

Chapter - Six

Conclusion

Our age is an age where all things are changing and changing so rapidly that most of us feel puzzled and lost. There is much of bewilderment, a feeling of insecurity and a sense of fear and anxiety and these make for restlessness. Raja Rao is of a confirmed opinion that this need not be so if we have a true sense of reality. To most people there is a very sharp dividing line between what is supposed to be reality and myth. But to Raja Rao the so called real things are very much like visions in a dream, and at the same time dreams appear to have a real significance.

Raja Rao's protagonists, therefore leave no stone unturned to appreciate fully how unreal the so called real is and thereby get an insight to grasp actual reality by breaking various myths. Thus his purpose is quite different from the writer whose prime concern is to present a faithful account of some unique physical experience. His fiction is essentially in the form of a spiritual quest and so demands a different level of competence in the reader, the readers ought to be sincere and should have the capacity to share something deeper than the physical experience.

All his works are loaded with Hindu philosophy. It is so strongly laid out in his novels that a reader with no knowledge of Hindu philosophy will find it hard to understand his works. The philosophical content of his fiction has especially intrigued many critics in India and abroad. Raja Rao's pronounced fascination with *Vedanta* has led a number of scholars to interpret his work from an exclusive *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' point of view. He is not only a *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' but also a tantric. While *advaita* 'non-dualism' is an important aspect of his work, the roots of his imagination lie in Tantra. In his novels we find a perfect blending of the eastern and the western philosophies. He seems to have been greatly influenced by Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Marxism. The impact of the western philosophies is specially seen in *Comrade*

Kirillov and *The Serpent and the Rope*. Raja Rao collates and synthesizes Indian metaphysical tradition with the corresponding western motifs to form his *Vedantic-Tantric* cum western philosophy. The projection of philosophy in his novels is best understood as the aesthetic undertaking of an imaginative writer who has given a distinctive form to Indian novel by correlating the *puranic* mode of writing with the western forms and ideas.

Although there is an encounter of the eastern and the western philosophies in his novels yet there is always an insinuation of the superiority of the eastern philosophy. The supremacy of Brahminism and *advaita* 'non-dualism' is very much evident in his novels. Most of the critics believe that the non-dualistic philosophy of Samkara alone forms the nucleus of his work. O. P. Mathur opines, "He does not present in this novel any personal, social, economic or political clash. He rather shows a dramatic contrast between two different. . . Similarly it is through a perception of dualities that the hero arrives at non-duality or *advaita*, it is in the west that he realizes what India really is"(44). His artistic acumen is highly eclectic. Raja Rao's entire fiction is soaked with Indianness. A clearly contrasted portrayal of the West is essential for an understanding of the true spirit of the east. In his experiences of duality of the West that Raja Rao 'realizes what India really is'. *Dvaita* 'duality' leads one to *advaita* 'non-duality' or one can say 'through perception of dualities the hero arrives at non dualities'. Raja Rao's novels reflect the discovery of India and discovery of the self through busting of various myths of the western philosophy.

Raja Rao's deeply reflective nature, a high degree of fervently poetic sensibility and natural and unsophisticated response to life helps him in integrating and rationalizing all the dualities, consequently finding his own cultural and spiritual moorings. He is mainly Indian in sensibility and values and not in subject matter alone. The focal point of Raja Rao's Indianness is the ancient Indian philosophy as to him, India is synonymous with metaphysics. He delineates Indian

philosophy as he reflects upon the nature of the Absolute and the phenomenal character of the world in his fiction. His novels are full of references from Upanisads and the *Bhagavad- Gita*. He draws on *Vedantic* and non *Vedantic* doctrines such as the *advaita* 'non-dualism' of Samkara, Nagarjun's theory of emptiness of self and the Buddhist and Hindu tantric thought with ease and authority. Mythological influences are huge in his novels. He has grown up with the teachings from the mythological epics. In *The Serpent and the Rope* there is a story of Radha, Krsna and Durvasa, "One day Radha had a very possessive thought of Krishna 'My Krishna', she said to herself, as though one could possess Krishna as one could possess a calf, a jewel" (SR 380). Krishna explains the reality of the world to Radha.

" 'The world, my dear, is not a lie, it is an illusion. Besides,

tell me, is my body your husband, Radha?' "

" 'No, my Lord'

" 'Then what is it you mean when you say to yourself, "Krishna, my husband' " ?

" 'Assuredly something beyond the body and beyond the mind- the Principle.' "

" 'And tell me, my love, can you possess that, can you possess it?' "

" 'No, my Lord, how can I possess the Absolute? The "I" is the Absolute'. . . ."(SR 382)

Similar to the above mentioned example there are many references from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other mythological and philosophical books in his novels. Another very important aspect of his novels is myth and reality. Apart from the myths inspired by the mythological books, another kind of myth is also very conspicuous in his novels. The connotation

of this myth is false belief. The characters of his novels believe in some or the other kind of myth or illusion. The novel starts with an ideology or principle on which the protagonist strongly believes. As the story progresses these strong beliefs of the characters turn out to be myths. The reality emerges and all their belief system turns out to be myths or illusions. Raja Rao is trying to emphasize in all his novels that there is nothing in this world which is permanent or real. Our dreams, relationships, worldly possessions are all myths. There is only one thing real and that is *Brahman*. *Brahman* is infinite and it cannot be described or defined. This reality of *Brahman* can be achieved with the help of a spiritually enlightened soul a Guru. The Guru can guide his disciple to walk smoothly on to the path of self realization and thus help him achieve *Brahman*. Raja Rao's novels present this quest of the ultimate as all his heroes are searching the ultimate reality. A certain kind of restlessness is evident in the heart and soul of the protagonists to reach the heights of spirituality. They are pining for spiritual satisfaction which is not attained through worldly pleasures. On the path of their destination of the Absolute, they meander through various myths in their lives. The social, cultural, religious, political and many other kinds of myths are experienced by the characters.

In each of his novels, Raja Rao takes up one of the Hindu philosophies and through this philosophy the protagonist tries to search for the Absolute. But the philosophies are often misinterpreted by them such that the whole concept becomes a myth. There is no philosophy or concept which is complete in itself to help one reach the Absolute. They are all interdependent on each other and a correct interpretation is required. All the paths suggested in various novels appear incomplete in themselves and their interpretations seem to be mythical towards the end of the novel. Raja Rao fully understands these paths or schools of philosophy and refers to them in his novels. These schools of philosophy are both Indian and western. The detailed study shows that there are primarily five philosophies which are concentrated upon in his novels. There is

Nishkam 'desireless' Karma philosophy in *Kanthapura*, *Advaita* 'non-dual' philosophy in *The Serpent and the Rope*, *Visistadvaita* 'qualified non-dualism' philosophy in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Marxism in *Comrade Kirillov* and Tantrism in *The ChessMaster and His Moves*.

The *Nishkam* 'desireless' karma philosophy is a very important part of Hindu religion. In its abstract form it finds the most lucid and authentic expression in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is full of Karmic philosophy, Lord Krsna explains to Arjun about *Nishkam* 'desireless' karma:

Tasmad asaktah satatam

Karyam karma samacara

Asakto hy acarana karma

Param apnoti purusah (BG 3.19)

Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment one attains the supreme. (trans. Prabhupad 184)

One should do one's duties and perform every action sincerely in life without getting attached to the fruits of action. If one can develop detachment from the result of action one can get stupendous success as well as blessings from the Lord. The postulates of this philosophy are best embodied in the life, ideas and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi. His life is the perfect example of Karma philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Our country achieved independence through his endeavours. Gandhi is the pivotal point of *Kanthapura*. The whole novel revolves around Gandhi's principle of karma philosophy. Moorthy, the hero of the novel is out and out a Gandhian. He has given his life on the doctrine based on non-violence and truth. It is depicted in the novel that well planned and well directed action of a man can make the best of his potentialities-material, moral and spiritual.

Moorthy is really a man of actions and whatever convictions he has he realizes them through actions at all costs. He organizes agitations motivating villagers to participate in it and practices Gandhian philosophies of non-violence and truth. The belief in the power of combined action is underlined as, “ ‘Now,’ said Moorthy, ‘we are out for action. A cock does not make a morning, nor a single man a revolution, but we’ll build a thousand- pillared temple, . . . we shall invoke the mother to reside with us in dream and in life. India then will live in a temple of our making’ ”(K 123).

By following the principles of truth and non-violence, Moorthy is successful in pushing Mother India towards independence. Through freedom struggle the villagers move a step ahead towards independence in the novel. Towards the end, Moorthy realizes that his soul is not pining for this freedom. Our countrymen are not looking for freedom of a geographical area in the map of the world. They are looking for freedom from poverty, narrow mindedness, economic disparity and caste distinction. This freedom is not easy to achieve. Moorthy gets disillusioned from the Gandhian principles and moves towards Nehru. The Gandhian principle proves to be a myth for him. In the spiritual path his soul is pining for inner freedom, for the absolute reality. This disillusionment from Gandhian principles is also observed in the novel *Comrade Kirillov*. The protagonist believes that Gandhian principle of non-violence is irrational and will bear no result in solving problems of the country. Kirillov opines, “Your morality is bogus . . . Mahatma Gandhi should have been born in the Middle Ages, and he should not have bothered us with his theology in this rational age of ours” (CK 37).

Raja Rao’s protagonists found Gandhian principles to be incompetent in dealing with the problems of poverty and economic disparity. The reality of the Absolute and inner freedom of the collective consciousness of people could not be achieved through karma *marg* ‘path of action’

alone, as shown by Gandhi. There is something more required apart from *nishkam* 'desireless' karma to reach the ultimate realization. Moorthy gets disillusioned by the karmic philosophy of Gandhi. Therefore this karmic philosophy proves to be a myth in the quest for realization of the Absolute Truth for him. The philosophy is very effective but not complete in itself to help a man achieve self realization. In the karma *marg* 'path' also, in order to reach the Absolute one needs the guidance of Guru as suggested in *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge'. At the same time spiritual discipline is required as one cannot be engrossed in worldly affairs following the karma *marg* 'path' and aim for inner freedom. Therefore one can say that Moorthy does not follow the path properly and gets disillusioned from it. In the novel *Kanthapura*, along with karma philosophy, the Indian religious traditions and ideals, emanating from the popular philosophical ideas have also been portrayed graphically in the novel.

After disillusionment from karma *marg* 'path of action', Raja Rao has tried to lead his hero to *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' in the next novel as there is progression of the protagonist spiritually with every novel. The hero moves towards self realization getting spiritually elevated with every subsequent novel. The same south Indian Brahmin hero now moves on *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' to achieve his objective of the Absolute Truth in the novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. It is perhaps the greatest metaphysical novel written in English language. The novel is a brilliant, artistic exposition of the highest school of Indian philosophy, the *advaita* 'non-dualism' of Sri Samkara. The world is an illusion and the reality is *Brahman*. This is explained through the analogy of the serpent and the rope. The protagonist implements the knowledge of *advaita* 'non-dualism' in the path of knowledge. Raja Rao's novels have the motto that man's life is an august mission to find the Absolute. In the darkness we mistake the rope for the serpent but in the daylight we can distinguish between the rope and serpent. Similarly with the darkness of ignorance we mistake the whole world as real but when the light of Guru's guidance and

knowledge manifests itself then the illusion disappears and the reality of *Brahman* dawns upon us. There are many myths broken in the novel like the myth of Brahminism, myth of marriage etc.

It is a biggest misconception and misinterpretation of *Vedanta* that a *vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' can afford to be a slave of his senses. Raja Rao's protagonists especially Sastri in *The ChessMaster and His Moves* and Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* seem to ignore self-restrain and act according to the directions of their senses. They feel that an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' can afford to disregard self-control and follow the senses completely. The reality is that an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' should practice the principle of asceticism and try to lead a moral life. Radhakrishnan makes an interesting remark regarding this:

The discipline of moral life includes the suppression of selfish activity the development of true desires overcoming of empirical individual but until we cut the very roots of eager desire and petty egoism, until *avidya* is abolished, we cannot be sure that we shall occupy the impersonal attitude of true enlightenment. . . .Vices of character are not merely follies and errors, but perversions of will violations of the voice of God.(*Indian Philosophy by S.Radhakrishnan* 2:623-624)

It is hinted many times in the *Vedas* and *Upanisad* that a person should exercise constrain at every step. The protagonists of Raja Rao are on the pursuit of self realization but none of them are successful in reaching their aim. They are still miles away from the ultimate reality as they act, succumbing under the pressure of their senses and even behave immorally as per the norms of the society. If an individual is under the grip of his senses and has 'vices of character', such a person will find it hard to move towards divinity. There should be restrain of the desires

especially, sexual. Sexual restraint and observance of celibacy is essential for the person who is on the quest for self realization.

The second important myth broken in the novel is of the misconception of *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge'. The *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' adopted by the protagonist is not complete in itself and appears to be mythical without a Guru. The protagonist, who is moving on this path appears directionless in the end. He seems to be completely confused and makes a mess of his life. At the personal front all his relationships break. He gets away from his motherland and professionally also he could not complete his thesis. If one follows the path of *advaita* 'non-dualism' one needs to lead a life of restraint and at the same time one needs the guidance of a spiritually enlightened soul a Guru. It is only with the help of a Guru can a person see some light of reality of the Absolute. Otherwise there is complete darkness of ignorance in the world. Highlighting the importance of a Guru, R.D. Ranade says,

When the equipment in moral virtues is thus being perfected, the next step in the path of self realization is initiated by a worthy spiritual teacher...books can never be expected to solve the actual difficulties in the path of self realization, while a teacher who walked on the path may take his aspiring disciple from step to step on the ladder of spiritual perfection. (242-243)

Without the guidance of a Guru one can never reach self realization. A Guru is like a guiding light a torch in the darkness of ignorance. One moves on the spiritual path with this torch light. Holding the Guru's hand, one can 'move step to step on the ladder of spiritual perfection'. But the Guru himself must be the one who has gained enlightenment. No one else apart from an enlightened person 'who walked on the path' may guide his disciple. A Guru's prominence is highlighted especially in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

As it is insinuated that *karma marg* 'path of action' and *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' appear incomplete in themselves for the protagonists of the novels. Similarly Raja Rao has also insinuated about *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion'. The *bhaktimarg* 'path of devotion' and the philosophy of *marjara kishore nyaya* 'cat kitten theory' is taken up in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. The novel is dedicated to the glorification of *visistadvaita* 'modified non-dualism'. Ramanuja expounded the doctrine of *bhakti* 'devotion' yoga and explained it as the union of the will of man with the will of God. One exponent of the theory is the *marjara kishore nyaya* 'cat kitten theory'. It says that one should surrender one self to the almighty as the kitten does to the mother cat. Mother cat takes care of the kitten completely. Similarly if one surrenders oneself to the almighty, the Lord will take care of the being and take him on to the right path. The protagonist here is Pai who is also in search of truth and self realization like the other heroes of Raja Rao. Nair, the other character acts like his Guru and mentor of the spiritual path. Raja Rao in this novel has regarded marriage as a myth and glorified extramarital relations. The conventional marriages are shown to be mythical as they are loveless. The man woman relationship is inspired from Tantric-ideologies which focus on adulterous love. The delineation of illicit love in Raja Rao's novels has tantric connotations. The love is reminiscent of love of Radha Krsna. Tantrics equate extramarital love with Radha Krsna love as in extramarital love the two individuals do not get married but remain as lovers. Radha was a married woman and she was a devotee of Krsna. They had an *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' relation. In the novel *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Pai is married and he has an extramarital relation with Shantha. Shantha's dedication is total and complete like Radha. Pai expresses his views on Shantha as, "And that is Shantha. To be a wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born. . . .You annihilate time and you become a wife"(CS 30). Shantha's devotion is like that of Radha of total surrender and worshipping the *purusa* 'real man' of her life. But the comparison is true only from Shantha's side as Pai is not like Lord Krsna.

The fact or reality is that the characters in the novel take the example of Tantra and *Vedanta* to suit their own convenience. Pai who is fed up of his wife and indulges in extra marital relations, tries to justify his love by trying to equate it with Radha Krsna love. Actually the hero is nowhere like Lord Krsna as he is scared stiff of his illicit relation and often questions his life with his mistress as normal. He is not a complete follower of *Vedanta* or Tantra. Therefore the myth of being a tantric and *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' that the characters have breaks and the reality emerges that they are ordinary beings who need the guidance of a Guru. The biggest myth broken in the novel is that the cat kitten theory does not teach us to be passive and indolent. It is a myth with which the characters live. Both Govindan Nair and Pai have laid back attitude and they seem to be shirking their responsibilities. They feel that followers of *visistadvaita* 'qualified non-dualism' theory should sit back and let destiny play its role. They are unaffected by sorrows and pleasures of life. They do not raise any voice against the malpractices of the society. Nair seems to be unaffected at his son's death and Pai is also nonreactive to the happenings of his life. This is a big myth that a *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' should be passive and shirk his responsibility. The cat kitten theory emphasizes the fact that we should perform our duties and surrender its result to God. The fate is in God's hands but the efforts are in man's hands. Therefore the biggest myth of this novel is of *visistadvaita* 'qualified non-dualism' theory and its misinterpretations. The characters seem to mould it to suit their own convenience and thus do not follow it properly.

Any practice or theory of the *Vedanta* and Upanisad never teaches us to sit back and not perform our duties. The reality is that one should fulfil one's commitment towards family, society and oneself. Surrender should be of the result and not of the actions. Doing karma is not only a duty but a privilege given to mankind. There is no karma in the subhuman level as animal and plants do not have the capacity to discriminate between right and wrong. Man cannot afford to sit back and be inactive as Pai and Nair do in the novel. Swami Satprakashananda says, "It does not

make God, or some unknown fate responsible for this. It makes you responsible for this. You are what you struggle for. Your present situation has been determined by your past actions, and your future will be determined by your present actions" (170).

Spirituality and quest for self realization comes after one's duties and commitment. One has to perform duties for family and society and then move towards one's inner self. Pai in the novel does not perform his duties towards society and family properly. He leaves everything on his Guru, Govindan Nair. On the other hand Nair himself remains passive in his life accepting everything as God's will. They both never realize that 'you are what you struggle for'. Passiveness takes one away from the path of self realization as 'your future will be determined by your present actions'. One also concludes in this novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* that by adopting this *bhakti* 'devotion' yoga the quest for self realization of the protagonist does not succeed. The search of Pai and Nair still continues. Therefore it appears that even the *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion' is not complete in itself for the goal of reaching the Absolute. The characters misinterpret the path and thus they are not successful in achieving the goal of self realization.

Raja Rao himself was in search of the Absolute Truth which he tried to project through his heroes. In his quest Raja Rao has explored both the Indian and the western philosophies. After exploring the three *marg* 'paths' in his first three novels he moves towards the western philosophies in his next novel *Comrade Kirillov*. The south Indian Brahmin hero, not getting satisfied by the eastern philosophies experiments with the western concept of Marxism. The novel is a journey of the protagonist from Theosophy to Marxism and then back to *Vedantism*. *Comrade Kirillov* mainly concentrates upon Marxism, though it shows the superiority of *Vedantism* over it. The protagonist of the novel, *Comrade Kirillov*, is an intellectual spiritual young man. He is a thirsty soul pining for the attainment of the higher truths and is given to meditations and serious

thinking. His inner being never finds satisfaction from any school of philosophy. Desparately, he ventures into the western philosophy in order to achieve his spiritual goals. He keeps hopping from one school of philosophy to another. First he grasps Darwinian evolution, then Albigensian heresy, Kant and Hegel, Gandhism and Marxism. He remains a champion of Communism. Communism is presented as something purifying and extremely beneficial. Kirillov is pining for spiritual satisfaction at the same time he is upset with class, caste and colour discrimination existing in the world and especially in India. Marxism appealed to him the most as Marxism favours a society where there is no distinction of rich and poor. He tries to find his spiritual quest through these philosophies. Kirillov like Raja Rao is torn between the intellectual pull towards the West and its theories and the emotional pull towards his motherland. Kirillov's soul remains Indian always. The narrator says about Kirillov that, "he loved India with a noble, delicate un-reasoned love. He loved her poetry as few among the so called educated ones in India had-he loved the intricacies, the permutations, the magnitude of the Sanscrit verse" (CK 86-87).

Kirillov realizes the reality that running after the western philosophies is a myth. His questions have no answers in the western theories. They have answers in the Indian theory only. He understands that *Vedantism* alone can offer solution to all his problems and the principles of *Vedanta* alone can satisfy his restless soul. It is Kirillov's myth that Marxism can offer him any solution. He is basically an Indian and Indian philosophy can only satisfy him. The myth of Marxism disappears when the reality of *Vedanta* emerges. The *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' theories can only take him towards self realization. As in *Comrade Kirillov*, in all the novels the *advaita* 'non-dualism' and its principles are given utmost importance and priority. In all the novels of Raja Rao we find this emotional pull towards India and Indianness. No matter how much he writes about western culture their cities characters theories etc, but in his novels what dominates is Indian

thinking, its culture, its lifestyle and above all its *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' philosophy. Raja Rao appears to be a patriot many times in his novels.

In *advaita* 'non-dualism' God as such does not get prominence. Everything is *Brahman*. God does not figure anywhere in the whole concept of *Brahman*. Raja Rao being an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' does not give priority or importance to God and its role in our lives. For the first time, Raja Rao mentions God and his plan and thus redefines his importance in *The ChessMaster and His Moves*. In the novel God is redefined as the Chessmaster and his importance is stressed upon. The Chessmaster is the almighty, the creator and the game of chess stands for the *jagat* 'world'. The moves in the game initiated by the Chessmaster are a symbolic enactment of the *lila* 'divine play'. As the moves in the game of chess are unpredictable, so are the ways of God mysterious and inscrutable. Each move is made according to the law of karma so that nobody's life will ever be the same again and thus the world continues forever. This conception of God in the novels is consonant with the non-dualistic philosophy of Samkara.

Advaita 'non-dualism' says that the world is an appearance, a play, an illusion and not a reality. Sastri in the novel says that the whole universe is Parvati's play and Siva's amusement. In this game however nothing is lost and nothing is ever gained. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* also the importance of Karma is emphasized. The lives of people are governed by the law of Karma. Good deeds bring good fortune and bad deeds bring bad fortune. Towards the end, Sastri realizes that there is no Chessmaster and no one is pawn. The game, the player and the pawn are all, merged into one reality *Brahman*. The game is for the game's sake not for winning or losing. Sastri seems to understand this concept but fails to realize it in true sense. He lives in a world of duality and thus experiences many myths. As the myths are busted, Sastri moves towards realization. Sastri

questions, 'If duality is not there, who would know non-duality? If non-duality could not know itself, how could the world, the dual, know the absolute? . . ."(CMM 552).

Apart from the concept of Chessmaster of the universe, the major myths emerge in the novel are myth of Brahminism, myth of marriage and myth of *Kama* 'desire'. The myth of *kama* 'desire' appears to be most prominent in the novel. In his earlier novels also like *The Serpent and the Rope*, the importance of *kama* 'desire' is emphasized and it proves to be mythical in the end. The focus of relationship is physical pleasure or lust. This concept of using *kama* 'desire' for the fulfillment of spiritual goals is inspired from Tantra. Raja Rao is majorly influenced by two systems of philosophy namely *advaita* 'non-dualism' and Tantra. Tantra has an important place in Hinduism and it is also one of the paths adopted by his protagonist to reach the goal of self realization. In Tantra, the liberation is achieved through *bhoga* 'hedonism'. It is believed that when one reaches heights of sexual pleasure one can reach the Absolute through it.

In order to achieve self realization and move on the path of spirituality, the protagonist Sastri in *The ChessMaster and His Moves* indulges in a lot of relationships based on *kama* 'desire'. He has relations with number of women like Suzanne, Mierelle and Rati. The reality that emerges is that all these sexual encounters do not lead him to the state of *parmananda* 'supreme bliss'. The reality of *Brahman* still eludes him. He does get glimpse of the Absolute in some of his relations but this glimpse is only temporary thus pushing him back to world of duality. He realizes that sexual experience can help one attain heights of ecstasies but the true happiness and satisfaction can be achieved through spiritual and intellectual affinity between man and woman. Sastri says, "If a man and a woman unite, by destroying their duality, they establish the Absolute itself. The whole universe-the cosmos-is nothing but the playful drama of the two becoming the not-two" (CMM 366).

It is shown in the novel that Sastri has spiritual affinity with a princess Jaya. There is no physical relation but still they are happiest together. They are totally devoted to each other such that two become one and get a glimpse of *Brahman*. The path of sexual encounter for achieving salvation is a myth. In fact none of the paths seem to be complete to reach the ultimate reality. The path to the ultimate remains a myth. Life and death remains a mystery. Most of the characters all remain confused about the concepts of *Vedanta*. How can one achieve liberation? This remains a big question in the heart of all his protagonists. Life is a big myth but even death is a myth and this is shown in the novel *On the Ganga ghat*. The main *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' concept that life and the world are myths is redefined. The myths highlighted in the novel are of life and death. The novel has eleven short stories, the first is purely about the author's arrival at Benaras, and the last is entirely reflective of his personal offerings or a tribute to the city of Benaras and the Ganga river. The remaining nine stories are all separate narrative of different characters who participate in the action of Benaras. All the stories are untitled and separated through numerals as if they are different chapters.

The Benaras city of Lord Vishwanath is glorified and the river Ganga with its mythological significance is highlighted. '*Ghat*' refers to the banks of the Ganga river which are primarily used for cremation of the dead bodies. For the people living on the *ghats* 'bank of river', death and the process of cremation is completely insignificant. They behave in detached manner. According to the Hindu philosophy life, death and then rebirth is the truth of the universe. When a person dies he is reborn again says the *Bhagavad -Gita*. The soul only changes its body like we change clothes.

Vasami jirnani yatha vihaya

Navani grhnati naro parani

Tatha sarirani vihya jirnany

Anyani samyati navani dehi(BG 2.22)

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones (trans. Prabhupad 104).

Reincarnation is the biggest truth of the Hindu philosophy. As it is emphasized in the novel *On the Ganga Ghat* that life and death both are myths. Death is just a temporary phase between birth and rebirth. The soul never dies it keeps changing bodies until it gets submerged in the Absolute. Salvation is achieved when soul gets merged into *Brahman*. Therefore this life, our body and ultimately death are all illusions. *Brahman* is the only reality. We love our physical bodies we decorate it, take its care but everyone dies one day. Life is an illusion but we take death to be the ultimate reality, but like life, death is not the permanent and not the ultimate reality. Soul is immortal and death is a myth. *On the Ganga Ghat* depicts the myth that people live with. They believe that dying in the Benaras city on the Ganga *ghat* 'bank of river' will give them liberation.

The Benaras city and the Ganga river cannot liberate anybody. The reality is that only if we purify our souls from the dirt of ego, frustration and pride only then our soul moves closer to *paramatma* 'supreme soul'. One has to clean the mind of its impurities of *avidya* 'lack of knowledge'. The cleaning of body is not sufficient as the mind and the soul has to be cleansed. This cleansing takes place by following the principles of *Vedanta* and leading a self restrained life by indulging in meditation and devotion to God. No matter where we die salvation can be achieved if our inner being is cleansed. By taking a holy dip in the river or by immersing the ashes in the river, only the river is getting polluted the soul is not cleansed.

On the whole the conclusion is that protagonist in the novels of Raja Rao is actually Raja Rao himself. His novels are more or less autobiographical. The hero is south Indian Brahmin who is in search of spiritual realization. There is a spiritual progress of the same protagonist in every novel.

Spiritually the hero progresses from one novel to another as if the novels are sequel to each other. Firstly the hero adopts the *karma marg* 'path of action' in *Kanthapura*, the myth breaks and he moves to *jnana marg* in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Then he moves to the myth of *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion' in *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Dissatisfied he moves to the western philosophy of Marxism to achieve his goal in *Comrade Kirillov*. Again not being satisfied the same hero indulges in Tantra in *The ChessMaster and his Moves*. Till the end he is not successful in achieving the Absolute.

By adopting various paths the protagonists of his novels do not reach the goal of *Brahman*. The reality is that one can aspire to reach the Absolute only with the guidance of a Guru. The Guru with his supreme knowledge can channelise the energies in the right direction. The various paths suggested are not complete in themselves. One has to take the amalgamation of all the paths the *jnana*, 'knowledge' *bhakti* 'devotion' and *Karma marg* 'path of action'. Sreerem Manoj Kumar makes an interesting comparison in an article "Devotion and Knowledge" in *The Times of India* about *jnan* 'knowledge' and *bhakti marg* 'path of knowledge',

The *bhakta* will find God in all the forms he sees while the *jnani* justifies emptiness, which is the same thing said in different ways. *Bhakta* enters the Supreme through self-surrender, while a *jnani* expands and become one with Him through Self-enquiry. A *bhakta* shuns doership while a *jnani* shuns both doership and enjoyer-ship...The ignorance to recognise our true nature and origin has made us fall into the whirlpool of *Samsara*. By *jnana* one can overcome ignorance and attain salvation for which *bhakti* is necessary.(24)

We are all 'into the whirlpool of *Samsara*'. Our minds are enveloped with ignorance and thus are involved in worldly pursuits and desires. These desires should be channelized with the help of

karma, *jnana* 'knowledge' and *bhakti* 'devotion' to higher desire of self realization. With the guidance of a Guru if one implements the supreme knowledge, performs good deeds and then surrenders it to the Lord, this can lead one to realization. If one takes the example of saints who achieved self realization in their life span like Goswami Tulsidas, Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa, MiraBai and Shri Aurobindo. These saints mainly followed the path of *bhakti* 'devotion'. Tulsidas was devotee of Shri Rama, Mira Bai followed Shri Krsna and Ramakrishna Paramhansa was a devotee of Goddess Kali. In spite of them following the *bhakti* 'devotion' *marg* 'path', they all had Gurus to guide them and also had knowledge of the *Vedanta* and Upanisad. Tulsidas's *Racharitmanas* mentions a lot about *Brahman*. In Gospels of Ramakrishna Paramhansa there is knowledge of *Brahman* and *advaita* 'non-dualism. The collection of the words of wisdom of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, is given in article "20 RamaKrishna quotes on the realization of *Brahman-God*". Ramakrishna Paramhansa says:

The yogi seeks to realize the *Paramatman*, the supreme soul. His ideal is the union of the embodied soul and the supreme soul. He withdraws his mind from sense objects and tries to concentrate it on the *Paramatman*. Therefore during the first stage of his spiritual discipline, he retires into solitude and with undivided attention practices meditation on a fixed posture.

These lines show that Ramakrishna Paramhansa not only had *bhakti* 'devotion' but also *jnana* 'knowledge'. A soul trying to reach the supreme soul has to 'withdraw his mind from sense objects'. This is where the protagonists of Raja Rao's novels fail. They are not free from worldly desires and have not succeeded in annihilating their ego. Thus they are not able to tread on any path properly. The above mentioned saints who followed *bhakti* 'devotion' yoga also had *jnana* 'knowledge', guidance of Guru and they did their karma and performed their duties towards the

family and society. Therefore if one is aiming for the Absolute one has to have a systematic approach and take the nuances of all the paths and follow them under an expert.

Second important conclusion is that an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' has to follow ethics and morality. Follower of *advaita* 'non-dualism' cannot take the liberty of breaking morals and values and act according to one's own whims and fancies. If one knows and follows *advaita* 'non-dualism', one has to be morally correct. One has to lead a life of discipline and follow the morals and values set by society. A *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' has to set an example for others to follow. If one breaks these values and principles one can never achieve realization. If we analyse the heroes of Raja Rao's novels they are all believers and followers of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. They often talk and behave according to its norms but they lead a life of duality, breaking the ethics and morality of society. Therefore in the end they land up nowhere and there is utter confusion and chaos in their lives. There is no sign of peace or salvation anywhere. Whatever goals they want to achieve they remain far away from it. Therefore it is a big myth that an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' can break the morals and principles.

The reality is that an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' has to follow the morals and rules of the society and set an example of leading a controlled life dedicated for the quest of the ultimate. A person who has *vidya* 'knowledge' will automatically lead a self controlled life of morality and ethics. As a person who has realized *Brahman* becomes detached and becomes *Sannyasi* 'saint'. The Absolute can be achieved with the help of an enlightened soul called Guru and by leading a spiritually disciplined life.

By breaking one myth after another karma, *bhakti* 'devotion' and *jnana* 'knowledge' one can hope to grasp the ever eluding reality by the *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' method of *neti-neti* 'not this not this', or by *tat tvam asi* 'that art thou'. These approaches are also rational and

scientific. It is interesting to note that once there has been an awakening as to what reality is through the approaches mentioned above, although one may then still be caught unawares many a times and get carried away by illusion or myth, ultimate truth or the ultimate reality will prevail and the myth will be seen as the myth. This break-through to reality and sanity, by just discovering and realizing this self and therefore as the result of something beyond thought, would be a wonderful experience.

So, only by forgetting completely all thoughts of involvement in this mythical world-and this must drop away on its own account because its unreality is perceived-can man rise out of this valley of illusion. Then, with the collapse of myths –the reality will emerge. This will produce tremendous change in one's outlook, and as a result one feels capable of walking through life with a much lighter trend.