours are between ten and five.’

‘Bless me, as if I were your daughter,’ she said.

‘My sister,’ he said.” (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 70)

So, the author uses ambivalence as a methodology and strategy to subvert and disrupt the power of both the alien and traditional Indian culture. Women in both the cultures are viewed as bodies, and commodities for consumption. But the author’s favour tilts more towards Indian culture since colonial paradigm views everything Indian as a commodity.

Ambivalence is the keynote of Kirillov’s character. He is a bundle of contradictions. The author focusses on this particular trait of Kirillov. His physical appearance is described thus:

He wore a necktie which had a “prater plus-parenthetical” curve as if some deep philosophy had gone into its making. It appeared to betray his “ambivalent” soul. Other items of his turn-out are equally interesting. His pants, the narrator describes, were “too dissimilar for his limbs,” his coat “flapping a little too fatherly on his small, rounded muscles of seating”.

(Sharma 71)

The narrator ‘R’ finds Kirillov childlike in a number of ways: “He was so like a child…when it came to simple things…he loved India with a noble delicate unreasoned love” (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 86). All these childish traits are in contradiction with his overall personality. Although he is hugely influenced by communism as he believes that there is no god but the common man, he almost worships India which has nothing but only goodness. This is the ambivalence in Kirillov. The crisis of his personality is that on one hand he behaves as an atheist, while on the other hand he worships India as if it does not have any negative qualities but sheer goodness. Another narrator Irene aptly labels Kirillov as ‘the Sadu (the saint in English) of communism’ (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 72).

Ambivalence in the personality of the central character in *The Serpent and the Rope* is also one of the predominant themes. Ramaswamy displays a love-hate
relationship with the West. He lives in the West, but practices Indian customs and traditions. He loves and marries a French-Spanish girl, but his heart goes for Indian women. He is charmed by Western education, and social and political developments there, “…somehow I always thought of a house white, single-storeyed on a hill and by a lake – and I would go day after day to the university and preach to them the magnificence of European civilization.” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 12). But no sooner he is in India, he sings praises for the Ganges, the Himalayas and Benares. He is in poetic rapture at the sight of the sacred city of Benares, but he is all hatred for the hypocrisy of the Brahmins there:

I wrote postcards to friends in Europe. I told them I had come to Benares because Father had died, and I said the sacred capital was really a surrealist city. You never know where reality starts and where illusion ends; whether the Brahmins of Benares are like the crows asking for funeral rice-balls, saying ‘Caw-Caw’; or like the sadhus by their fires, lost in such beautiful magnanimity, as though love were not something one gave to another, but one gave to oneself. (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 8)

Speaking of his father’s attitude, the narrator says that “He disliked my marriage, I think chiefly because my wife could not sing at an arathi; but before the world he boasted of his intellectual daughter-in-law, and had a picture of me and Madeleine on his table” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 15). Ramaswamy’s father does not like the marriage of his India son with a European girl as it is against the cultural practices of his society, but at the same time he takes pride in the fact that he has a Western daughter-in-law.

Ramaswamy is well-versed not only in the theory of *Advaita Vedanta* but also other schools and subjects of Indian Philosophy. “I even knew grammar and the Brahma Sutras, read the Upanishads at the age of four, was given the holy thread at seven – because my mother was dead and I had to perform her funeral ceremonies, year after year – my father having married again” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 1). But, on the contrary, he finally realizes that by following the path of orthodox brahminism, he has rather swerved away from the path of self-realization. He came to believe that external purity or the purity of acts observed by Brahmins is not the real purity, but purity lies in the meaning of the act. Therefore, he thinks that had he been less of a Brahmin, he might have known more love. If this fact is accepted as the
central tenet of *The Serpent and the Rope*, then it can be interpreted that Raja Rao is broadly advocating Hinduism for India but not exactly brahminism.

This point has been noted by P. Dayal too. He strongly believes that Ramaswamy displays much aversion to brahminism, specifically the so-called rigid, inflexible and static interpretation of the principles of the Hindu religion regarding morality. But, this feature in his personality may be a later development as he comes in contact with European civilization and ponders over the rigidity of brahminism on issues like austerity and sexual containment for self-realization as compared to rather sexual freedom in the Western thought (Dayal, "The Serpent and the Rope: From Vedanta to Tantra" 30). This may be an expression of a person who feels his libido is blocked unnecessarily.

His critique of brahminical morality seems to be oriented under the influence of free sex, rather than as a matter and advocacy of equality and social justice. This is a tricky situation. This is a different kind of ambivalence, though. Ramaswamy speaks against Indian morality in general. So, Raja Rao’s Ramaswamy is a man who firmly believes in Indianness, but an Indianness devoid of rigid morality and brahminical dharma; an Indianness dedicated to the pursuit of self-realization and happiness for one and all. This Indianness is universal, not confined to any particular religion or sect.

There is a hint of an influence of exoticism on Ramaswamy’s character, which is fundamentally an impact of colonial education on his personality. Colonial education was intended to inculcate in the colonized the way of thinking of the colonizers so that they could become useful tools in carrying out the business of the empire. It created a hybrid generation, neither like the colonizer nor like the colonized:

> After all to be in the Political Services was to belong to the most exclusive cadres of the Government of India: you were not quite an Englishman or a Maharaja, but about equidistant from both, and sometimes superior, because you played polo. You ruled Maharajas, who ruled Indians, and the British received you at the club. (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 28)

One of the outcomes of colonial education has been exoticism, that is, the colonially educated individual found the aspects of his/her own culture something exotic and the aspects of the culture of the colonizer as something normal or typical. Ramaswamy feels normal in France and with Madeleine, but he is dazed by India,
Indian scenic beauty, India holy places, Indian rivers, the Himalayas, Indian women and the Indian way of life. Here is an instance of his feelings:

I remember how in 1946, when I first came to Europe – I landed in Naples –
Europe did not seem so far nor so alien. Nor when later I put my face into
Madeleine’s golden hair and smelt its rich acridity with the olfactory organs of
a horse – for I am a Sagittarian by birth – did I feel any the less familiar.
(Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 17)

The irony is that it is not very long he had been out of India, but still his feelings are as if he saw India for the first time, a dreamy and exotic place. Indian women are typically exotic to him, with their devotion to their husbands. Raja Rao succeeds in bringing to readers’ attention, particularly through his postcolonial novels, the influence of the thought patterns of a limited number of colonially educated Indian people, who, after independence, merely replaced the British and never accorded full citizenship rights to the masses. It has been only a change of masters in India.

However, Raja Rao does not display any despair at the state of affairs the same way as many of his other contemporary writers did, and that is why many critics and scholars feel that Raja Rao’s novels are just portraits of life in general, not that much of the Indian postcolonial political condition. The following observation in the introduction of *The Cat and Shakespeare* by an eminent critic of Raja Rao is worth noting here. R. Parathasarathy, who had been Raja Rao’s editor from 1974 to 1998 notes that “As a Writer, Raja Rao’s concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or ethnic group” (ix). In a conversation between this critic and Rao on a lovely February morning in 1976 in Adyar, Madras, Rao told him the following about his objectives in writing:

One of the disciplines that has interested me in Indian literature its sense of sadhana (*exercitia spiritualia*) – a form of spiritual growth. In that sense, one is alone in the world. I can say that all I write is for myself. If I were to live in a forest, I would still go on writing. If I were to live anywhere else, I would still go on writing, because I enjoy the magic of the word. The magic is cultivated mainly by inner silence, one that is cultivated not by associating oneself with society, but often by being away from it. I think I try to belong to the great Indian tradition of the past when literature was considered a sadhana.

In fact, I wanted to publish my books anonymously because I think they do not belong to me. But my publisher refused. (qtd. in Parathasarathy ix- x)
But the critic tends to disagree with this feeling of Rao, as the readers can indirectly get the feeling that Raja Rao’s standpoint on postcolonial Indian condition is that things would have been better if India had accepted Gandhian ideals and if Indians had gone back to their Vedic roots.

Even Madeleine displays some traits of ambivalence in her personality. She is attracted to India and Indian culture, but she thinks Indian people are difficult to understand. Even Hinduism proved to be difficult to her and ultimately she converts to Buddhism. Ramaswamy feels that she married him because he was from a poor suffering country: “What I think Madeleine really cared for was a disinterested devotion to any cause, and she loved me partly because she felt India had been wronged by the British, and because she would, in marrying me, know and identify herself with a great people” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 16).

Her love-hate relationship with India is very much clear in her warning to her husband when he prepares to leave for India:

You say you are going to Benares with your mother. Of Benares all I know is the bits of floating human flesh and the pyres of the dead, and that the Ganges water when chemically examined shows no bacteria. We Europeans are not yet holy enough to have crypts with no bacteria. (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 40)

In Europe she is a European, and wonders about her adherence to Indian thought pattern now and then, “How Indian sometimes I have become – I see and I wonder. India is infectious, mysterious and infectious” (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 40). She is an erudite scholar of *Advaita Vedanta* and a lover of Indian traditions, but she leaves nothing to chance when it comes to health concerns on Indian soil:

The smell of incense that used to hurt me now gives me a pained delight. I hate to kneel and yet sometimes I half bend my knees and remember what my mother always said: “Never kneel without cotton on your knees; God knows what infection may lie there.” I still have such a fear of bacteria –how shall I ever stand India? (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 39-40).

In neo-colonial paradigm of identity crisis in the ambivalent populace in the postcolonial countries becomes the founding pillars as consumers. Cultural warfare and conflicts are won through them, as suggested by Sardar in his forward to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks*, the ego of such a person “…collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his
behavior is to emulate the White man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man” (xiii). At the economic and political front, the conquest has achieved some success in Saudi Arabia and further grounds are being prepared for a cultural invasion.

Estrangement and the Dilemma of Hybridity

“I told you Kirillov was an Indian – and his Indianhood would break through every communist chain” (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 91). This is what the narrator ‘R’ says of Kirillov waiting outside to knock at Kirillov’s door. R is a staunch Vedantic and he feels Kirillov’s meandering into communism is just one aspect of the quest of a seeker of truth which he will ultimately find only in *Vedanta*, though the author has been inconclusive on this aspect. But it is very much evident through the anecdote of ‘Kanthaka’ and ‘Siddhartha’ presented at this point in the novel. Kanthaka was the name of the horse Siddhartha (Gautam the Buddha) rode when he left his palace seeking enlightenment. The narrator imagines himself to be Kanthaka which stands as a symbolic representation of his determination to bring the communist Kirillov back to *Vedanta* (Sharma 82). Estrangement of Indian intellectuals from their “great ancient” roots has been a prominent theme of Raja Rao’s works. All the three novels discussed here, viz. *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare* and *Comrade Kirillov* deal with this ‘problem’ at great intensity.

And it is not surprising that Ramaswamy of *The Serpent and the Rope* is shown to finally return back to his Indian sensibilities after experimenting with various thoughts and philosophies. Govindan Nair and Ramakrishna Pai of *The Cat and Shakespeare* are very faithful followers of *Vishishta Advaita* of Ramanuja, and Padmanabha Iyer of *Comrade Kirillov*, though seeks deliverance of the masses in communism, is not very happy the way the great ideology has been exploited in communist countries. The narrator is shown to be hopeful of his return to Indian philosophy which, according to him, solves not only the problems of the material wants but also spiritual needs of man.

Raja Rao’s protagonists in all the three novels *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare* and *Comrade Kirillov* are the transcultural hybrid products of a cross-cultural exchange. They display characteristics of hybridity in their social, religious and linguistic exchanges. But, the point to note is that the author stresses
upon purity, it seems, since all the protagonists in these novels turn to their supposedly ‘pure’ roots in the end. “The ‘pure’ were dear to me. Madeleine, too, got involved in them, but for a different reason,” comments Ramaswamy (Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 12), putting it succinctly in reference to his research objective with the hope of tracing the roots of Albigensian heresy to ancient Indian times of Jainism and Buddhism. Ramaswamy is a curious mix of Indian and European traditions.

One of the central characters in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Ramakrishna Pai, suffers from “British boils” though he is purely an Indian man: “Hitler has bombs, the British have boils….Yes, the British boils worked” (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 17). And not surprisingly, the disease couldn’t be cured by allopathic medicines, but only through an Indian concoction brought to him by Govindan Nair, that ‘smelled disgusting, like horse dung’ (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 19). Looking at the British boils, Govindan Nair had declared, ‘Let’s drive the British out’ (Rao, *The Cat and Shakespeare* 19). Padmanabha Iyer in *Comrade Kirillov* is a bundle of contradictions and a typical specimen of a hybrid character, ‘a prisoner of ideology’ (Naik 145) who accuses Gandhi of kleptomania and suggests him to read Freud to gain some wisdom, “Your Gandhi is a kleptomaniac… Ask your Gandhi to read Freud — he would be the wiser for it” (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 35-36). The same comrade Kirillov is shown to be endowed with an altogether different persona: “He could almost speak of India as though he were talking of a venerable old lady in a fairy tale who had nothing but goodness in her heart…He could not bear a word against Mahatma Gandhi” (Rao, *Comrade Kirillov* 58).

This is one of the techniques Raja Rao uses to portray conflicts of cultures. Communism to him is not just a political ideology but a culture, an alien culture unsuitable to Indian ethos and therefore in clash with Indian way of life and values. It is not that Rao is not with the poor and suffering masses of India or that he is with the capitalists. No, that is not the case. Rao is not for a bloody revolution which ends in endless class conflicts and hatred for each other. He is for perfect harmony among people, based on Gandhian ideals, which derives their strength from ancient Indian traditions and philosophies of life. He is for non-violence and perfect harmony among the masses where people love each other; people share each other’s joys and woes, a society where hoarding of wealth is a sin.
The village of Kanthapura is an example of such a society, and Moorthy represents its ideal member. Raja Rao is for gram swaraj (village self-rule), each village in India being a self-contained, self-sustaining unit where there is no much difference between the poor and the rich, the whole village functioning as a commune. This may be called the Gandhian perspective for development of India. Of course, Mahatma Gandhi has provided a model of progress with social justice. He favoured development of villages and village life. His central focus was on cottage industries specially set up in rural areas, full employment of one and all, regionalization of political and economic and power, and the sanctity and purity of our environment. Gandhi’s opinion was that it is villagers’ basic right to own lands. If Gandhi’s model is followed, then heavy industrialization in not needed in India, and therefore the problem called ‘capitalism’ will never take root in India. According to Raja Rao it was not just an empty idealism as he had faith in it. The fact is, it is still true since the world has witnessed disasters of heavy industrialization, slowing down economies and leaving the masses jobless, in lurch. Heavy industries require big markets, and markets are already over flooded, with stiff competitions. Industries, in the growing technical sophistication, also require less manpower, and they will require less and less manpower as technical sophistication grows. Where will the large population, unemployed because of loss of land, go? Gandhi had said, “Industrialism is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind. Exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors” (qtd. in Pandikattu 487). Gandhi favoured cottage industries, even if the production was done there through machines. The idea was to give economic, social and professional self-dependence to people (as traditionally there has been self-dependence in Indian villages before the advent of colonization, as we read in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura), rather than converting them into labour units without any life. It may be dubbed by some people as a highly idealistic dream, unrealizable in India or elsewhere amid stiff market competition, but Gandhi’s ideas came from real life situations.

Communist countries also make progress through heavy industrialization, with a difference of some form of social justice being in place there, but Gandhi could foresee the results of lopsided developmental projects that depended upon heavy industries. He believed that such projects could never tend to establish human
equality. According to him, “real planning consisted in the best utilization of the whole man-power of India” (qtd. in Prasad 31) at their own rural sites. Raja Rao seems to be in full agreement with Gandhi.

Therefore, comrade Kirillov is characterized as a misguided youth who remains a mere convert to communism since he could not reconcile himself with the alien ideology, which at times goes against the deep-rooted cultural heritage in his collective unconsciousness. Comrade Kirillov also represents failure of communist movement in India owing to the presence of better political and social ideologies than communism since communism is based on struggle among people, whereas Indian social and political thought is rooted in spiritualism and hits at the root of materialism and greed.

Materialistic pleasure has always gained secondary importance in Indian thought – not denied altogether since it is the first experience of man before he realizes that there is no ultimate satisfaction in it. The primary importance is given to spiritual pleasure which lies in the happiness of one and all. If happiness of one and all is the motto, there is no place for class struggle, greed, anger and hatred for each other. Comrade Kirillov is given up by the narrator at the end symbolizing unacceptability of the alien ideology in Indian scenario.

**Cultural Hegemony and the Postcolonial India**

Hegemony, especially cultural hegemony, is a subtle phenomenon. Hegemony is commonly defined as “the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all, often not only through the means of economic and political control but more subtly through the control of education and media” (“Key Terms in Post-Colonial Theory”). Political hegemony is coerced, but cultural hegemony may not be so. It is a willing acceptance of the presumed ‘superiority’ of the culture of the conqueror by the conquered masses. This is achieved through the metanarrative of modernity and discourses of technological advancement, effectiveness of approach and a model of progress for one and all. Thus, to the followers of other cultures, their own culture appears much inferior compared to the culture of the conqueror and their approach appears to be progressive leading to all round happiness for one and all. In a colonized nation like India, this was achieved through colonial education and control of media. The conditions created are such that
the colonized feel proud in accepting the alien culture, though at the same time feeling a pull of his/her own culture, too.

There was an unbridgeable cultural gap between Ramaswamy and Madeleine in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Their marriage is a marriage of intellectuals but their cultural idiosyncrasies have not allowed them to stay together. What is a hindrance to their marriage is not their mutual incompatibility, but the incompatibility of their cultures. Rama is advised to obtain a divorce on the grounds of their mutual incompatibility, but that is a wrong move. Madeleine comes from a culture that lays stress upon individualism. She hardly shares herself with Rama. This gesture of hers may be construed as a sign of cultural conflict which she does not want to overcome. It amounts to even cultural hegemony at occasions. She remains confined to herself hinting that she considers herself superior to Rama in certain ways. Her approach to life bears more of a practical touch. Rama, on the other hand, is a dreamy creature. He represents the Eastern mystic soul always contemplating on metaphysics, the conundrum of human existence and the absolute truth.

**Issue of Diaspora**

An interesting issue, brought to the fore in the novels under discussion here, is the diasporic problematic. The protagonists in *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Comrade Kirillov* represent Indian diaspora. Interestingly they are enlightened and start thinking of India and the problems in the Indian nation when they are out of the country. This may be a metaphor for the impact of colonial education, but at the same time it also indicates their altered identity. India to them attains the status of a subject of study and look back in sympathy. In a sense, they become part of the colonizers. Perhaps, that is the reason the author rejects both the protagonists as effective interpreters of Indian identity. Though their souls are Indian but they think in an alien language; they acquire an alien idiom. In Indian postcolonial conditions, such an identity is undesirable. It indicates that Indians are yet to be free, as mere change of masters is not real freedom. If White skin is replaced by brown skin with the thoughts and mindset of the Whites, does it make any difference for the masses?

In conclusion, it can stated that Raja Rao is a staunch supporter of Gandhi and Gandhian ideals of harmony in Indian nation. He whole-heartedly supported Indian freedom struggle, especially the non-cooperation movement and abandonment of
foreign goods called *swadeshi*, uplifting the downtrodden to the mainstream, welfare of Indian villages, establishing connection with the Indian rural masses through a revival of India’s past glory, educating the masses and reinventing an India free from evils. He had a firm belief in the revival of Hinduism and Hindu philosophy of life. In Hindu view of life man is born with an aim, and that is attainment of salvation and self-realization to recognize the self as the Supreme Self, the ‘Divine Brahma’. All human efforts should be directed towards this goal. Man may forget his goal attracted by worldly pleasures and taking the charms of the empirical world to be an end in itself, but there comes a time in life when man realizes that the world is not real in itself; the world only appears to be real. Self-realization is that experience which radically changes man’s attitude towards the world.

Raja Rao follows this Advaita Vedantic philosophy in *The Serpent and the Rope*. The protagonist Ramaswamy undergoes all the phases in a common man’s life. He is charmed by the pleasures of the world – pleasures of the flesh, pleasures of the intellect and the pleasures of ego-satisfaction (like, the feeling of being loved and being praised). He takes the world to be as it is. But towards the end when he is disillusioned with his life, he realizes he took a rope to be a serpent. He feared losing his loved ones, losing sensory pleasures and losing his reputation as one fears a serpent. But in the end when he loses everything, he realizes he was afraid of a rope.

In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, the philosophy of life is quite different. Here Raja Rao’s protagonist Govindan Nair is a carefree man. He preaches the philosophy of pure love and total surrender. According to him, struggle against divine will is futile since the divine carries individuals with infinite love like the mother cat carries her kitten by the scruff of their neck. In *Comrade Kirillov* Raja Rao makes an experiment with communism and finally rejects it as unsuitable for India conditions. He is with the suffering masses of India, and for equality and social justice, but he feels that communism is not the right way to achieve this social goal.

In *Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao makes a point that Indian culture is quite rich and fulfilling, but Indians in general fail to realize its richness in postcolonial period. Rather, charmed by Western material progress they seek pleasure through the Western models of human happiness. But truth seekers and the seekers of true happiness even from the West look towards Indian models of attaining happiness. The way is spiritualism and self-realization. Raja Rao shows it through two measures: First, Madeleine is fascinated by Indian culture and she quickly falls in love with a
man from India who shares her intellectual and spiritual interests. She seeks happiness through spirituality, not materialism. Second, Ramaswamy is charmed by the West, Western women and the Western way of life. But when he visits India, especially the holy places here, he is in rhapsody and rapture for India’s spiritual beauty. Towards the end of the novel Ramaswamy realizes that what he has been seeking all through his life is true happiness, but mistakenly he has taken materialism to be the source of pleasure despite being aware of the deep philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

*The Serpent and the Rope* represents a society in transition. It represents sheer confusion in a society that has just gained independence from foreign rule, dominated by alien but materially attractive culture that left its impact on the Indian mind, a hegemonic influence, so to say. The hegemonic culture is felt more progressive and scientific by one and all, so much so that people have moved away from their ancient but equally forceful, scientific and attractive culture which is not material but spiritual in nature. Cultural dominance is a real issue that cannot be side-stepped, and it was very much visible and pronounced as a phenomenon at the time when these novels were being written. But the state of transition produced much hypocrisy and a lot of hypocrites were born. Hypocrites were the people who were neither this side nor that side but they claimed to know both the sides. In India there is no dearth of people who shout slogans on the glory and greatness of ancient Indian culture without knowing much about it, least to follow it in their lives. On the other hand, they derive much material advantages out of this slogan-shouting and make much profit. Such people are dangerous and treacherous since they care only for themselves and harm both the nations and their respective cultures.

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Rao also laments that cultural hegemony has taken its toll in India. The problem is not that the alien culture is bad or undesirable, but for Indian social conditions, citizens’ own thought process and culture are more suitable and no other cultural values can solve their problems. *Comrade Kirillov* makes this message quite obvious.

To sum up, in this chapter three postcolonial novels of Raja Rao, namely, *The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespear* and *Comrade Kirillov* are analyzed with a view to examine Raja Rao’s vision of culture, cultural domination and cultural hegemony as portrayed in these novels. The examination has revealed that Raja Rao’s vision of culture was coloured chiefly by the mainstream Hindu thought of Indian
cultural. Raja Rao was all for the revival of the so-called glorious Hindu tradition of the past.

In his works the past comingles with the present as in folktales there is no distinction of past and present. Raja Rao’s style of narration is also affected by Indian folk tradition. But in the three novels investigated in the present chapter, he has also given a glimpse of the postcolonial scenario in India. If the stories are considered as metaphors, Raja Rao seems to suggest that post-independence India is ridden with hybridity, alterity, ambivalence, diasporic problem and such other postcolonial issues that are induced in the characters of people by colonial conditions. Like Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao is also critical of post-independence Indian nation, but his perspective is that India suffers in the postcolonial age because Indian masses have not taken the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi, the path that is also glorified in ancient Indian philosophical traditions, like *Advaita Vedanta* and *Vishishta Advaita* of Ramanuja.

But as the researcher vies it, the works of Raja Rao lean towards the mainstream Hindu traditions as he lauds Hindu philosophy and almost all of his protagonists are Brahmin intellectuals, except Govindan Nair. Raja Rao fails to realize that the mainstream Hindu cultural tradition neglects a large part of Indian population, their hopes and aspirations in free India. Indian masses have had a great contribution in the struggle for India’s freedom and they had to put up double fight – fight against the foreign rule, as well as, fight against anti-pariah movements led by prominent Hindu leaders. They fought with others in the hope that they would see better days in free India. But if Gandhi supporter writers like Raja Rao start leaning towards a biased ideology, it is not a god sign.

Cultural conflict has been visualized by Raja Rao in India at both the levels, conflict between the culture of the ruler and the ruled, the colonizer and the colonized, and conflict between the mainstream Hindu culture and the culture of the neglected lot. Raja Rao apparently stands for social justice, equality and fraternity since he follows Gandhian ideals of social justice. Thus, in his postcolonial novels also he displays strong sympathy for the suffering masses. But this sympathy is not the sympathy of Moorthy in *Kanthapura* for which he is excommunicated by the all-powerful Swami, and he does not care for it. Raja Rao’s sympathy for the suffering masses of India is spiritualistic, the philosophical stance of *Advaita Vedanta*
according to which the visible phenomenon is an illusion of the senses. One has to get over the error of perception to enjoy real happiness and joy in life.
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