

Chapter-Five

The Chessmaster and His Moves as Itihaas

On the Ganga Ghat : A Pilgrimage from Myth to Reality

Raja Rao as a novelist stands out among the Indian novelists in English not just because of the themes of his novels, but also on account of his innovative narrative techniques. He makes experiments and innovations in each and every novel. He frankly admits that he does not write novels, but *Puranas*. (To P B Reddy in an interview 91). His technique of writing novels is not actually new but rather a reorientation of the traditional Indian art present in *Puranas* and epics. *Puranas* as *Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary* defines are the "sacred Hindu scriptures in the form of verse dialogues coming next in order after the Vedas, dealing mainly with theogony and cosmogony, especially with the God Vishnu and his incarnations". *Puranas* have been further explained by Radhakrishnan as follows-

The *Puranas* are the religious poetry of the period of the schools, representing through myth and story, symbol and parable, the traditional view of God and man, cosmogony and social order. They were composed with the purpose of undermining, if possible, the heretical doctrines of the times they are eclectic in their character, mixing up philosophical doctrines with popular beliefs. The *Puranas*, though they refer to philosophical doctrines, do not aim at systematic development. Their main object is to convey the lessons of ancient thinkers, especially those of the *Vedanta* and the *Samakhya*. Their name indicates that they are intended to preserve ancient (*purana*) traditions. They are all theistic in

character, and recognize the distinctions of matter, soul and God. (*Indian Philosophy by S.RadhaKrishnan 2: 663-664*).

The novels of Raja Rao also represent through myth, story, symbol and parable, the concept of God and man and comment upon social order again, 'they mix up philosophical doctrines with popular belief' like *Puranas*. Their object is to convey the lessons of ancient thinkers especially those of the *Vedanta*. All his novels deal with some or the other *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' theory. While Marxism is dealt with in *Comrade Kirillov*, Christianity is discussed along with *Vedanta* in *The Chessmaster and His Moves*.

The Chessmaster and His Moves can be described as *itihasa* 'tradition' which not only includes *Puranic* and epic style but also uses narrative poetry of an age before literature was institutionalized as an art according to the principles of literary criticism. It can be read as *Samhita* 'compilation' of different schools of the eastern and the western philosophy. As Kaushal Sharma says, "Raja Rao endeavours to collate Indian philosophical strands with the corresponding western ideas to experiment and innovate and finally to synthesise them. Though his debt to the West is considerable yet he is essentially Indian in thought and spirit" (3).

The amalgamation of the East and the West is especially evident in his novels *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Chessmaster and His Moves*. The eastern concepts of *Vedanta* and Upanisads are combined with the western ideas of Albigesian theory and Christianity. The western culture and its philosophy are also exhibited in his novels to a great extent and some of the characters are foreigners. He makes significant innovations with the blend of metaphysical tradition and concepts of western culture. Through these characters, Raja Rao emphasizes the western ideas. But overall the eastern philosophy appears to have an edge over the western theories as 'he is

essentially Indian in thought and spirit'. The south Indian Brahmin heroes of his novels boast of the superiority of *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge over any other knowledge.

The Chessmaster and His Moves like the *Puranas* has portions relating to meditation and supreme knowledge and like an epic it not only has a long narrative of seven hundred and eight pages, but also presents a vast mosaic of number of characters, reminiscences, confessions, myths, and realities. Each character has a background and the events in the life of the protagonist are described in detail through flashbacks. There are many short stories incorporated within the main story. There are many myths in the life of the protagonist which are busted towards the end of the story as the protagonist proceeds on his inward odyssey. The central theme is the quest for truth and self realization in the life of the protagonist Sivarama Sastri. This web of myth and reality unfolds itself as we go through the different parts of the novel like 'The Turk and the Tiger Hunt', 'The Goblets of Shiraz' and 'The Brahmin and the Rabbi'. As the myths are being busted, serious thoughts on politics, history, religion, love, death and *advaita* 'non-dualism' emerge.

The main themes touched upon in the novel are the quest for truth, saga of love, marriage, Indianness and metaphysical concept of time and death. The framework of *The Chessmaster and His Moves* appears to be similar to that of *The Serpent and the Rope*. Through the stream of consciousness technique the story of Sivarama Sastri, a south Indian Brahmin and a mathematician is narrated. The story is full of the protagonist's reminiscences of his past in India. He thinks about his parents and about Jayalaksmi. He has spiritual and deep relations with her since childhood. She is a north Indian woman born in a princely state. Basically the novel is a love story between Sastri and Jaya. She gets married to Surendra Singh a materialist and business tycoon. She still remains in touch with Sastri and they have a spiritual union when she comes for her treatment to Paris. They are like Radha and Krsna, eternally together but never get married

according to the norms of the world. She is so spiritually connected with him that together just with each other's presence they can attain the *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state.

Meanwhile Sastri gets involved with two other women, Suzanne and Mireille. Suzanne is like a devoted wife to him who is always very caring and thoughtful. She wants to marry him and beget a child but Sastri's concept of marriage is entirely different. Suzanne wants to bring back her dead son Robert by conceiving a child with Sastri. Her secret intentions are to have a son rather than a sacred union which becomes clear in her following statement, " "Silly man", she said, gently slapping his face, "not to die, but to live for. Would you give me a child, a baby boy?" "(CMM 81). Thus she has a selfish motive behind her union with Sastri and never loses herself or gives herself completely to the relation as Sastri wants and therefore their union never becomes a sacred one. Mireille who is also married appears in his life and they experience great heights of sexual pleasure. She knows that she is involved in the relation only for pure adventure and new experience. In a light and playful manner she reveals the beauty of womanhood and makes him realize the highest *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' truth. This experience helps Sastri to rise above physical beauty and pushes him towards *Brahman*. Another woman who has a significant place in Sastri's life is none other than his own sister Uma who is neither materialistic nor metaphysical. Sastri loves his sister very much and with her he feels at home. Her selfless love and concern for him gives him immense satisfaction. He tells, " When Uma stood by me, putting my hair up, there was at her fingertips, so to say, an intimacy, a foreknowledge, of what is oneself in the other, though there is one and the other, and yet in a way of speaking the same- two halves of one whole . . ." (CMM 265).

This is nothing but realization of non-dualistic state through kith and kin. Out of the four women in his life he reaches the *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state with three of them. For Jaya(his

lover) and Uma(his sister), he has feelings of true love and for others only sentiments. There is a triangular relationship of Siva-Suzanne and Jayalakshmi interspersed by Jean Pierre, Michel, Mireille and sister Uma. The third part of the novel entitled 'The Brahmin and the Rabbi' is a discussion on Hinduism and Jewish tradition through a dialogue between Michel and Sastri. Jewish concepts and their history are explained through a discourse. Ultimately the superiority of the *Vedanta* and Upanisads is emphasized.

'And who is their highest God?'

'Well, He is not so far away, either, actually you can reach His feet,'

they say, but never become Him. . .

'Who is the other God then?'

'The No-God, the highest God. He is not even a He but an It'.

'Maybe that's the only true God,' he said, . . . (CMM 670)

Although the protagonist Sivarama Sastri has an in-depth knowledge of the *Vedas* and Upanisads, yet his life is full of misconceptions and myths. He speaks with authority on many subjects and usually dominates the discussions with everyone around and most of the characters appear to be silent listeners who ultimately surrender to his viewpoints. Still his life appears to be full of myths and the novel is about his journey to dispel myths for a glimpse of the ultimate reality.

(A) Myth of the Chessmaster

The title *The Chessmaster and His Moves* has symbolic significance where God is referred to as the Chessmaster and the world is his *lila* 'divine play'. The concept of God in the novel

corresponds to the *advaita* 'non-dualism' of Samkara which says that God is beyond the world, he is *nirguna* 'attributeless' and indescribable. The world is an appearance, a play and not a reality where everything is fixed by God. We are mere puppets in the hands of God. Sastri believes that the entire war of Mahabharata between Pandavas and Kauravas and the defeat of the latter at the hands of former was co-ordinated by Lord Krsna. Thus the chessboard is a symbol of a playground of destiny where the Chessmaster plays with human beings treating them as billions of chess pieces. As it is evident in these lines, "Siva sits in yogic meditation, and runs the world from his mountain retreat. The world dances then, like the juggler's monkeys: . . ." (CMM 165). Sastri claims that we are like monkeys dancing to the tunes of the juggler. The juggler here is symbolic of God. For his amusement he is playing the divine play. The moves made by the Chessmaster are symbolic of the conduct of the drama of life *lila* the 'divine play'. In this game of chess the ways of God are mysterious and cannot be predicted.

The game of chess is obviously our world. The Chessmaster is the player par excellence who is very accurate and quick in making his moves and seldom makes any mistakes and we are told, "From now on events move in such tumultuous rhythms, one wondered who the master player was, moving his chess pieces with total precision, with dastardly quickness, rubbing his noble head in silence, in secret joy, for he was playing with his own self, as if the game would go according to its own formative end . . ." (CMM 501). He moves the pawns with great precision and Sastri feels that in this game of the master player our lives are governed by the laws of the game and the orders of pawn are not four as in the ordinary gaming but a million.

God is, thus, the ultimate master who controls our lives like a ventriloquist. He always does justice with people and he enjoys this *lila* 'divine act' like a game which is his own creation. We the people have nothing in our own hands. In *Bhagavad-Gita* this aspect of God being the

Chessmaster is emphasized when Lord Krsna in the battle field of Kurukshetra shows his gigantic form which encompasses the whole universe and he proves that he is the controller of the universe. He states that all living beings come from him and go into him. Everything is merged inside him. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. This particular huge incredible posture reminds us of his Chessmaster image. He has given this *jnana* 'knowledge' to Arjun that even a leaf cannot move without his wish.

Ihaika-stham jagat krtsnam

pasyadya sa-caracaram

mama dehe gudakesa

yac canyad drastum icchasi (BG 11.7)

Krsna says O Arjuna, whatever you wish to see, behold at once in this body of mine! This universal form can show you whatever you now desire to see whatever you may want to see in the future. Everything - moving and unmoving - is here completely, in one place (trans. Prabhupad 559).

Lord Krsna gives special vision to Arjun so that he can see the universal form of the Lord. The unlimited expansion of the universe situated in one place although divided into many thousand pieces. God is the creator, protector and destroyer. He is the supreme soul expanded everywhere without limit. As enunciated in *Bhagavad Gita*, man is bound by the law of karma. All his actions are met with justice, good or bad. God is the chief justice of all our karmas. Our fate is decided based on karma. God the Chessmaster, never makes any mistakes.

Sivarama Sastri, who is a great *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*', is in search of the ultimate reality. His knowledge of the *Vedas*, Upanisad and other epics is exhibited in the third part of book 'The Brahmin and the Rabbi'. It appears the he takes pride in being a great intellectual who has a

vast knowledge of the Indian philosophy. In some situations, Sastri nurtures the myth that he is the Chessmaster himself. Although Sastri repeatedly claims that God is the Chessmaster and we are all chess pieces yet in some situations he believes himself to be the Chessmaster. His behaviour and living style also illustrates this very fact. He behaves as if he is the Lord Krsna and all the women in his life are *gopis* 'devotees'. He acts as if he is the controller of their destinies. All the women are after him as he is like Krsna playing the flute and all the women are dancing to his tune as if they have lost their senses. The women have lost their sense of right and wrong and are completely smitten by him.

These women act according to Sastri's whims and fancies. Sastri appears to be the Chessmaster, the women are all pawns and life seems to be the game of chess. He makes the moves of the pawns and plays the tricks as he wants. The first time he appears to have acted like Lord Krsna is when a woman comes in his life whose name is Rati. Rati is the daughter of a rich businessman and she is attracted to him and when she finds him alone she tries to get physically close to him. He does nothing and behaves like an innocent child. She is the one who goes mad about him like a *gopi* 'devotee' goes for Krsna. Jayalakshmi, the north Indian princess is like Radha to him where Sastri is the enchanter and she is a devotee, a disciple. They share a spiritual bond beyond any relationship. In this relation also Jaya is so much smitten by his Krsna, that even after her marriage, she keeps in touch with him and is always eager to meet him. She even comes to Paris for her treatment such that she can be with Sastri. They both enter into a spiritual bond which can never be broken. In this relation he behaves like Krsna, the Chessmaster, pulling the strings of Jaya like a ventriloquist and Jaya feels like Mira Bai who in spite of being married, could think of only one *Purusa* 'man', (Krsna) which in her case is Sastri. She seems totally committed to him. Sastri says,

During those dramatic days in London, . . . there was such a sense that we were pawns in some metaphysical game, but J., my J.(if I can still call her so), who was playing *it*, who indeed was *it*. Again there was a feeling, as I walked . . . that not only was everything set, as in the western musical piece, the scores already written, that every gesture . . . that we moved because the stellar universe moved . . . (CMM 84-85).

He thinks that Jaya and he are meeting again and again because of some uncanny reason that is destined by God. It appears that he is controlling her emotions and movements towards him. He is the Krsna to his Radha, a myth that he is the Chessmaster. Sastri boasts of his knowledge and of his Brahmin superiority. He dominates all the people around him with his knowledge. Therefore another woman Suzanne is attracted to him and wants to marry him. While she lives with him like a devoted Indian wife, still he develops relation with another woman called Mireille. They both enjoy their sexual escapades. Again he acts like the Chessmaster, as if he can pull the strings of anyone and that person will come running to him with open arms losing his senses. Mireille is another woman who is a wife and a mother and still she cannot resist the temptations of Sastri. He acts like Lord Krsna who is considered the perfect enchanter. Women can't resist him as *gopis* 'devotees' cannot resist Krsna. Mireille frankly admits, "The gods play strange games. Here I am kneeling to you, heathen,' she said and laughed again. Heathen or god, you are my man" (CMM 369). It seems that she considers Sastri an ideal man. She respects him and is ready to surrender anything to him.

Sastri's sister Uma, who comes to Paris for treatment, also ends up doing service for her brother instead of solving her own problems. She starts taking care of the kids and managing the home. She is more concerned about her brother rather than her own problems and she hero

worships him. In this way all the women who come in his life including his sister behave like *gopis* 'devotees'. Under his spell they lose their senses and then fall head over heels for him. But Sastri behaves like an innocent child as if he has done nothing.

The reality is that Sastri has *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge and he is always in search of Truth and he does not hesitate to exhibit his knowledge and dominate others. By showing off his knowledge and his upper caste he tries to gain respect and dominate them with his thoughts. The people especially women are easily influenced by his views and his personality. They get overwhelmed by him and start dancing to his tunes. Unknowingly he starts controlling their actions and behaves like the Chessmaster. Whenever he wants any woman to come close to him, they just follow him religiously. Whenever he wants them to move away they move away. As Sastri does not want to marry, Suzanne moves away from his life. In fact he makes Suzanne move towards another man Michel. Sastri feels that Michel is his own creation done for Suzanne so she can move away from him. "Did I, or rather did my psyche, suddenly discover a way out of this corruption, and this Michel was he a creature of mine, or was Michel the reality, pre-existent, for such a magnanimous game? . . ." (*CMM* 222). Sastri feels that he has created his own world to suit his needs and he is the Chessmaster himself. This myth is slowly busted towards the end of the novel.

(B) Reality of the Chessmaster

Sastri believes in the beginning that God is the Chessmaster and all others are pawns and life is a chessboard limited to sixty four pieces. Then he starts nurturing the myth that he is the Chessmaster himself controlling all the movements in his life. The chessmaster symbol has been used by many writers. For instance, Shakespeare in *The Tempest* has used the chessmaster image. The protagonist of the play Prospero is portrayed as the supreme Chessmaster, the sovereign

puppeteer. He could command the winds and the waves of the sea. He used to float in and out of scenes hanging about the wings to observe and approve the spirit's movements. He is projected as the controller of destinies of spirits in his control just as the chessmaster controls the movements of the pawns. The spirit says to Prospero,

All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail! I come

To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly.

To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride,

On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task. (1.2.189-193)

Similarly, T.S. Eliot has also used the symbol of chess in his works. In *The Wasteland* the concept of game of chess is used effectively. There is a section called 'A Game of Chess' where life is compared to a ruthless game which the players play devoid of any emotions. They play only to achieve their selfish goals. Players are plotting and planning to win the game with their strategies. In *The Wasteland*, a woman is conversing with the narrator as,

"What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock

upon the door. (134-138)

The woman is asking the narrator, how to spend the day. He suggests a game of chess to spend the time. 'Lidless eyes' are the eyes of the chess players which are fixed on the Chessboard. Interaction is reduced to a set of movements on the board. There are no feelings and emotions- only cold ruthless play is going on. Likewise *In the Chessmaster and His Moves* also the selfish game of convenience is going on. Strangely there is a single player while all others are pawns. Therefore in Eliot's world or Raja Rao's, the players are not only selfish but are also playing the game to grind their own axes. Sastri's interest is to attain self realization. To achieve this objective he negates many incidents and people in his life.

The chessboard symbol that Sastri gives to the world of human operation is itself a metaphysical restraint on the individuals who are moving on the path of self realization. This restraint is due to *avidya* 'lack of knowledge' of ordinary beings. When the curtain of *maya* 'illusion' is lifted then the doer of action, the receiver of action and the action itself merge into one. "Is the earthen pot different from the earth, or is it the same?" (*CMM* 549). Sastri understands this non-dualism but never realizes it or never reaches that state. "And I also know that, I and this me, are not two me-s, but somewhere one and only one 'I'. So, I close my eyes, and wait for your cable, Father. And please do not delay . . . Thus speaks your son, Sivarama" (*CMM* 644).

The reality of the Chessmaster is that the player, the chess pieces and the game are merged into one ultimate reality *Brahman*. The chess pieces and the player are not two but one. The myth of the Chessmaster helps Sastri realize that life is a play from which one cannot expect anything concrete, so unreal (a myth) and the Chessmaster as God who appears to be a master player and governs the universe by his moves takes the form of Guru and then as Krsna and finally is realized as one's own self. This self is represented by zero which is synonymous of nirvana, *Brahman* and so on in various speculations. One has to analyse the whole process from the angle of true witness

standing upon liberating himself and not as a true actor intending upon achieving his victory in his game of chess.

The mingling of actor and spectator self takes place with the knowledge of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. As long as the self is in dualistic state, as Sastri is in a dualistic state, he feels that his identity is different from that of God and he is the master and the self is a mere pawn. In the ultimate analysis everywhere there is self- self is the pawn, self is the game, and self is *Brahman*. *Ahm Bramh asmi* 'I am *Brahman*'. Sastri understands this concept but could not realize it. That's why Michel asks in the novel,

"But do you know *Brahman*?"

"No. Not yet! For to know *Brahman* really, one has to become

Brahman, to become It" (CMM 671).

The difference of asserting one's identity and taking it to be different from supreme consciousness is duality. Once this duality is transcended and ego is dissolved then one can see this *lila* 'divine play' in a new light. One does not feel to be a victim or a pawn in a game but one feels to be a silent spectator enjoying the game. Only through duality one can reach non-duality and through myths one can reach reality. When myths are busted then reality is revealed. Once the realization of *advaita* 'non-dualism' is reached, then the sentient being will never fall into *maya* 'illusion' of *dvaita* 'duality'. As Lord Krsna says,

Yaj jnatva na punar moham

Evam yasyasi pandava

Yena bhutany asesani

Draksyasy atmany atho mayi (BG 4.35)

Having obtained real knowledge from a self realized soul, you will never fall again into such illusion, for by this knowledge you will see that all living beings are but part of the supreme, or in other words, that they are mine. (trans. Prabhupad 264).

All living and nonliving things are part and parcel of the supreme. The sense of an existence separate from Krsna is called *maya* 'illusion'. *Brahman* is the absolute reality. Factually it is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the impersonal *Brahman* is the personal effulgence of Krsna. The millions of incarnations are only his different expansions. The absolute means that one plus one is equal to one, and that one minus one is also equal to one. This is the case in the absolute world. The whole teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* is targeted towards the end that living beings cannot be separated from Krsna and his sense of being an identity apart from Krsna is called *maya* 'illusion'. Sastri is caught in the cobweb of many such myths. One of them is the myth of marriage. It seems that Sastri and other characters all have different views of marriage and none is clear about its basic concept. Western characters like Suzzane and Mireille have eastern dualistic views and eastern characters like Sastri, Jaya and Uma have dualistic concept of marriage. This leads to the myth of the sacred union.

(C) Myth of the Sacred Union

Marriage is considered a sacred bond in India as it is considered a union of two souls. According to *Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary* marriage is defined as the "formal union of a man and a woman by which they become husband and wife". 'Formal union' refers to the fact that the marriage ceremony takes place in front of the society. It happens after following certain rituals and traditions such that the bond is declared sacred. It is not meant to be temporary and

for convenience. In Hindu religion and philosophy marriage is viewed as a sacrament and not a contract.

According to the Vedic system the whole life span of an individual is divided into hundred years. The first period of twenty five years is *brahmacharya* 'chastity' dedicated to studies and knowledge. Next twenty five years is *grhastha* 'householdership' dedicated to family life and raising of children. After that there is *vanprastha* 'departure to forest' dedicated to the service of society. And lastly there is *Sannyasa* 'renunciation' for pursuit of spirituality. *Grhastha Ashram* 'stage of householdership' is considered to be most important of all *ashrams* 'stages of life'. Sage Valmiki has written in the 'Ayodhya Kand' section in *Valmiki Ramayana*,

Chaturnaam aashrammanaam hi gaarhasthyam shreshtham

Aashramam

Paahur dharmajna dharmajnaaktam kathamtyaktum

Arhasi (Valmiki Ramayana 2.106.22)

O Ram the knower of righteousness! The knower of what is right indeed tell that the life of a house holder is the noblest of all four stages of life. How can you abandon it? (trans. Rao, and K.M.K.Murthy).

Grhastha Ashram 'stage of householdership' is considered to be a stepping stone for spiritual pursuits. Even in *vanprastha* 'departure to forest' and *sannyasa ashrams* 'stage of renunciation' the wife is always a spiritual companion. They are neither two nor one but not two. The man is after *Brahman* and the wife seeks *Brahman* through him.

Everywhere in the world the institution of marriage is respected. A person who has knowledge of the *Veda* and *Purana* cannot ignore the value of wife and the institution of marriage. But in the novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves* marriage is regarded as a myth and insignificant for a man woman relationship. The protagonist Sastri remains unmarried till the end of novel. He respects women and holds them in high esteem and indulges in intense relations with them but never marries anyone. He has relations with married women like Mireille and Jaya. Sastri feels that marriage is a myth. If a man and a woman are deeply involved at the physical level or at the spiritual level, then they can realize *Brahman* and reach the *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state of two becoming not two. For this *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state marriage is not essential. Sastri regards marriage as a long anesthetized ritual murder for it is based on the concocted comparison of horoscopes of the prospective bride and bride groom.

That is what an Indian marriage is: the ascetic, the student wanting to go to Benaras to study is stopped by a future father in law, asking the young man to found a home with his daughter, and after much and much argument, the young man stays, finds a home has children and grand children-and only then turns towards holy Benaras. (CMM 405)

Sastri does not believe in marriage arranged by parents in India. He thinks that the two people should decide whether they have to live together or not. He is a believer of *advaita* 'non-dualistic' *Vedanta* philosophy which says that there is nothing two but everything merges into one. Real marriage takes place when there is non-dual affinity between the male and female. "The not two alone is marriage, you understand. So there is indeed no marriage" (CMM 701). Sastri believes that man and woman in a relation should get submerged into one such that they lose their individuality. He makes many such relations with various women like Suzanne Mireille, and Rati.

Sastri never gets married to anyone. Suzanne even behaves like an Indian wife with him. She learns Sanskrit and Indian mythology to impress him. In spite of all her efforts Sastri refuses to marry her. Their concept of marriage differs from each other and Sastri does not get what he is looking for in a woman from her.

It appears that Sastri wants to lead a life free from any commitment and bondage and marriage is a bondage to him. He enjoys the company of women and develops relations with them but the question of marriage never arises. Sastri has a deep spiritual bond with Jaya. He takes this relation as the relation of Lord Krsna with Radha. He never marries her and continues this relation even when she is married. In the meantime he develops relations with Suzanne and he is quiet happy. Still he gets involved with Mireille. Thus he is involved with three women at a time. Such relationships remind us of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. In *The Wasteland*, Eliot presents the muddy scenes of relationships where man and woman are involved with each other without any stability or commitment.

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart. He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you to get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there. You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set, He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you . . . He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time, and if you don't give it him, There's others will, I said.(142-146,148-149)

Eliot depicts the plight of a woman Lil whose friend Albert is coming after four years. Lil's another friend advises her to beautify herself lest Albert may choose another woman. She has to be smart enough to attract her man or someone else will woo him. Eliot is trying to show that relationships are all temporary. They are based on physical attractions and there is no place for

commitment. A man can enjoy with as many women as he wants as the concept of loyalty doesn't exist.

There is total chaos and confusion and nobody is happy as everyone is in a mission of finding true love and stability and they end up being stressed out and lonely. People keep on changing partners in pursuit of true love and happiness but they end up being depressed and messed up. As far as Sastri is concerned at the mundane level it appears that he is selfish and is switching women to suit his needs. There is total lack of commitment in his attitude. But when his behaviour is analysed at metaphysical level it becomes clear that his aim is self realization and not materialism. The relations he establishes whether physical or spiritual all are with the aim of reaching an *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state. He experiences *Purnata* 'completeness' with Mireille and Jaya. But both the women are married. Their marital status does not affect him. He says, "Her purity(forgive me saying it) had such depth, you felt you were touching something primordial, a cosmic centre, a basic equation. You rose from-I rose from Mireille's depths-carrying myself back, . . ."(*CMM* 427). Marriage cannot be a restriction to him in achieving reality. He is in search of the Absolute through the relations with women married or unmarried. Will he achieve the Absolute through this? This is the big question.

The institution of marriage which leads to stability and peace in one's life is projected as a big myth in the novel. Most of the characters show disrespect for marriage by indulging in extra marital relations. Jayalakshmi, is a north Indian princess. Of all the women he is fascinated by her the most. In spite of their feelings and love for each other, they never get married. She gets married to prince Surendra. She discovers that her husband is materialistic and is busy in being a tycoon. Surendra's view on marriage is that he has married Jaya as his parents like her. The differences between them causes discomfort and she continues her relation with Sastri and so she

indulges in extramarital affair. She develops a spiritual bond with him and vows to be with him in her next birth. She continues her relation even when Sastri is involved with another woman Suzanne. She is jealous of Suzanne but still hero worships Sastri like a disciple. Jaya also disregards the traditional concept of marriage. As a Hindu woman, she maintains the holiness of the age old social connection of marriage under Indian ethos. But her heart and soul belong to another man who is not her husband. As invited by Sastri, Jaya comes to Paris to perform her spiritual marriage with him. She is the real 'Benaras born bride'. "Don't rate me too high, she remarked, if she read my thoughts. 'I am a simple woman, totally a woman, living for her man's happiness. Even my music,' she said smiling, 'even my Mira, is enticement- into the divine, . . .-who knows what the divine is. Sometimes I feel a saint, . . .'" (CMM 172).

Jaya is devoted to Sastri as Mira is to Krsna. Without any expectations she is just lost in the devotion of her Lord. In spite of her spiritual wedding she never becomes a legally wedded wife of Sastri. She remains legally wedded to Surendra and spiritually wedded to Sastri. This is an amazing equation beyond the social norms of the society. Marriage appears to be a big myth for her. Unlike Jaya, Suzanne is from the West. The Western concept of marriage is dualistic. Both the partners believe in asserting their individuality. Husband and wife have separate identities which can never merge. Suzanne does believe in marriages but her intentions are not of pure union with the man but fulfillment of selfish desire. She wants her dead son back by marrying Sastri. She is deserted by her husband and is miserably perturbed by the tragic loss of her child. Suzanne is impressed by Sastri's knowledge and Brahminic stature and she worships him like God and remains devoted to him like a Hindu wife with the belief that their relationship is of several births. Sastri himself admits, "She was sure, was Suzanne, that she was my wife, and only wife, and none could ever take her place, however brilliant or beautiful- No, not even the princess . . . 'Where did

you learn all this, Suzanne?’-‘Why of course, in my past life, for I was your wife’, she assured me . . .” (CMM 624).

In spite of such deep bond and total commitment shown by Suzanne, Sastri never marries her. In the eastern concept of non-dualism, the two partners become one by annihilating their individuality. In the same manner Sastri expects her to lose her identity in the relationship. But she never relents for it due to her western norms and later marries someone else. The institution of marriage thus remains an unexplained concept for her whose reality she is unable to comprehend. Mireille, another French woman believes that Sastri’s concept of marriage as a big myth. Total surrender and commitment in marriage is beyond her comprehension. She admits, “I realize to live with you, one must be prepared for extinction, total extinction-your demands, without being so, are abstract-absolute. I am too french to answer to your absoluteness, . . .” (CMM 407).

Although being married Mireille is attracted to Sastri and establishes a physical relation with him. But she too like Suzanne is not prepared for any bondage or commitment and her relations with Sastri are just for adventure. For her marriage is not a bondage or restriction in living with freedom. There is no regard for the norms of the society or good social conduct. Marriage, therefore remains a big myth.

(D) Reality of the sacred Union

Our customs and traditions are rooted in the Vedas composed around 1500 B.C. The Vedic ideal of marriage is that of a perfect monogamy, the lifelong companionship of two people. This practice must have been established by the fact that the Vedic seers seeking comparisons for perfect duality for the twin deities, gave example of a married couple who appeared like twins. There are no spiritual differences between man and woman. They are two manifestations of the

same *atman* 'soul'. This is the highest search of Hinduism which emerges from its scriptures. Hindu religious philosophy views marriage like a triangle with God at its apex and the husband and wife at the two corners that forms the base of the triangle. As long as the couple is at the base there is separation between them. However when they begin moving towards God the distance decreases. The distance becomes zero when they reach God and unite in him forever. Even Sastri longs for this kind of spiritual relationship with a woman where the two can become not two and achieve *advaita*, 'non-dualism' but marriage was not essential for it. According to the Vedic system of marriage the wife has the responsibility of providing the umbrella of *dharma* 'acts of duty' so that the family is called a *dharmic* one 'religiously inclined'. *Patni* 'wife' is referred to as *dharma patni* 'wife according to religion'. Yudhishtira in "Aranya parva" of the *Sankshipta Mahabharata* has clarified the role of a wife while answering the questions of Yaksha. To quote,

Yaksha- *Kimsvinmi tram grhesatah?*

Who is the friend of a householder?

Yudhishtira-*Bharyamitram grhesatah.*

A spouse is the friend of a householder. . . .

Yaksha- *Dharmashcaarthasca kaamashca paraspara virodhinah*

e shaam nitya viruddhaanam katt hame katra sangamah?

Dharma 'act of duty', *artha* 'money' and *Kama* 'desire' conflict each other,

How can these contraries be reconciled?

Yudhishtira-*Yada dharmasca bhaavya paraspara vashanugau tada*

Dharmarthakamaanam trayaanamapi sangamah

When *dharma* 'act of duty' and one's wife are in harmony then *dharma*,

'act of duty' *artha* 'money' and *kama* 'desire' are reconciled.(1.3.203.402- 403)

In order to keep a balance among all - *artha* 'monetary', *kama* 'desire' and *moksha* 'liberation'- one has to have a *dharmic* 'religious' wife. It is the protection coming from such a spouse who provides torch light, spirit of friendship and cooperation that gives a reasonable chance for a couple to succeed in meeting the challenges of conflicting attributes. Man and woman are the soul-mates who, through the institution of marriage can direct the energy associated with their individual instincts and passion into progress of their souls.

Sivarama Sastri in *The Chessmaster and His Moves* appears to have some knowledge of the *Vedas* but has perhaps not imbibed the essence of the *Vedas* and Upanisads. He knows the importance of wife and *grhastha ashram* 'stage of householdership'. The best way to move towards *sannyasa* 'stage of renunciation', which is a way to reach self realization, but he wants to surpass *grhastha ashram* 'stage of householdership' and jump directly to *sannyasa* 'renunciation'. In this connection Raja Rao himself has described a legend in which Samkara was defeated by a woman in a discourse as he had not experienced *grhastha ashram* 'stage of householdership'.

Did you not say Rama, it was Sri Sankara himself who, defeated in discussion by a woman when she questioned him on things essentially feminine, left his body in the hollow of a tree by the river Narbada and incarnated in the body of a dead king? That he live for ten years with four queens and wrote those celebrated verses on love, which you say are among the most beautiful lyrics of India?(SR 164)

The fact is that the only way to move towards *sannyasa* 'renunciation' is through *grhastha* 'householdership'. Sastri does not fully understand this fact as he experiences the pleasures of a *grhastha* 'householder' without marriage, but never its responsibilities. He enjoys the company of woman but never thinks of marriage or raising children. Towards the end of the novel he is left alone only with his sister and no other woman. Whether he achieves realization or not remains an unanswered question. Apart from the myth of marriage there is another myth highlighted in the novel which is the myth of the physical beauty of a woman. The physical beauty is described as 'Goblets of Shiraz' in *The Chessmaster and His Moves*.

(E) Myth of the Goblets of Shiraz

The Goblets of Shiraz is symbolic of Sastri's sexual escapades into the arms of Mireille an art historian. Shiraz is a city of south west Iran distinguished for its blue pottery, its bowl shaped drinking vessels. Thus the epithet 'Goblet of Shiraz' symbolizes Mireille's physical beauty and shows the importance of physical pleasure in his life. Sastri is not just a believer of *Vedanta* but also of Tantra. A *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' believes in surrender of the self, devotion and sexual abstinence for spiritual elevation. Tantric system works differently as Tantra is a spiritual discipline of technical nature to attain immortality. The *Vama Marg* class of Tantra suggest that spiritual fulfillment may be realized through sensuality. Tantrics believe that poison is needed to eradicate the poison in human system. Sex, in tantrism has a high symbolic role. Tantrics believe that a right method to salvation cannot exclude the body. The body is considered *devata* 'Lord', the visible form of *Brahman*. As Heinrich Zimmer puts it,

The Tantric *sadhaka* is not interested in conventional survival so much as in the fathoming of life and the discovering of its timeless secret ... Hence the great Tantric formula (so different from that of the earlier Hindu yogic disciples): yoga

(the yoking of empirical consciousness to transcendental consciousness) and *bhoga* ("enjoyment" the experience of life's joy and suffering) are the same. *Bhoga* itself can be made a way of yoga. (579-580)

Buddhist Tantra requires the deification of women as Goddess and emphasizes the identity experience between man and woman. Raja Rao's major novels reveal several characteristics of Tantra such as the wielding of occult power, the worship of mother Goddess and the invocation of extramarital love. Raja Rao himself and the protagonist of his novels waver between the *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' and the tantric means of liberation.

Sastri tries to practice *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' principles of meditation and leads a religious life. At the same time he is also the believer of Tantric system. He believes that through sexual experience with women liberation can be achieved and the Absolute could be sought. Many a times in his sexual encounters he claims to see the light of the Absolute and hears the hymns as he states, "while I was still there, a soft, warm, breathful presence slipped beside me, and now knew this was joy, like the joy in the Vedic hymns, with the dawn, the dawn slowly rising, the sun rising over the arctic snows . . ." (CMM 350). It appears that Sastri used to experience spiritual satisfaction rather than physical pleasure in his sexual encounters. He feels that he is moving towards that light through the experience. Sastri equates sexual pleasure with spiritual contentment. He realizes that love is a spiritual experience, women are to be worshipped but this spiritual experience can be lead to great heights through sexual pleasures.

Sastri in order to move towards self realization adopts the Tantric method and indulges in a lot of sexual escapades. There is not much place for commitment, bonding and marriage. The Gods whom he worships and observes, he regards them in sexual form only. As he says, "A nation whose chief gods were Siva and Krishna, Siva whose symbol the noble phallus, and Krishna, the

great lover of gopis-it's strange how we've forgotten the temple of being, which is our own body, and for whose proper use, the sage Vatsyayana wrote *Kamasutra* while great Sri Sankara wrote *Saundaryalahiri*: . . ." (CMM 341).

Obviously Sastri seems to believe that if you worship your body then you can get over it and move towards *Brahman*. Sastri has knowledge of the facts of the book *Kamsutras*. The book gives a scientific analysis of the types of women therefore Sastri says this about Jaya. "And Jayalakshmi, her clothes smell of - musk of the Kashmir mountains, that wrought, so the tradition says, havoc with man's passions" (CMM 283).

The sexual escapades with Mireille are also described in *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' terms. Miereille's fullness reminds Sastri of the fullness of Brahman as described in *Brahadaranyaka* Upanisad. While playing with Mireille he has vision of light houses. Sastri indulges in many such relations. He has relations with Rati then he has relations with another French woman Suzanne. The relationship between Suzanne and Sastri can be interpreted in terms of tantric thought. In the *Karma mudra* 'a particular posture', situations, the partners develop a strong sense of affinity and the harmonious couple experience deepest joy. In the tantric experience man tries to prove himself to be a perfect lover while the woman will be the ideal wife. Sastri believes in *Vedantic* 'follower of *Vedanta*' concept that the woman should get absorbed into him and completely submerge herself into him. By being one the Absolute can be realized. Sex, in Sastri's case, is thus raised to the pedestal of revelation of mysteries through expressionistic terms.

(F) Reality of the Goblets of Shiraz

A question here arises whether following the tantric way to achieve liberation really helps Sastri to achieve self realization or not. After so many sexual encounters with various women he still seems to be lost on the path of quest for the Absolute. He has not achieved his goal as yet and

Sastri himself realizes this towards the end. Man and woman realize their identity only through intellectual and spiritual affinity with each other. The reality is that sexual experiences can help you attain heights of ecstasies but the true happiness and self realization cannot be achieved through it. With Jaya, Sastri has no sexual encounters but still he feels the happiest with her. Even physical distance does not decrease their charm and love for each other. The oneness which he wants to experience as mentioned in the Vedas is experienced with Jaya without any sexual contacts. Sastri feels, "So Jayalakshmi was joy, when I was 'I' (and when could I not be 'I'), Jayalakshmi was me (as 'I') so there was no J. but 'I' and finally was there an 'I'? No. 'I' could not say 'I'. . . .I was supremely happy, I had seen *sat* as *anandam*, Truth as happiness, and this was the end of pilgrimage to Benaras, this the celestial Ganga" (CMM 330). He is 'supremely happy' with Jaya with whom he is spiritually attached and gets a lot of contentment.

Sastri thus realizes that physical union is not required to achieve enlightenment. To achieve the oneness as mentioned in *advaita* 'non-dualism', spiritual and emotional bonding is required. Through this bonding one can achieve *Paramanand* 'eternal happiness'. Sexual experience gives one temporary gratification. Spiritual and emotional bonding gives one long lasting and deep gratification. Therefore the concept of the Goblets of Shiraz is a myth. But maybe by breaking this myth can reality be seen.

Sastri realizes that Shivalinga is being misinterpreted as Phallus, whereas in our traditions it is *Sphullinga* 'the flame of light', the real form of Lord Siva. To associate it with the male genital organ is blaspheme. Similarly, the Goblets of Shiraz referred to as female body parts are more a source of life vitality to the infant than a source of joy. At the same time the tantrics idealize the relation of Krsna and Radha. They get involved with women and adore them in the name of Krsna. The reality is that Krsna is the beloved God of Radha and the *gopis* 'devotees' are his worshippers

and devotees. They are more like his disciples rather than his sexual partners. Krsna never had any physical relations with the *gopis* 'devotees'. The objection to the philosophy of Sastri is raised by Ratilal Jhaveri who is a Jain. Jhaveri says about his Guru "His teachings are a combination, if I may say, of Jain humanism and of vedantic metaphysics. The moral and the metaphysical meet somewhere" (CMM 548). Jhaveri convinces Sastri that a *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' has to follow the moral code of conduct and refrain from immorality. 'The moral and metaphysical' have to meet in order to have a proper order in the society. In order to achieve the Absolute Truth, sexual abstinence is required. The reality is that the true emancipation is achieved through the right procedure as mentioned in the *Vedanta* and not by following the tantric method. However, Hinduism allows all sorts of contradictory beliefs for it believes that there are a number of different ways to seek the ultimate reality. Apart from many other myths another major myth conspicuous in the novel is the myth of Brahminism. Sastri is proud of being a Brahmin and he often boasts of his knowledge of the religious scriptures. But he never implements the principles laid down by these scriptures such that the illusion of Brahminhood emerges.

(G) Illusion of Brahminhood

Like the other protagonists of Raja Rao, Sivarama Sastri is a south Indian Brahmin. He wins scholarship from French court and goes to Paris as a Mathematician. He has an in depth knowledge of *Vedanta* and *Puranas*. He knows the verses of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and remembers many other mythological stories of Siva Parvati. He can have discussion on any topic of Indian mythology and dominate it. He is well versed with Indian heritage and culture and he believes in *advaita* 'non-dualism'. He himself is in search of the Absolute Truth. He leads his life following the principles of Tantra and to some extent *Vedanta*. It seems in the beginning that Sastri is a true Indian propagating Indian culture and philosophy abroad. He can bring name for

the country by doing good in the world of Mathematics. He also takes pride in being a Brahmin which is considered the highest caste in India.

Sastri, a typical Brahmin always wears a sacred thread around his body. He goes for ablutions many times a day and never eats anything before his bath. For him a Brahmin is a symbol of a person who is pious both physically and spiritually. Like an ideal Brahmin, Sastri conducts himself observing all the rudiments like washing daily worshipping and undergoing spiritual meditations. "May be its Brahmin ancestors in me, but I must wash before I do anything - before I sit for work, go out for dinner, before going to sleep, or before I touch a book, . . . I must go in for a wash, otherwise I feel I have done something improper"(CMM 633).

Sastri is an enlightened person and he strongly defends his practices despite his long stay in the West. Brahmin for Sastri is a symbol of illumination because a true Brahmin aspires for salvation and seeks *Brahman*. He is also fascinated towards women who have Brahmin like purity and have spiritual inclinations like Jaya. He calls them the 'benaras born brides' which if interpreted in the perspective of *Vedanta* signifies bride who observes ascetic rigour of *Vedanta* and sits in meditation to attain salvation. He discusses myths and *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' theories with women. He used to speak at length about *Bhagavad Gita* and its principles, "How fleeting and uncertain are life's glories. As the Gita says: Perform your dharma fearlessly, and be not attached to the fruits of action. This was a law as true as, indeed truer than Newton's law of motion, and it consoled me and aided me in every aspect of my human existence"(CMM 605). Women used to get attracted to him because of his knowledge of Hindu philosophy and also the aura he carried of belonging to a superior caste Brahmin. The third part of the novel, 'The Brahmin and the Rabbi' shows speaks at length on various topics of Nirvana and the importance of Guru. In a discussion Sastri explains, "What did your good Sankara say?- 'He said: There's neither the Guru

nor the disciple, but the fallacy is, who ways it? The Guru never says anything, for what can It say but Itself to Itself, and so there's no saying, and he which says is not It, for It, by definition, does nothing-' . . . "(CMM 616).

'The Brahmin and the Rabbi' shows his knowledge in the *Vedas* and Upanisads and establishes his identity as a very knowledgeable Brahmin in search for Truth. Sastri is also a great Mathematician. He has a gigantic task of combining metaphysics and mathematics. He also explains various concepts of *Vedanta* in terms of mathematical equations. Sastri used to speak in terms of zero and infinite for *advaita* 'non-dualism' philosophy. He is a follower of eminent Indian legendary mathematician Ramanujan. He believes that Lord Siva is oval and thus Siva is zero. Sastri asserts that zero is the womb of humanity. He wants to bring good name for his country and uphold the tradition of Ramanujan and his Guru. His concepts are very clear as he sees logic behind every principle of life.

Yet in spite of his boastings of Brahminism, all his claims appear to be myths. His Brahminism is mythical and his Indianness is also a myth. Even as a Mathematician he is not very successful. He speaks in mathematical terms but it seems that he is not successful in doing anything substantial in the field of Mathematics. He does nothing to uphold the principles of Ramanujan. He spends most of his time discussing philosophy with friends and acquaintances. Sastri does not do much in the field of mathematics. He uses mathematical method to explain philosophy. Philosophy is more important than mathematics. His claims of being an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' and a true Brahmin fall flat. He is observed smoking and he does not even have much regard for the sacred thread. His conduct is also not ethical according to the norms of society. Suzanne thinks that he is arrogant and considers him to be superior to others. A person who has knowledge of *advaita* 'non-dualism' and whose aim is to achieve self realization exercises restraint in all aspects. Sastri works beyond

ethics and morals. At one time he has relations with three women. It appears that he has great weakness for sex and sometimes he treats women as sex objects looking at them in only one way. He indulges in liaison and wants to achieve enlightenment through the sexual experience. This lack of self control over senses is not like a true Indian Brahmin. The Indian culture and heritage which he boasts of does not teach us to have extramarital affairs. The stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata teach us to exercise self-restraint and respect the husband and wife relationship. It seems that Sastri preaches one thing and practices something else. His Indianness and Brahminism actually turn to be mythical.

(H) Truth of Brahminhood

A Brahmin is a member of the priestly class in India. The English word Brahmin is an anglicized form of Sanskrit word *Brahmana* 'member of the most intelligent class of men'. According to the ancient Hindu texts like *Bhagavad -Gita*, *Manusmriti* and others there are four *Varnas* 'social classes' into which the Hindu society is divided. This division is not on the basis of birth or ancestry but on the basis of nature of interest and inclinations towards a profession of an individual. Lord Krsna says

Brahmana-ksatriya-visam

Sudranam ca parantapa

Karmani pravibhaktani

Svabhava-prabhavair gunaih(BG 18. 41)

Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras are distinguished by the qualities born of their own natures in accordance with the material modes, O chastiser of the enemy.(trans. Prabhupad 827).

A person who has a spiritual bent of mind and interest in teaching and preaching of the *Vedas* is a Brahmin. One who is inclined towards leadership, heroism and courage in battlefield will be *Ksatriyas*. One who is interested in agriculture and business will be *Vaisyas* and one who is interested in dance, music and other services will be called *Sudra*.

Brahmins are also called *Vipra* 'divine being' and *dvija* 'twice born'. They are said to be inspired by the knowledge of the *Vedas* and Upanishads. Twice born refers to the fact that a Brahmin is twice born once from the womb of his mother and secondly when he gains knowledge of spirituality and philosophy. To be called a Brahmin one has to acquire the status through hard work as one acquires degrees of MBBS, M.Sc. etc. There are certain duties which he must do and follow a code of conduct to be called a true Brahmin.

First and foremost to be called a Brahmin one must acquire knowledge of the *Vedas*, Upanisads, *Bhagavad-Gita* and other epics. He should be a *Ved gyata* 'knower of Vedas'. Sastri is a *Ved Gyata* 'knower of Vedas'. Therefore in this regard he is a Brahmin. Many a times in the novel he recites verses from the Upanisads and the *Vedas*. He even holds a discussion with Michel on spiritual topics and is successful in making him realize the truth of God and uphold the supremacy of 'no god' *Nirguna*. In the chapter 'the Brahmin and the Rabbi' there is a discussion-

'Your God is an I-Thou, is not that so?'

'- And yours?' he spat, as if in desperate irritation.

'A Thou-so I. The I, and only therefore, Thou. Thus only the "I"

remains.'

'What would you want?'

'I want to be It'(CMM 669)

In this discussion with the Rabbi, Sastri exhibits great knowledge about the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. He also seems to understand the ultimate reality of *Brahman* and feels that a true Brahmin should realize *Brahman*.

“ ‘The real definition of Brahmin, however, is: A Brahmin is he who knows Brahman.’

‘But do you know Brahman?’

‘No. Not yet! For to know Brahman really, one has to become Brahman, to become It.’ ” (CMM 671).

The very definition given by Sastri for a true Brahmin keeps him away from the reality of Brahminhood as he himself admits that he has not realized *Brahman* and so he is not a true Brahmin. Perhaps this is because Sastri lives in a world of duality or myths. Initially he thinks that he is a pawn and there is some Chessmaster controlling his destiny. He asserts his individuality and perceives his existence to be different from *Brahman*. At one point Sastri starts feeling that he is the Chessmaster controlling the situations and people in his life. Slowly the myths are busted and reality dawns upon him that the world is a mere play. He understands the nature of truth and relates it with Nirvana and zero.

Brahminhood is not a complete illusion for him as he realizes *Brahman* for temporary moments and he becomes a true Brahmin in those moments. This realization slips from him and again moves into the world of duality. Lord Krsna has elucidated in *Bhagavad Gita* certain qualities which a Brahmin should possess in order to be called a true Brahmin.

Samo damas tapah saucam

Ksantir arjavam evaca

Nanam vijnanam asitkyam

Brahma-karma svabhava-jam (BG18.42)

Peacefulness, self control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge wisdom and religiousness-these are natural qualities by which the brahmanas work.(trans.Prabhupad 827).

Among the qualities mentioned above Sastri does possess some of them like knowledge, wisdom, peacefulness and religiousness, but he is definitely lacking in self control, tolerance, austerity Sastri always moves with the flow of life and he never shows tolerance and self control in his decisions. He gets involved with Rati a college friend. Sastri develops relation with Suzanne and slowly moves away from her. Meanwhile, he develops relation with Mireille. Throughout this journey he is in touch with Jaya, a married woman. All these relationships entangle his life and in the end he is left with emptiness. It is not clear whether he reaches his goal of the Absolute or not Sastri always exhibits knowledge of the ultimate reality but lives a life full of myths.

The novel *The Chessmater and His Moves* is like an epic in terms of length. It is a long epic encompassing many themes of love, sex, philosophy of *Vedanta* and Tantra. Its scale is very large covering two countries India and France. It breaks many myths of the hero Sivarama Sastri. The most important thing emphasized in the novel is that the player, the game and the chess pieces are all one. Everything is *Brahman* and there is no Chessmaster or the pawn. Only the realization of *Brahman* is not easy. Many people who are *vedgyata* 'knower of Vedas' fail in understanding and realizing *Brahman*. Sastri has great knowledge of the *Vedas* and the Upanisads. He understands it but never realizes it as to realize *Brahman* is to become it. All individuals must lead

their lives ethically and exercise some restraint over the senses otherwise they will be completely confused and land up nowhere like the protagonist Sivarama Sastri

There is one part of the book devoted to seeking reality through physical pleasures. It is shown in the novel that the protagonist follows the tantric method of achieving self realization. Though he speaks of *Vedanta* but follows the tantric method wherein through sexual experience one can see the light of enlightenment. The protagonist claims that he is nearing the goal of self realization through this process. But actually till the end he does not attain enlightenment but is shown utterly confused. He is searching his roots in the West but actually he can get to them only in India. The novel is full of the myths of caste distinction, marriage and Chessmaster which are busted towards the end. Tantra as a method appears incomplete or non-dependable to achieve self realization and Indian roots and its culture can be fully realized in the motherland and not somewhere outside.

The ultimate reality of *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state can be reached with a pure mind, body and soul. One has to go through different experiences and myths in order to have a glimpse of reality. The concept of reality becomes clear if one understands the mysteries of life and death. The next novel taken up for study is *On the Ganga Ghat*, which analyses the mystery behind life and death.

On the Ganga Ghat: A Pilgrimage from Myth to Reality

On the Ganga Ghat is a distinct work of Raja Rao in which eleven stories are woven into the form of a novel. It presents the quintessence of Indian experience and distilled wisdom. These stories are untitled and are separated by numbers only. They are like beads of a necklace, connected with each other to form a novel. The novel deals with incidents, anecdotes, occurrences and actions

taking place in the holy city of Benaras on the Ganga *ghats* 'bank of the river'. The title *On the Ganga Ghat* is therefore justified. In the writing of this volume, Raja Rao follows the Indian literary tradition of *Panchatantra*; stories involving dogs, parrots, cows, concubines, sadhus spirits etc. The stories are told in a very simple manner about the incidents in the lives of people coming from all walks of life. There are rich businessmen, poor hawkers and coolies. The stories about their previous birth and the present one are narrated. Animals are also characters in some of the stories. One gets totally involved in the storyline as there is a great amount of realism present. As M. S. Hema puts it,

Apart from these occasional ruminations everything in the novel contributes to the creation of the world to which the reader is compulsively drawn. Along with Rao the reader becomes a participant when he gets woven into the fabric of life on the Ganga *ghat* what where the line between the Real and the unreal does not seem to exist. (79)

'Occasional ruminations' refer to the philosophy of *advaita* 'non-dualism' on which Raja Rao seems to ponder many a times in his novels. In this novel also elements of metaphysics and Indian philosophy are stressed upon along with the main storyline. Apart from these philosophical angles the storyline is interestingly told such that it holds the attention of the reader towards it. The reader becomes a participant like Raja Rao himself in the story. The line between myth and reality blurs in the story. We seem to understand something as real and it turns mythical as we move ahead in the story. It is difficult to differentiate myth and reality in the novel.

Raja Rao as a writer has an exuberance of spirituality in his makeup and connects every tale with holiness. The stories are dazzling, smacking of Raja Rao's scintillating artistic and literary sensibilities. In these short stories not only the imaginative power but also the writer's art of

narration comes up brilliantly. The focus is always on metaphysics and spirituality but the anecdotes are presented with minute details which showcase Raja Rao's artistic brilliance. The whole play of life is monitored against the backdrop of time and space in the form of Ganges and Benaras. The Ganges and Benaras stand as symbols of eternity. In the vision of the writer Benaras is not just a geographical entity, but a metaphysics that unfolds the divine within, following the course of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. Benaras is the holy city of Lord Siva and is considered the epicenter of Hindu religion. It is situated on the Ganga *ghat* 'bank of a river' which has great significance for the Hindus. It is a common belief of the Hindus that if a dead body is cremated on the Benaras *ghats* 'banks of a river', then the soul attains *moksha* 'liberation'. These kind of religious beliefs give rise to myths regarding life and death.

(I) Life and Death –A Big Myth

On the Ganga Ghat specially focuses on the metaphysical notions of life, death and rebirth. In order to get rid of this vicious cycle of birth and rebirth, Hindus believe that if they die on the Ganga *ghat* 'bank of the river' and their ashes are immersed in the holy river they can get *moksha* 'liberation'. *Moksha* 'liberation' is the state where *atman* 'soul' gets merged in *paramatma* 'supreme soul' such that one is not born again. The question of death being a permanent reality and life being a myth arises quiet often. We all live our lives as if we will never die. We amass wealth, form relationships, build houses and live as if we will live forever and this is a big myth in which we all live. This myth of living life as if we will never die is present in everybody's life. We never ponder over death. The reality is that life is an illusion. Everybody who is born whether rich or poor, fair or dark has to die. As Swami Vivekananda observes:

Great men have died. Weak men have died. Gods have died. Death-death everywhere. The world is a graveyard of the infinite past, yet we cling to this

[body]: 'I am never going to die.' Knowing for sure [that the body must die] and yet clinging to it. There is meaning in that too[because in a sense we do not die].The mistake is that we cling to the body when it is the spirit that is really immortal.(CW 4 : 244)

Truly, the individual identifies itself with the matter. The lump of clay is taken to be the real self whereas the real self is 'the spirit that is really immortal'. The soul or atman is unborn and uncreated, without beginning and end as it never dies nor is it born. 'We cling to the body' and are trapped in the mystery of life and death. Everybody will be reduced to ashes as this life is impermanent. All our relatives whom we think, are our own, we will leave them in a second and go as if we never knew them. Death seems to be the ultimate and inevitable destination. It is believed that death is the ultimate reality. But this is a myth as death is a temporary pause in the soul's spiritual journey. The famous poet, John Donne has beautifully expressed this very concept in *Divine Sonnet X*.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee

Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so;

For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,

Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

.....

Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,

And dost with poison, war and sickness dwell;

And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well

And better then thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.(1-4, 9-14)

An individual does not die but lives eternally after 'one short sleep'. Death is not mighty and powerful, as it becomes a slave in front of accidents, murder, diseases and war that put men to sleep. But some medicines and charms can also induce sleep-and do it better than death. As Donne points out, after a human being's soul leaves the body and enters eternity, it lives on and only death dies, when the body dies. The spirit is reunited with God. The philosophy of *Bhagavad-Gita* also agrees with the fact that death is not an end but a beginning. Just as sleep is a temporary phase and one wakes up and finds himself in the real world. Similarly there is also a life beyond death. An individual is born, dies and takes rebirth. Death, therefore, should not be considered 'mighty and dreadful'. In reality, death itself dies as there is life after. The truth or ultimate reality is *Brahman* and not death or life. From this perspective both life and death appear to be myths. This is very well realized in these lines,

Son, has death meaning? No, death is an empty event it's like the yawl of a crow, the son of a barren woman. Can life die, that is the question? The Ganga answers : Man, you think you die. Burn yourself on my banks and know that what flows cannot but unflow. Death is a superstition, like the flies that sit on the baby's rags, and find nothing there (*GG 124-125*).

Raja Rao here emphasizes the fact that death is not something which can be believed upon. It is also a myth and 'an empty event'. It is a big gap between this life and next life. What flows cannot

unflow refers to the process of life one after the other, death is just an intermediate break which has no meaning or significance.

A number of characters in *On the Ganga Ghat* remember their past lives and claim to have been reborn. It is told that, Parrot Bhim was queen Prabhavati in his previous birth, "And of course Bhim was Prabhavathi, and his companion(who soon joined him)was born as Rupvati. The fact that Rupvati lives with such arrogance is simple: she was not so much devoted to God as to her queen" (GG 19). Similarly Sudha, daughter of Ranchoddas recalls her past life in which she was married to a prince. She died without even having intimation of God's holy presence. She is now born to Ranchoddas thus resuming life at the point where she left in her previous birth. The story of the mythic king from *Vishnu Purana* which Ranchoddas narrates gives a graphic detail of life cycle the king passes through. "But the story he loved most of all was of that king, . . . but when he died he was, of course born a deer, for remember, you are reborn as your last thought be. And again, as a deer he was so wise . . . for he well remembered his past life, as king, but was born again as a man,. . . though a brahmin by birth, a palanquin bearer of King Suvera" (GG 115-116).

The king is born as deer once and as Palanquin bearer later. Thus Raja Rao indicates that a person passes through the cycle of life and death until he attains enlightenment. The characters in the novel are gripped in the myth and reality of life and death. Many of them have accepted death as a reality and are waiting for it like Mathuradas who has come all the way from Vrindavan to Benaras in order to die. Similarly, the old Rani Rasomani is described collecting sandalwood for her pyre and is awaiting death as a baby bird awaits its mother. For many people when life is a burden they wait for death. They think it will solve all their problems and with their rebirth there will be happiness and no problems in their lives. They do not know that when one is reborn one gets into another cycle of birth and death and is once again involved in the cobweb of myth and

realities as another set of problems awaits oneself. This vicious circle of birth, death and rebirth goes on till one is finally liberated and becomes reality himself. Rebirth or reincarnation has always remained a mystery for the human beings. Lord Krsna has clearly stated the doctrine of the reincarnation in *Bhagavad Gita*.

(J) Reality of Life and Death -Truth of Reincarnation

Reincarnation is an important doctrine followed by Hindus. The soul changes bodies like pieces of clothing. It casts off old clothing and enters new body. Birth and rebirth take place with death being an intermediate phase. This cycle continues till *atman* 'soul' becomes one with *Parmatma* 'divine soul'. Then it is free from vicious circle of life and death. As Lord Krishna says,

Jatasya hi dhruvo mrtyur

Dhruvam janma mrtasya ca

Tasmad apariharye rthe

Na tvam socitum arhasi (BG 2.27)

One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament (trans. Prabhupad 110)

Every being should discharge his duties and do what is right. Life and death are inevitable. They are bound to happen and no one can change that. Keeping this fact in mind one should lead one's life and discharge the duties. In *On the Ganga Ghat* the characters are well aware of this fact that death is a myth and soul is immortal which is born again and again. This aspect of death being a

temporary phase, becomes true for one of the characters Mahoba. He works in a Sandalwood shop and supplies wood for burning pyre. For everybody death is stark agonizing reality but to Mahoba it is an intermediate state between life and rebirth. He takes death for granted and is unaffected by it. In Benaras mostly people are aware of it. In *On the Ganga Ghat* even the animals are aware of their true identity. And all characters follow one or the other yogas as expounded by Lord Krsna in the *Bhagavad- Gita* to reach the divine. Depending on the state of enlightenment they attain the progress on their own to a certain state, though they fail to reach the ultimate. Most of the characters realize the illusory state of their past and understand the futility of pursuing the mirage and so they resort to calm detached meditation to realize the divine force in them. In this connection Atchut Raman and N Ramakrishna observe, "It is this moment of revelation that liberates them from the state of *avidya*. The rope is mistaken for the serpent. But the light of *advaita* exposes its true nature and the end is union with the ultimate force of the universe . . . Benaras is the city . . . where yogis may see eternity, when they open their eyes after midnight meditations" (38).

Ramakrishna truly pointed out that mostly people live in *avidya* 'lack of true knowledge' and they keep thinking that first life is permanent and then death is permanent reality. The people are dangling between *avidya* 'lack of knowledge' and *vidya* 'true knowledge'. Nothing is permanent in this ever changing world. Only *Brahman* is permanent and the ultimate reality because it is changeless. Life and death are only *maya* 'illusions'. The fact is that life reincarnates. Death is like a small break in the journey of *atman* 'soul'. As the break terminates, the soul moves to the next destination of a new body as the life force energy remains the same. An individual gets blinded by this veil of *maya* 'illusion' and are fooled by it. The *maya* 'illusion' creates the myths and misleads an individual away from the path of spirituality. There are many myths related to the river Ganga. These myths have surfaced due to the various religious beliefs of the Hindus.

(K) Myth of the Ganga

Ganga is considered to be a sacred river of Hindus. People worship her as mother Goddess. According to Hindu mythology, a very famous king Bhagiratha did *tapasya* 'penance' for many years continuously to bring the river Ganges, then residing in the Lord Brahma's pot, down to the earth to liberate his ancestors who were cursed by a seer. The river Ganga became furious in its flow such that to control its furiousness, Lord Siva soaked the river in his lock of hair. King Bhagiratha then pleaded Lord Siva to free the river from his hair. Therefore Ganges descended on to the earth through the lock of hair of God Siva to make whole earth pious fertile and wash out the sins of humans. For Hindus in India, the Ganga is not just a river but a mother, a goddess, a tradition, a culture and much more. In *Shrimad Bhagwat Purana* the glory of the Ganga is mentioned.

य स्यां स्ननार्थं चागच्छतः पुंसः पदे

पदेऽश्रुमेधराज , सूयादीनां फलं न दुर्लभमिति(1.5.48)

Shuk dev says in the *Mahapurana* that a person who takes a holy dip in the Ganga even once, can enjoy the same fruits which one gets when he performs the *Ashwamedh yagya* 'sacrifice done to become all powerful king' and *Rajsuya yagya* 'sacrifice done to get kingdom'.(trans. mine 612-613). The river Ganga and its water are treated to be holy as it is believed to have a divine origin.

It is said that the river Ganga, fulfils the wishes of the people. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that the river Ganga is supposed to be the mother of Bhishma who often appears when he seeks her advice. It is an age old belief that the water of Ganga is very pure. She is our life giver, our mother and it is believed that all our sins will be purified by taking a holy dip in the river.

Many people throughout the year and especially in the *Kumbha mela*, feel blessed to take a holy dip in the Ganga. *Shahi snan* 'royal dip' is done by saints and religious leaders. In the Ramayana, the river Ganga has great prominence. Ganga is also known as *VishnuPadi* as it has emanated from the lotus feet of Shri Visnu. Lord Visnu promised Ganga that when he takes avatara as Ram, he will reside on the banks of Ganga and her tributaries. In 'Ayodhya kand' of Ramayana, Goddess Sita worships Ganga and asks for her blessings,

Tvam hi tripathagaa devi brahma

Lokam samiiksael

Bhaarya ca udhadhi raojsya loke

Asmin samprad rishyase.(Valmiki Ramayana 2.52.90)

You oh goddess flowing through three regions (namely heaven, earth and subterranean region) included in your basin the realm of Bramh(the outermost of the six sphere enveloping the earth) and are vividly seen on this terrestrial plane as a consort of the ocean king.(trans. Rao and Murthy).

In the above lines Sita praises Ganga as the consort of ocean as Ganga merges in the ocean. Ganga is supposed to flow both in heaven and earth. Her blessings can absolve a person of sins and evils. Both Lord Rama and Sita worship her as a goddess. All the saints and sages from different temples all around the world take a holy dip in the river. The goddess Ganga purifies the soul, mind and body. It is believed that not only the body but also the evil deeds get cleansed. If a person has committed any bad karma, then that person can get rid of it by bathing in the river: "He who has not slipped into the Ganges and felt the lightness of the Ganges knows not water.

You plunge and plunge again into the Ganga. And you are suddenly aware of a fragrance of holiness and the touch of a deep white truth” (GG 82).

People worship holy Ganga as a goddess. They try to take as many holy dips as possible in the river. People perform the last rites of their relatives on the banks of the Ganga. It is mentioned in *Shri Shri Visnu Purana*,

गंगा भातद्रूं यमुना विपा ां

सरस्वतीं नैमिशगोमती वा ।

तत्रावगाह्यार्चनमादरेणा

कृत्वा पितृणं दुरितानि हन्ति ।।(3.14.18)

One can get rid of one’s evil deeds by taking bath in the rivers Ganga, Shatadruv, Yamuna, Vipasha, Saraswati and Gomti. One should worship the ancestors and then take bath in these rivers.(trans mine 208).

Many people immerse the ashes of the cremation into the holy water of Ganga. By doing this they feel that the dead person will achieve salvation or the doors of heaven will be opened for him. The sins of people can be rectified and a long happy life could be affected by taking the dip in the river. All these beliefs of the people are not completely unreal. No doubt the river Ganga is life giver and a holy dip in it relaxes your mind and body. But it is not completely true that one can get rid of one’s sins by taking holy dip into it. In this context S.Atuchute Ramam and N Ramakrishna make an interesting observation about the pilgrims of the novel *On the Ganga Ghat*:

Water itself does not work miracles and it is by flowing with the Ganges as the writer suggests in his preface that they acquire harmony with the spirit of the universe. Through meditation, study of holy books and appropriate companionship a slow but a steady change is brought into the lives of various characters, and all past *samskaras* are gradually eliminated thus resulting in the progress of the pilgrims”(35).

As the critic points out the mind, body and soul cannot be purified just by a holy dip in the river, but it requires continuous meditation, and effective prayers to cleanse the mud of ego and pride from one's soul. The 'past *samskaras* 'values' are gradually eliminated' after rigorous training of asceticism. This asceticism is difficult to practice for an ordinary individual as he is still entangled in the cobweb of rituals and myths. Observance of religious rituals on the banks of rivers is chiefly responsible for the pollution of the river. The cremation of the dead bodies and the performance of other rituals on the Ganga *ghat* 'bank of the river' pollute the river. The reality of river Ganga, today, is that it is one of the most polluted rivers of the world.

(L) Reality of the Ganga

In fact, it is not the water of the Ganga that purifies the soul and body of a being but the belief of the people that does wonders - a belief that can even turn a stone into a God. As the writers in the above quoted lines rightly point out, just a holy dip does not rectify one's being. It is only through proper knowledge, guidance of a guru and by performing good deeds that a person can purify himself. If one moves with a positive belief in one's heart, then one can remove all the bad vibrations and get purified and rectified. This is how one attains purity and not by a holy dip. Purification of the mind and soul can take place when you implement the knowledge given by

Gurus, the *Vedas* and Upanisads. One should aim for such purification through the right procedure.

People live in the myth that if they die in Benaras, the city of Lord Siva, they will get salvation. They desire to be cremated on the *ghats* 'bank of river' the Ganga in Benaras. However, it is another matter that the floating bodies of the dead people and ashes littered on the *ghats* 'banks of river' make them very dirty and unhygienic. Raja Rao has himself condemned the dirtying the *ghats* 'banks of river' in the name of various rituals and rites. In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao expresses his feelings as, "Of Benaras all I know is the bits of floating human flesh and the pyres of the dead..."(SR 39). Similarly at another instance Ramaswamy, the protagonist in the novel, voices Raja Rao's views as, "Like one of our own mothers, Ganga, Mother Ganga, has at by the ghats, her bundle beside her. What impurity, Lord, have we made her bear."(SR 33). The pain in Raja Rao's heart is very much evident in the above lines. This pain is caused by deterioration of the condition of Ganga *ghats* 'bank of river'. This kind of filth is not going to purify any soul or body. In this context it is pertinent to mention that this fact is slowly being recognized by many.

The Indian government has started a Ganga Action plan in 1986 in order to clean Ganga. Unfortunately it did not achieve success in spite of expenditure of five billion rupees. Many non government organizations like *Sankat Mochan* foundation are involved in the cleaning process. In the article in *indianetzone.com* it is elucidated, "The Sankat Mochan Foundation with the aim of cleaning Ganga launched many programmes like 'adopt a *ghat*' program in 2002 which brought the schools and other local institutions together to save the world famous historical Ghats. It also launched '*Swatcha* Ganga' program and the 'Clean Ganga – Clean Ghat' campaign"("Clean Ganga Campaign"). Ganga is the symbol of our culture and tradition. We should keep it clean and hygienic so that the river can be actually used to cleanse our mind and body.

The ever-flowing Ganga is an age old symbol of the living force in our country. As Ganga accommodates all types of karmas and temperaments, all types of life are underpinned by the unity of existence. One should try to throw one's negativity like anger, frustration depression and illness and not all the dirt and litter of dead bodies. Similarly, instead of the dead bodies, our egos, frustration and anger should be burnt so that the soul can surrender to the almighty to achieve salvation. Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa has emphasized on purity of heart for self realization. His quotes are given in a website under the title, *20 Ramakrishna Quotes on the Realization of Brahman-God*. Ramakrishna Paramhansa says, "God cannot be realized without purity of heart. One receives the grace of God by subduing the passions of lust, anger and greed. Then one sees God". It is a myth that by taking a holy dip in the Ganga one can rectify one's sins. It is a myth that by bodies being cremated on its banks one can achieve salvation. As mentioned earlier, the reality is that one should try to achieve the knowledge of the *Vedas* and the Upanisads with the help of Guru and then lead the path of spiritually disciplined life. One has to 'subdue passions of lust anger and greed' in order to reach the Absolute. If one tires to 'purify the heart' by practicing self restrain then slowly our attitudes, our thinking will change and our soul will get purified. With this purified soul one can gain enlightenment and reach *Brahman*.

River Ganga the purest of all is born in the Himalayas, the abode of Lord Siva. Lord Siva is regarded as the originator of *advaita* 'non-dualism' and the Ganga is viewed as flow of life. Therefore Ganga is linked with *advaita* 'non-dualism' as Ganga is linked with Lord Siva. According to *advaita* 'non-dualism' the ultimate reality is *Brahman*. *Brahman* which cannot be defined as it is immovable, constant, permanent and infinite. Ganga is immersed in *Brahman*. Therefore in the beginning of the novel Raja Rao mentions his Guru's words 'water does not flow'. In terms of the Absolute, movement is illusory. For the realized soul who has attained enlightenment, Ganges water does not flow and has not much significance. The less realized souls who cannot scale the

heights of *advaita* 'non-dualism' but who wish to change their mind and body consider Ganga as the ultimate way to salvation. These people come to Benaras, on the Ganga *Ghat* 'bank of a river' with a view to worship Lord Siva, the *Vishwanath* 'the Lord of the universe'. People surrender whole heartedly to his benign presence and take a dip in the Ganges to get rid of their sins. It is a regeneration of life through *bhakti* 'devotion' and karma yoga.

(M) Summing Up

Thus the characters in *The Chessmaster and His Moves* and *On the Ganga Ghat* are on their metaphysical journey- journey from myth to reality. In their quest for the ultimate reality they move from one myth to another which leads to the discoveries of various realities. In the ultimate analysis both myth and reality merge into one and as Esha Dey writes in the context of stories of *On the Ganga Ghat*, "After demolishing logic and rationality all through the stories, life is argued to nothingness[myth].The self remains an inscrutable enigma, life a miracle. At one level, 'Ganga never flows,' at another rises the prayer, 'O, Mother Ganga, please be gracious and flow' " (252). The Ganga that never flows is changeless and therefore real, while one that flows is a myth. The point to be noted is that an attempt is made to go through various realities towards the ultimate reality and then beyond- a state where as Raja Rao's Guru Atmanand observes, 'Water does not flow'- a state of changelessness- an ultimate reality.