

Chapter-Three

The Serpent and the Rope: An Epic

A civilized man's life is a perpetual struggle to attain knowledge and to experience *ananda* 'happiness' that follows it. No matter how much one possesses, it always appears insufficient. One strives to achieve more knowledge and awareness but the experiences of life give disillusionments. All this leads to unbearable restlessness. This restlessness is pervasive in the life of all the protagonists of Raja Rao's novels. The answer to this problem lies in the wonderful formula given by Sri Samkaracharya, the exponent, explainer and clarifier of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. In "Vivekudamani" Samkaracharya says,

Brahma satyam jagat

mithya, jivo brahmaiva na parah (20).

Brahmam alone is real and the world is illusory. The individual self is none other than *Brahman* (trans mine).

This realization gives true knowledge and man experiences *Brahmananda* 'the bliss or happiness of being *Brahman*'. There is only one reality called *Brahman*. It is non-dual in nature and there is no place for any sentient or insentient being outside *Brahman* as it is infinite and omnipresent, it is beyond any definition. In comparison with *Brahman* the world is unreal, a big myth. *Jagat* 'the world' is very much like a dream which has its own subjective reality but which is mythical when compared with the waking state. In order to explain the illusory nature of the world, Samkaracharya has expounded the theory of *rajju sarp nyaya* 'serpent and rope theory'. In the section "Atmabodha" of *Complete Works of Sri Samkaracharya*, Samkara says,

रज्जु सर्पवदात्मानं जीवं ज्ञात्वा भयं वहेत् ।

नाहं जीवः परात्मेति ज्ञातश्रेन्निर्भयो भवेत् ॥(27)

By mistaking the self to be the individual soul, as a rope for a serpent, one is subject to fear. But if one realizes 'I am not the individual soul, but the supreme self' then one is free from fear. (trans. mine)

This *rajju sarpa nyaya* 'serpent and rope theory' of *advaita* 'non-dualism' is the nucleus of Raja Rao's novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. The title itself is a translation of the theory. The life one lives is considered to be real and permanent as if one will never die thus the illusory nature of life is never realized. The existence of a human life can be compared to the tip of the wave which rises only to get submerged in its source which is *Brahman*. In the real sense that one second of the wave's existence in the air is just a flash neither real nor unreal. Swami Amarananda says in *Stories from Vedanta*:

Apprehension and anxiety are based on a kind of deception which is very much like thinking that a rope is a snake. We are basically perfect whole, and full of bliss. Yet we see ourselves as hapless mortals marching towards the grave. We are behaving as if we have been put under a magic spell, which is called *maya* in *Vedanta*. When *maya's* spell is broken, we can no longer be fooled about our real nature.(43)

The real nature of *jiva* 'sentient being' is 'full of bliss'. Oneself is *Brahman* as it is repeatedly said, *ahm brahmasmi* 'I am *Brahman*' or what Ramaswamy says in the novel many a times *shivoham* 'I am Shiva'. When '*maya's* 'illusion's' spell is broken then one realizes that whatever is

considered to be a serpent is not serpent but merely a rope. According to *maya* 'illusion', this world is an appearance but by appearance it is not meant that the world is false. It is unreal but it is not quite false. As Ramaswamy says, "According to the Hindu concept there is not only *satya* and *asatya*, Truth and untruth, but also *mitya*, illusion-like the horns on the head of a rabbit, or the son of a barren woman"(SR377).The world is real for only the present state of consciousness but it is not real in the state of supreme knowledge. When a person realizes the supreme reality or *Brahman*, this apparent existence vanishes into *Brahman*. Nothing is permanent in this world as it is continually changing and therefore it cannot be called real. At the same time the world cannot be called unreal or mythical as myth is mere imagination with no proofs of existence.

To explain this phenomenon of real and unreal, Samkaracharya created out of logical necessity a third type of perceived object which is *sad-asad vilaksana* 'different from real and unreal'. In *Vedanta* philosophy this phenomenon is also called *anirvachaniya* 'inexpressible'. The serpent in the rope serpent theory is neither *sat* 'real' nor *asat* 'unreal'. It is not *asat* or unreal like the son of a barren woman since it is actually perceived. Neither is it *sat* 'real' since it disappears as soon as in the light the substratum or rope is perceived. Therefore the snake which is a simile of this world has *sad asad vilaksana* 'different from real and unreal'. This *anirvachaniya* 'inexpressible' phenomenon is due to the veil of *maya* 'illusion' caused by *avidya* 'ignorance'. When the knowledge of *Brahman* is realized then the absolute reality gets unveiled such that the world becomes mythical.

(A) Illusory Serpent in Ramaswamy's Life

Ramaswamy, like any other protagonist of Raja Rao is on a spiritual quest. He has

Vedantic knowledge and his soul is yearning to attain the supreme bliss of *Brahman*. But like any other human being he is governed by the vices of *kaama* 'lust', *krodha* 'rage', *moha* 'attachment', *lobha* 'greed' and *ahankara* 'ego'. These five evils of human beings are at variance with its spiritual essence. They provide obstacle in man's pursuit of self realisation. Ramaswamy is dominated by *kaama* 'lust' and *ahankara* 'ego' the most. In his journey of self realization he establishes many relationships. He develops incestuous crush for his young step mother and teenager half sister. Ramaswamy justifies all his actions under the cover of *advaita* 'non-dualism' which gives value to metaphysics rather than morality.

Ramaswamy marries Madeleine and tries to find the ultimate bliss in the relation. But, both Ramaswamy and Madeleine fail to find spiritual solace in the relation. She is western in her thinking which is based on *dvaita* 'duality' philosophy and Ramaswamy believes in *advaita* 'non-duality'. The relationship proves a fiasco and ends in divorce. Therefore this relation proves a myth, a serpent in his life far away from reality.

(B)Rope of Reality in Ramaswamy's Life

Ramaswamy attempts to discover *Brahman* through his relationships but in the end he fails miserably. He is left alone with neither any personal relationship nor any professional occupancy. The reality dawns upon him that the bonds of relationship, *moha* 'attachment' with people cannot help one in reaching the goal of self realization. The fact is that the relationships which he thinks are the realities of his life and which will show him the glimpse of *Brahman* are actually unreal or the serpent. Ramaswamy fails to realize *Brahman* and all his claims of *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge prove unreal or mythical. Towards the end of the novel one finds him going

to a Guru who shall perhaps show him the path of self realization. The absolute reality of *Brahman* cannot be achieved if one is deeply involved in the *maya* 'illusion' of the materialistic world.

One has to discard the vices of *kaama* 'lust' *krodha* 'rage' *moha* 'attachment' *lobha* 'greed' *abhimaana* 'ego' and then with the guidance of a spiritually enlightened soul, a Guru, and with a pure heart can one tread the path of self realisation. This novel shows a lay man the reality of this mythical world as we are all engulfed by the web of *maya* 'illusion' and thus cannot distinguish between the serpent and the rope. *The Serpent and the Rope* can be described an epic as it has many characteristic features of it. It represents the quest for reality, breaking various kinds of myths from one continent to another.

(C) *The Serpent and the Rope* –An Epic

Raja Rao's literary genius has bloomed to its fullest in his second novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. It is a long semiautobiographical novel which was published in 1960, after he met his Guru. *Kanthapura* is a *Sthala-purana* 'localised myth' whereas *The Serpent and the Rope* is a modern Indian *mahapurana* in miniature form. Through this novel Raja Rao has attempted the art of *Puranic* recreation of Indian story telling. The novel is like a pandora's box with one box inside the other. It has different layers of *jnana* 'knowledge' yoga, karma yoga and so forth. Every reading of the novel provides a new meaning. The story is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached many other stories, fables and philosophical disquisitions, like a necklace. An epic is described as an extended narrative poem in elevated or dignified language, celebrating the feasts of a legendary or traditional hero. According to *Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary* an epic is "a long poem describing the actions of heroic figures or the past history of a nation". There are certain major characteristics of an epic such as its setting is vast covering many countries, its hero embodies values of civilization, it has a huge plot with stories within the story, it has many sub

themes apart from a main theme. As Gaurinath Shastri says in *A Concise History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*:

The essential characteristics are based on the conception of three constituents of poetry viz the plot(*vastu*) the hero(*netra*) and the sentiment (*rasa*). First the plot of an epic must have a historical basis and should not be fictitious. Secondly the hero must be an accomplished person of high lineage and should be of the type called *Dhrodatta*. . . . Delineation of various sentiments and emotions is important . . . Generally the sentiments are eight in number viz, *sringaar, hasya, raudra, vira, bhayanaka, karuna, vibhatsa and adbhuta*. (75)

The eight rasas 'sentiments' play an important role in Indian literature. Raja Rao's novels have one of the *rasas* 'sentiments' as a dominant feature. In *The Serpent and the Rope* the *sringaar rasa* 'erotic sentiment' is quite conspicuous. The major theme of the novel is marriage of Ramaswamy with Madeliene and thus the novelist highlights the *sringaar rasa* 'erotic sentiment' in this relationship. Ramaswamy expressing his feelings for his wife and says, "Madeleine was so lovely, with golden hair-on her mother's side she came from Savoy-and her limbs had such pure unreality. Madeleine was altogether unreal" (SR 13).

In an epic as Gaurinath says 'the hero must be accomplished person with high lineage'. The hero of the novel Ramaswamy also has a high lineage. His ancestors had written Vedic texts and were related to sage Yajnavalkya. "But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalkya, my legendary and Upanisadic ancestor, have really known the Truth: excepting the Sage Madhava, who . . . wrote some of the most profound of Vedantic texts since Sri Sankara?" (SR 5). An epic covers many countries and continents similarly the novel covers three countries India, France and England. The protagonist is an Indian, marries a French woman and visits England for work.

Another unique characteristic of an epic is digression. Digression enables the writer to weave story within a story giving rise to various sub-plots and sub-themes of the novel. The main plot is of the protagonist Ramaswamy and Madeleine. At the same time there are plots of Ramaswamy's step mother and half sister and also of Catherine and Georges. There are also many short stories in between, which digress from the main storyline. Ramaswamy mentions the story of Iseult and Tristan. "Iseult with the lovely hands had to remain a widow. The potion of love was made of the eighteen aggregates. The limb and the lip spoke to one another. . . .Tristan took Iseult of the White Hands as bride, but he did not take her maidenhead" (SR 389).

The quest for *Brahman* is the highest goal of saints and seers in India in all ages. Raja Rao is not just ideologically interested in philosophy. He has a prolonged quest of his inner being as well as the higher truths. The philosophical and literary influences which Raja Rao has assimilated have lent him a quality of the mind that distinguishes him from the other great writers of Indo-Anglian fiction. As Narsingh Srivastav opines, "Equipped with the mental endowments of a philosopher and a realist, Raja Rao has been able to apply his metaphysical erudition and mystical insights to the interpretations of the reality of life in his art. The blend of metaphysical vision and the realistic view of life has enabled him to depict the rope and the serpent together" (14).

The blend of metaphysics and realism is a unique feature of his novels. Raja Rao commands at every moment of his creative thinking, a firm hold of the concrete reality and philosophical abstractions. Raja Rao has this power of creating revelatory utterances of the universal truth and combining the descriptive and the interpretative with the intuitive vision of things. This vision of the ultimate reality can be achieved after passing through the various experiences of this mythical world. *The Serpent and the Rope* presents the chief tenets of various philosophies, Catharism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. It depicts the concept of global oneness of reality. All

religions show us the path of realization in different ways. It seems that Raja Rao has, what Narsingh Srivastava points out, given 'the interpretation of the reality' in a purely *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' manner which 'enabled him to depict the rope and serpent together'. The protagonist is a Hindu Brahmin, and a proud Indian and it is this deep-rooted Indian philosophy in him which makes him go on a quest for realization of the ultimate.

The central theme of the novel is the clash of cultures, a straining for adjustment and recognition. The protagonist's quest for self-awareness, his attempts to circumvent the mundane dilemma; his final attempt to leap towards the reality and his gaining the perceptiveness of vision constitute the main movements of the story. Against the backdrop of ethnic and topographical diversity, the massive problems of history, philosophy and metaphysics are dramatised. Consequently the novel acquires a multiplicity of meanings, a complexity of texture and an amplitude of experience and vision.

Ramaswamy seeks for self realization through the *advaita* 'non-dualism'. He has acquired the knowledge of it by being born in a spiritually inclined south Indian Brahmin family. He appears to be knowledgeable in philosophy and often speaks about it. But there is a slight difference in his words and actions. His preachings are not the same as the implementations of it. Ramaswamy boasts about being a Brahmin but never behaves like the one.

(D) Myth of Being *Vipra* 'Divine Being'

Brahmins are called the *vipra* 'divine being' and also *dvija* 'the twice born'. In *Freelang Sanskrit English and English Sanskrit Online Dictionary* Renato B. Figueiredo, defines *vipra* as, "a kind of divine being, inwardly stirred, sagacious wise". Brahmins are regarded as custodians of religion and Vedic knowledge from the time immemorial. The Hindu society is divided into *varnas* 'caste system'. In the Vedic system this distinction was based on the occupation of the people. Brahmins

were considered the superior caste as they supposedly came from the mouth of Lord Bramha. As per *Manusmriti*, translated by G. Buhler,

As the Brahmana sprang from Brahman's mouth, as he was the first born and as

He possesses, the *veda*, he is by right the lord of this whole creation.(1.93)

Manusmriti is Hindu's law book and its principles are followed by every Hindu. Not only *Manusmriti* but also various *Puranas*, emphasise the importance of Brahminism. In *Visnu Purana*, Brahmins are regarded as the highest caste and then comes Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras respectively. As per *Shri Shri Visnu Purana*,

क्षात्र कर्म द्विजस्योत्रं वै यं कर्म तथाऽपि

राजन्यस्य च वै योत्रं भूद्रकर्म न चैतयोः (3.8.39)

In the time of crisis a Brahmin can take up the job of Kshatriya and Vaisya. A Kshatriya can take up the job of only Vaishya. But a Brahmin and Kshatriya can never do the job of Shudra.(trans mine185).

These lines of *Shri Shri Visnu Purana* strongly support the caste distinction and the superiority of Brahmins. The feeling of distinction and supremacy of Brahminism is deep seeded in the minds of all Raja Rao's protagonists. The novel starts with the idea that Ramaswamy the protagonist expresses his desire to know the reality. His ancestry goes back to the Upanisadic sage Yajnavalkya who attained the ultimate reality. "I was Born a Brahmin-that is, devoted to Truth and all that. 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahman', . . ." (SR 5). Conscious of his Brahminic heritage and inspired by his conviction that a Brahmin is devoted to the Truth, Ramaswamy expresses his irrepressible quest for God. Ramaswamy used to speak with authority on *advaita* 'non-dualism' and other

subjects of Indian Philosophy. “I even knew Grammar and the Brahma Sutras, read the Upanishads at the age of four, was given the holy thread at seven. . .”(SR 5). He thinks that his wife is attracted to him as he is a Brahmin. Madeleine finds a brahminical aura around him and is impressed by his knowledge of *Vedanta*. According to him a Brahmin has the distinction of not being a contemporary, he goes backward and forward in time and so has a sage to begin the genealogical tree and a Guru to end the cycle of birth and death. Everyone around him, his stepsisters, stepmother or his wife all look to up to him as a Guru, a mentor and a guiding force.

Ramaswamy lives in the myth that he belongs to the higher caste and has attained the highest knowledge of the Hindu philosophy. This myth of his is broken as his actions are contrary to Brahminism and *advaita* ‘non-dualism’ which he preaches. He behaves like a Brahmin by birth and a non-Brahmin by deeds or action. Swami Vivekananda says:

Anyone who claims to be a Brahmin should prove his pretensions, first by manifesting that spirituality, and next by raising others to the same status. On the face of this, it seems that most of them are only nursing a false pride of birth; and any schemer, native or foreign, who can pander to this vanity and inherent laziness by fulsome sophistry, appears to satisfy most. (CW 4 :300)

As Vivekananda says most Brahmins are only ‘nursing a false pride of birth’. A Brahmin should be a Brahmin by his actions and behavior and not just by birth. A spiritually elevated Brahmin, who is a follower of *advaita* ‘non-dualism’, must behave in a calm and controlled manner. He should exercise restraint and self control over worldly desires and passions as this world is an illusion or a myth. Ramaswamy breaks the myth of a self controlled Brahmin and behaves immorally. He indulges in extramarital affairs and has a liaison with the wife of his friend and an

emotional affair with a princess who is betrothed. His actions are contrary to the decorum of a *Vipra* 'divine being'.

Ramaswamy remains passive over the malpractices of the society. When Saroja fulminates against the state of women in India particularly among the Brahmins, Ramaswamy characteristically states that there is no answer on this issue.

"Times have changed, Saroja."

"Not in India yet-and certainly not among Brahmins. You had better wait till you see my in-laws. They already think I'm a cloth in their wash basket: they'll know when to beat me against the stone, to make me white as milk. We girls are thrown to other families as the most intimate, the most private of our clothes are thrown to the dhobi on Saturday morning. Like cotton, we women must have grown on in trees. . ." There was no answer to give (SR 255).

Ramaswamy could not, as Vivekananda says, 'pander to the vanity and inherent laziness by sophistry' and thus could never rise to the occasion. The suffering that the women of the Brahmin community face is raised here but Ramaswamy who boasts of being a true Brahmin remains passive in that situation. Being a true *advaitist* 'non-dualist', Ramaswamy should have raised his voice against the malpractices of the society.

A true Brahmin who could voice various mantras should also wear the sacred thread around his body and never let it out. It was a privilege of a Brahmin to wear the sacred thread but Ramaswamy did not have the sacred thread around his body. He was refrained initially from performing the obsequies of his father as he did not have the sacred thread. Moreover in those days visiting a foreign country and marrying a foreigner was also considered against the religion.

When the last rites of his father were performed the Brahmins objected on these two issues, “Your son, they said to Little Mother, has been to Europe, and has wed a European and has no sacred thread.”(SR 10).Therefore one finds that Ramaswamy who is boasting of belonging to a higher caste, does not even follow the basic rituals of the Brahmin community. His claims of Brahminism are all myths.

Benaras is considered a very sacred place for the Hindus. In Benaras, the evils take place under the name of Brahminism. Not just Ramaswamy but the other Brahmins also break the myth that Brahmins are superior in all respects. In Benaras, Ramaswamy observes Brahmins looting money from people in the name of religion. He himself says, “I would rather have thrown the rupees to the begging monkeys than to the Brahmins”(SR 11). He compares Brahmin with crows and says, “You never know where reality starts and where illusion ends; whether the Brahmins of Benaras are like the crows asking for funeral rice-balls, saying ‘Caw-caw’. . . ”.(SR 11-12). At Benaras, Ramaswamy witnesses the exploitation in the name of Brahminism but never raises a voice against it. It is a Brahmin’s primary duty not to indulge in malpractices and is obliged to stop others from doing so. Swami Vivekananda says, “Beware, Brahmins, this is the sign of death! Arise and show your manhood, your Brahminhood, by raising the non-Brahmins around you-not in the spirit of a master-not with the rotten canker of egotism. . . –but with the spirit of a servant. For verily he who knows how to serve knows how to rule” (CW 4 : 300).

Humbleness is the most important characteristics of being a Brahmin. A person who is full of ego may find it difficult to move towards self realization whether a Brahmin or of any other caste. This humbleness was missing in Ramaswamy’s life as he was always exhibiting pride of Brahminism. Towards the end, Ramaswamy realizes the myth that his pride in being a Brahmin is of no good. His actions are contrary to that of a true Brahmin. The reality of life is far beyond

Brahminism. While facing the problems of his life, Ramaswamy realizes that by following the orthodox principles of Brahminism, he has hindered his path of self realization. He makes a significant remark which explains his tragedy, "Purity is not in the act but in the meaning of the act. Had I been a less a Brahmin, I might have known more 'love' " (SR 400). It's not just love but also life. If he had acted against the orthodox traditions and rituals and lived his life like a liberal and brave individual he would have gained more love and respect as an individual. He always got cowed down by the pride and ego of Brahminism and in this process his inner pure beauty got eclipsed.

The real Brahmin always strives to purify his inner self and comes out strong in front of people. Ramaswamy realizes the reality of being a Brahmin and admits, "For the going inward is the true birth. He indeed the Brahmin who turns the crest inward; even if you are a *pandit* great as Jagannatha Bhatta or learned in logic as Kapila-Charya, the true life, the true Brahminhood commences when you recognize yourself in your eternity"(SR 215). To know one's true self is the ultimate goal of a Brahmin and Ramaswamy is only slowly progressing towards it. Another important characteristic of Ramaswamy is his pride of being an Indian. This pride proves baseless when he finds himself influenced by the western ideologies more than Indian.

(E) Illusion of a True Indian

A true Indian is the one who loves his country like his own mother. For a true Indian, his country is tantamount to his mother. India has given birth to enlightened mystics and master musicians, to the inspired poetry of the Upanisads and the breath taking architecture of Taj Mahal. It may be underdeveloped financially and technically but spiritually and traditionally it is the most developed country. India is the land 'where words come out from the depth of truth' and where

through the weapons of *ahimsa* 'non-violence' and *satyagraha* 'hold on to truth' wars are won.

Rabindranath Tagore paints the picture of an ideal India in *Gitanjali*

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth

.....

Where the mind is led forward by thee into the ever

Widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

(1-4, 7-8)

These inspiring lines of Rabindranath Tagore embody the true spirit of the land of seers called India. The spirit of a nation lies not in its geographical areas, governments or people but it lies in its universality. India is the only country which is deeply concerned with the evolution of a consciousness. Every Indian's restless soul is striving to attain self realization. India has shown the world the path of spirituality. Ramaswamy states, "India is not a country like France is, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic"(SR 376).

For Raja Rao, India stands for truth. Indians are the true followers of *satyagraha* 'hold on to truth' as they seek the truth humbly with non-violence in their actions. Ramaswamy says in the

novel, "India is every-body's: India is in everybody. It is in that sense, I think, that Mahatma Gandhi said, 'When we are free, all will be free.' Let us be truly *satyagrahis*-graspers of the truth-and that humbly is my India"(SR 193). As Raja Rao related India with metaphysics and truth, Gandhi also equated India with divinity. Joseph Levlyveld who wrote a biography on Gandhi, quoted the words of Gandhi about India,

I can refer to you to what Gandhi did say in 1915. . . In a letter to his dear friend Kallenbach, he wrote: "I see around me on the surface nothing but hypocrisy, humbug and degradation and yet underneath it I trace a divinity I missed (in South Africa) as elsewhere. This is my India. It may be my blind love or ignorance or a picture of my own imagination. Anyway it gives me peace and happiness. It fills me with love and confidence without which no man could work". . . (10)

The 'trace of divinity' is present in every Indian. This divinity gives Indians the boost to march ahead on the path of nation building. A true Indian is the one who is humble and polite and respects all other individuals and their culture. An ideal Indian is the one who strives for self realization like his ancestors. He is not rigid in his thinking but flexible enough to incorporate new ideas. A true Indian gets recognized for his Indian spirit as he asserts and maintains his identity everywhere and never loses his Indian spirit in any surroundings. Some of these qualities are there in Ramaswamy but the basic quality of being humble and tolerant is missing in him such that his claims of being a true Indian appear illusory. The feeling of belonging to the upper caste is very strong in him, at the same time he is also very conscious of being Indian. His inner desire it seems is to spread Indian culture and tradition around the world. Ramaswamy endeavours to establish an Indian identity partly because his father opines that India should be made more real to the

world and partly because he is brought up with Upanisadic traditions from childhood. Ramaswamy's father opined, "The British will not go till we can shame them with our intelligence"(SR 16). India's history or geography does not attract him but its metaphysical entity enthralls him and makes him sentimental. According to K.R. Shirwadkar: "India lives by inner prosperity and this inner direction of her living offers the people an emancipation through the knowledge of the self. India is continuity not in time but in space. She is more of an idea than a reality hence she is within us and is everywhere. India is truth, she is the Guru of the world" (04).

The 'inner prosperity' refers to the Indians leading a highly spiritual life with the knowledge of the *Vedanta* and the Upanisads. They appear to be more at peace with themselves than the people of other continents. This peace and prosperity comes through the knowledge of the *Vedas* and the Upanisads. India can be called, as the critic Shirwadkar says, 'the Guru' of the world'. It is the land of the four *Vedas*, eighteen *Puranas*, sixty four art forms and the mother of all languages the Sanskrit language. The German and French languages have their origin in Sanskrit. Ramaswamy says, "The Sanscrit language has a *gambhiryatha*, a nobility that seems rooted in primary sound"(SR 70). Ramaswamy preaches *advaita* 'non-dualism' and tries to promote this Indian culture and tradition across the world. The memory of India sends Ramaswamy into ecstasy. "I would go back to India, for that India was my breath, my only sweetness, gentle and wise; she was my mother" (SR 376).

Raja Rao has tried to glorify Indian culture through *The Serpent and the Rope*. The novel is full of myths and rituals and it gives a detailed account of pilgrimages like Benaras and the Himalayas. In describing about Benaras, Ramaswamy's Indianness comes out strongly. The description brings about the secret of the strength of the Indian tradition. Ramaswamy goes to Benaras along with his stepmother to perform the obsequies of his father. His visit to a pilgrimage gives rise to the

first stirring of the spiritual awakening in his heart. "I told Little Mother how Tulsidas had written the Ramayana just there, next to Rewa Palaca, and Kabir had been hit on the head by Saint Ramananda. . . .Farther down, the Buddha himself had walked and had washed his alms bowl . . . "(SR 11). He recollects the Buddha's Gospel of the renunciation of desire for the enjoyment of the finite world and devotion to the supreme goal of Nirvana. Such holy associations and recollections have an uplifting influence on his mind and he discovers his roots in the glorious spiritual heritage of Benaras.

The Himalayas give Ramaswamy the feel of Lord Siva, the auspicious, the good and the infinite. Ramaswamy observes: "The Himalaya made the peasant and the Brahmin feel big, not with any earthly ambition, but with the bigness, the stature of the impersonal, . . . For in the deepest sleep, as every pilgrim knows, one is wide awake, awake to oneself. And the Himalaya was that sleep made knowledge. (SR 42) In fact, in the Hindu religion, the Himalayas are tantamount to Lord Siva, who is remote, detached, calm, majestic, silent and lost in transcendental meditation. The Ganges that emerges from the intertwined foliage of the forest trees of the Himalayas is the Ganges that flows from the locks of Siva. Apart from the religious places, the Indian wedding ceremony is also described artistically. It is recreated before our eyes in all its splendour and significance. Describing Saroja's wedding, Ramaswamy says, "All the women were gathered under the pandal, and there was a smell of camphor, Lucknow perfumes and betel leaves; . . . the magnificence of earrings, neckbands, nose drops, diamond marks on the forehead-an innocent joy which showed that man was made for natural happiness" (SR 264).

There is an aroma of the Indian spirit in the novel as Ramaswamy glorifies its culture, religion and tradition. Time and again one gets the feeling, that the novel is not about metaphysics, but about glorifying India. When Ramaswamy goes back to France after his sister's wedding, he is so much

mesmerized and awestruck by the pervasive Indian spirit that he expects his French wife to dress up like an Indian woman which she follows. Ramaswamy expresses, "Madeleine left the cathedral a well dressed Hindu bride with *kumkum* on her forehead and her ear-pendants touching her jaws" (SR 98). A very important thing conspicuous about Ramaswamy is that he is looking for Indianness in all his relationship with women. Madeliene tries to be an Indian wife but their spiritual inclinations are different. She is western and dualistic in approach and thus turns towards Buddhism whereas Ramaswamy is totally non-dualist in his approach. He even claims that it is India which came between him and his wife. Madeleine questions:

"What is it separated us, Rama?"

"India"

"India? But I am a Buddhist."

"That is why Buddhism left India. India is *impitoyable*."

"One can never be converted to Hinduism."

"You mean one can only be born a Brahmin?"

"That is – an Indian," I added, as an explanation of India.(SR 331)

Ramaswamy feels that only when one is born in India, one can be a true Indian. Therefore, for Ramaswamy, Madeliene can never become a true Indian no matter how much she tries for it. For him, his dream woman is an Indian, who is born in India as she only embodies the true Indian spirit. Ramaswamy's search for the Indian spirit in a woman ends when he meets Savithri. She appears to be an epitome of the Indian spirit and both had similar spiritual inclinations. Ramaswamy appears to be simply obsessed with India. He believes that he is completely an Indian

from inside as he has a command over Hindu religion and he speaks with great ease on *advaita* 'non-dualism'. Ramaswamy states, "Similarly all philosophies are possible in and around *Vedanta*. But you can no more improve on *Vedanta* than improve on zero. The zero, you see, the sunya, is impersonal; . . . I am not one, I am not two, I am neither one, nor two: '*Aham nirvikalpi nirakara rupih*'. I am the 'I' " (SR 205).

This non-dualism is all pervasive in the novels. Everybody listens to Ramaswamy as if he is the authority on these subjects. Ramaswamy, like a true Indian, always tries to follow the Indian customs and tradition. He ties *rakhi* 'a thread symbolic of sibling's love' to his wife's cousin Catherine and tying *rakhi* 'a thread symbolic of sibling's love' is purely and solely an Indian custom. "Here, Catherine is my wedding present, I said, and tied the *rakhi* to Catherine's wrist. She danced with joy, . . ." (SR157).

But an in depth study of the novel reveals that Ramaswamy's pride of being a true Indian is totally a myth. He is actually an Indo-European. He is as much influenced by the European culture and philosophy as by that of Indian. Contrary to the norms of his south Indian Brahmin family, Ramaswamy marries a European woman. Many a times, his attitude and thinking reflect the European culture and so the term European Brahmin is apt for him. Once, Ramaswamy fell ill in his sister's wedding, a doctor was examining him, and during the conversation, Ramaswamy called himself a European Brahmin. "But times have changed and you have gone to Europe. You must eat and drink wine." he advised. "If not, why marry a European wife". What was there for me to say? I laughed and said, "I am a European Brahmin, . . ." (SR 283). The reality of his life is that many times his behaviour is non Indian. If we look at Ramaswamy's life objectively, many of his decisions and actions are against the Indian norms and traditions. Firstly he goes to France and does his research on the subject Albigensian heresy. It is a subject related to Christianity. He is

strongly attracted to Europe and its culture and he also gathers knowledge about the traditions of France and other European countries. “France alone has universal history. Every battle of France is a battle for humanity” (SR101).

Ramaswamy has knowledge and inclination for various religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism. In *The Serpent and the Rope* he has expressed his views about the Catharist idea and Christianity. “The Cathars were the Theosophists of the thirteenth century. If I had been a contemporary I would have joined Simon de Montfort . . .” (SR101). This shows that he is not obsessed with India and its culture as he is also fascinated towards the other cultures of the world. Another aspect is that he is attracted to a French woman five years older than him. Ramaswamy is obsessed with Indian women, still he gets attracted to a foreigner and even marries her. Marriage to a western woman is strongly against Indian conservative society of his times. A European wife or a daughter-in-law is against the Indian family traditions during those days. Madeleine very well expresses the feelings of his family, “And she said . . . My love, the gods of India will be angry, that you a Brahmin married a non Brahmin like me; why should they let me have a child called Krishna?” So sacred is that name” (SR 14). Ramaswamy’s claims of being a true Indian prove mythical when his behaviour becomes immoral and completely inappropriate according to the norms of Indian society. Ramaswamy indulges in extra marital relations with two married women Savithri and Laxmi.

A man like Ramaswamy who considers Hindu religion and philosophy as the highest, indulges in activities against the ideals of his religion. In this aspect his code of conduct is not Indian but that of a European. As P. Dayal says: ‘It may be pointed out that these occasional lapses on the part of Ramaswamy could be termed as human failings of a Europeanised Brahmin who finds it difficult to observe vedantic asceticism” (28). ‘Human failings of a Europeanized Brahmin’ are completely

against the Indian culture and so Ramaswamy's myth of Indianness emerges. The reality is that he is more influenced by the western philosophy.

Ramaswamy is against Indian morality. He believes in Indianness which is dedicated in pursuit of self realization and which has nothing much to do with morality and dharma. "I hated this moral India. True, Indian morality was based on an ultimate metaphysic. Harishchandra told the truth; and lost his kingdom and his wife, but he found the Truth."(SR 349). This 'ultimate metaphysic' is the main focus of Ramaswamy's life therefore he is not bothered about Indian morality.

Ramaswamy's claim of being a true Indian is busted. The myth of following Indian culture breaks into pieces. The reality of his life is that he is equally impressed with Hinduism as well as with the western religions. He is European in his code of conduct but idealises the Indian spirit. Ramaswamy is a normal and universal being who is impressed by all the religions of the world and tries to follow any of the religions according to his convenience. Ramaswamy seems to be caught in the cobweb of *maya* 'illusion'.

(F) Cobweb of *Maya* 'Illusion'-The Ultimate Myth

If *Brahman* is the ultimate reality then *maya* 'illusion' is the ultimate myth. It is *avidya* 'ignorance' that causes the *Brahman* to indicate the same reality appear as many *jivas* 'sentient being' and it is *maya* 'illusion' that causes the world phenomenon. *Maya* 'illusion' is *avidya* 'ignorance' at the cosmic level. To consider the world to be real is *maya* 'illusion'. The world is unreal in the state of supreme knowledge, as at that point the world disappears into *Brahman*. In the state of present existence this world appears real and *Brahman* seems to be an illusion. Human beings are like spiders caught in the cobweb of *maya* 'illusion'. The more they try to come out of it the more they get entangled in it such that the cobweb spreads all over blocking their

intelligence and vision to see the reality. When the cobweb is removed then only the spider who is weaving the cobweb comes into light.

Ramaswamy is also trapped in this cobweb of *maya* 'illusion' like any other sentient being. He is the self proclaimed *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' who always utters the words of wisdom and lives in the illusion that he is a *jnani* 'knowledgeable person'. But the fact of the matter is that Ramawsamy has bookish knowledge. He knows *Vedanta* and other books of various religions of the world but never really implements that knowledge. It's easier said than done for him. A person who is on the pursuit of enlightenment must exercise self restrain. In the course of the story one realizes that Ramaswamy is a slave of his senses and self restrain is chiefly missing in his life as he easily succumbs to his senses. The biggest impediment in the path of self realization is to be governed by one's senses. Lord Krishna has warned Arjuna not to be a slave of the senses:

Indriasyendriyasyarthe

Raga-dvesau vyavasthitau

Tayor na vasam agacchet

Tau hy asya paripanthinau(BG 3.34).

There are principles to regulate attachment and aversion pertaining to the senses and their objects. One should not come under the control of such attachment and aversion, because they are stumbling blocks on the path of self-realization.(trans. Prabhupad 201).

These 'stumbling blocks' of the senses are caused by *maya* 'illusion'. The sense of touch smell, hear and sight are all the instruments of *maya* 'illusion' which make us realise that whatever we feel through theses senses is only real. This world is just illusory world the reality is transcendent *Brahman*. The senses infuse evil traits of pride, lust, anger, attachment and so forth. It is believed

that the strongest working of *maya* 'illusion' is observed in the case of lust and ego. The biggest weakness of a man is lust.

Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa says, "Those who wish to attain God or make progress in their devotional practices should particularly guard themselves against the snares of lust and wealth. Otherwise they will never attain perfection"(41). Ramaswamy, a *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*', could not resist at least the physical attractions of *maya* 'illusion' in the form of women. He falls prey to his senses and could not resist temptations. This lust is a great obstacle in the path of self realization.

The first encounter that he has with a woman is at the age of nineteen, when he meets his wife who is five years older than him. To get physically attracted to a woman is not at all a sign of self control. Ramaswamy himself admits that he falls for the charms of the beauty of a French woman. Ramaswamy says, "I love the curved nape of her neck, so gentle, so like marble for me, almost saffron-coloured under the light of the moon, or when I call her to myself in the day, And take her in my arms, how her throat smells of some known musk"(SR 158). The charm of Madeleine is such that he falls prey to it and ignores even his family and marries her. Narsingh Shrivastav comments about Ramaswami and Madeliene's love, "Truly, their love in spite of the innocence in their relationship was in the beginning full of all sensuous charms and physical attraction without which love between man and woman is incomplete"(75).

It is a myth that love is incomplete between man and a woman if it is not physical. The fact is that love can be pure and platonic between man and woman. A woman can act as a source of inspiration for a man to move towards realization. If a relationship is based on 'physical attraction' then it does not have the depth required for completeness in a relation. For any relationship to be complete and blissful, physical involvement is not required. This fact is proved in Ramaswamy and

Savithri's relationship who find completeness in each other without being physically involved. It is also observed that this very relationship pushes him forward in the quest of the ultimate reality. Therefore physical love does not provide completeness to a relationship and thus the critic's statement is not completely agreeable. Ramaswamy's belief that he is a true *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' turns to be a myth when he succumbs to the charms of a French woman.

Ramaswamy is in the grip of his senses and is far away from asceticism. This fact is exhibited when he develops a crush for his half sister Saroja. After he comes back from the pilgrimage with his stepmother, he observes that Saroja was turning into a woman from a girl. He gets completely struck by her physical beauty and her presence intoxicates him. He himself expresses:

I was intoxicated with Saroja's presence, like a deer could be before a waterfall, or an elephant before a mountain peak; something primordial was awakening in a creature, and I felt that maturity in a girl was like the new moon or the change of equinox, it had polar affinities. . . .What a deep and reverential mystery womanhood is. I could bow before Saroja and call her Queen.(SR 50)

These feelings are incestuous and are completely against the Hindu religion and its teachings. Ramaswamy is a very ordinary person who has weakness for sex. A normal person also does not develop attraction towards his sister or mother. It is even hinted in the novel that he is also attracted towards his young stepmother. When they go together on a pilgrimage after his father's death, he gets impressed by her nobility and wisdom. These oedipus and incestuous feelings are against the norms of a civilized society. Ramaswamy acts like a spiritual Guru to the women in the novel and this 'Guru' lives in the myth of being spiritually inclined.

In terms of sexual behaviour his conduct and feelings appear to be against the moral order of the society. Dayal comments: "Ramaswamy, desiring such a relation with Saroja, therefore criticizes

his own brahminical heritage which prohibits endogenous relationships. He feels aggrieved that the Brahmin's despite their metaphysical wisdom, lack the courage to rebel against the outmoded orthodox Indian morality that still holds on to "fidelity in love"(30). Ramaswamy who is proud of being a Brahmin always preaches and propagates the philosophy of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. But as described by Dayal, Ramaswamy is against Brahminism and the so called rigid and inflexible principles of the Hindu religion. This criticism is born out of his disappointment with his ancestors who propound austerity and sexual containment for self realization. This viewpoint of a rebel is characteristics of a Europeanised Ramaswamy whose libido is blocked. Therefore his sexual inclinations towards his sister and stepmother are justified in his own eyes as he does not accept Indian moralities in this aspect. In aspects of sexual inclinations, he wants freedom with no strings attached.

Another example of him being under the spell of *maya* 'illusion', is when he hears the news of Savitri's marriage with Pratap, his mind is filled with anguish and frustration. Ramaswamy shows no control over his mind and acts according to his whims and fancies as directed by his senses. To forget his frustration and dark despair he plunges headlong into a liaison with Laxmi. Laxmi is a married woman who is the wife of a friend of Ramaswamy in Mumbai. Ramaswamy, the *advaitist* 'follower of non-dualism' rolls in the mire of sensual gratification. Without any sense of shame or qualms of conscience Ramaswamy admits, "In a day or two Laxmi yielded to me. I thought to myself it was like eating a pickle. My days and nights would be spent in luxurious enjoyment" (SR 295).

While facing any kind of problem, a man should try to remain calm and balanced and should try to come out of that situation as soon as possible. That is a sign of a true *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*'. Adversity and problems take oneself more towards the path of self realization.

Ramaswamy on the other hand in despair and frustration goes astray and indulges in liaison with a married woman. His attitude towards women is at times full of lust. The *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' principle of asceticism or self control is not at all followed by him.

Against the principles of *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' philosophy, Ramaswamy holds the view that the canalization of libido is the psychological need of a man. He believes that man is polygamous by nature and celibacy is unnatural. Ramaswamy says, " I have always told you polygamy is man's nature. Both Hindus and the Christians are wrong about these single hearted devotions. Islam is the better religion, from that point of view-it treats life naturally"(SR 139).To transcend nature or sex is to suffer unhygienic pathogenic after affects such as abnormal behaviour of sexual morbidity. Ramaswamy feels that the chastity or self containment in sex is like going against the nature. It is an inbuilt, God given desire which should be respected and fully satisfied. In fact, it seems that Raja Rao is voicing his opinion through Ramaswamy. One observes the same views on sexuality in the novel *Comrade Kirillov*. While conversing with the narrator, the protagonist Kirillov says:

"The biological game of love-making is as natural as food. . ."

"And water," I added mischievously.

"Yes, quite, quite so", he agreed.

"So sex is the commom biological act," I pursued.

"Quite so- does it need any proof? No." His head rotated in absolute assurance (CK 36).

There is nothing like moral or immoral as far as sex is concerned. He feels that chastity (except in Mother Mary's case, one assumes) is a denial of motherhood and therefore evil. Ramaswamy opines that the suppression of sexual desire causes psychosomatic disorder or some kind of disease in human body.

Ramaswamy himself, when he suppresses his desire in Saroja's case develops asthmatic disorder and this he feels is due to his unsuccessful attempts at repression. He feels that most of the monks who observe celibacy become ghosts in their next life. Ramaswamy denounces Nazism primarily because it supports asceticism. The Jews and the Chinese win his applause as they uphold the utility of sex and accept the reality of the world. Freedom in sexual behaviour is against the moral order of the society but Ramaswamy feels that an *advaitist* 'follower of non-dualism' whose only aim is self realization should be free from the shackles of morality. Moral values have significance only at the mundane level and not at the metaphysical level. D. S. Maini in "Raja Rao's Vision ,Values and Aesthetics" states:

It may be helpful to remember that Ramaswamy's conduct is not to be understood or measured in terms of any ethical cannons or values . . . in short for him, mortality is essentially social and western, whereas metaphysics is eternal and Indian. Starting on this phoney premise-a cliché we Indians love to believe-Ramaswamy goes on to justify all his little escapades, adulteries liaisons treacheries and infidelities in the name of higher truths to which perhaps blue blooded Brahmins alone are privy.(8)

Ramaswamy believes that truth is the only substance India can offer and that truth is metaphysical and not moral. For him morality is 'essentially social and western whereas metaphysics is eternal and Indian'. 'Blue blooded Brahmins' here refer to the highly elevated souls

in pursuit of realization and they do not behave like normal beings whose blood is red. Ramaswamy feels that the quest for reality with which he identifies India is such a big truth that it should be free of obligations of all the mundane, earthly moral ethics.

The reality is that a person may or may not seek *Brahman*, but still to live in this world in the right way and to achieve great things in this world one has to discipline the body, the senses, and the mind. Ramaswamy tries to suppress his desire and develops ailments. The fact of the matter is that the desires and emotions are not to be suppressed but they have to be channelised to proper direction. Self control does not mean torturing oneself rather it means directing one's energy in a positive way. If a person has libido and he directs his energy and interest in emulating the sages and saints who have self control, then the energy can be used in positive direction. Swami Satprakashananda of RamKrishna Mission says:

You have to direct the energy of the body, the organs, and the mind towards the attainment of the goal. Even if you do not care for the highest goal as delineated in the Upanishads, still, you have to exercise self-control; and the more you can distinguish the real self from the body, the organs, and the mind, the greater is the power of self control. . . .You have to distinguish yourself from the body, the organs and the mind. This is the secret of self-control according to Vedanta.(142-143)

A person like Ramaswamy has to realize that emotions and sexual desires are all natural phenomenon but a true *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*' is the one who knows how to control them and redirect them positively and not get controlled by them. One has to be the charioteer of the mind body and the senses and not let them drive one self. People should not be allowed to indulge in such lecherous activities if they are seriously pursuing the attainment of self realization

on another plane. Ramaswamy is trying to extract the best of both the worlds according to his convenience. He wants to continue on the path of quest for knowledge at the same time he wants to enjoy the worldly pleasures. Ramaswamy's actions are like that of a normal human being full of frailties and shortcomings and his belief of being an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' is a big myth. He realizes it towards the end and in utter frustration seeks for a Guru to guide him in the path of self realisation. The fact is that it is not just in the Hindu religion but in other religions like Catharism, Christianity also asceticism is honoured. As Alastair Niven puts it in 'Truth Within fiction':

Catharism had a formalized theology which owed much to doctrines that are Indian in origin. . . renunciation of the world of reality was therefore the ideal. Hence the proliferation of wandering scholars, troubadours and minstrels, hermits and monks in the period. The perfecti renounced the flesh in any form, abstaining from sexual intercourse, meat eating and permanent social communication. Asceticism was honoured. So too was the testing of one's dedication to these ideals by self flagellation or through the 'endura'.(43-44)

Proliferation refers to increase in the number of people who were attracted to the principles of self restrain. In Europe during the olden days there were plenty of people who were distressed from their lives. To get rid of the problems they made escapades to the practices of various religions. These Europeans started exercising self control by indulging deeply into religious practices. Asceticism is respectable in all religions like Hinduism, Christianity Catharism and so forth.

In India, Gandhi the ideal of all people practiced and preached asceticism. He was himself a vegetarian and often practiced self restrain by observing celibacy and fasts. Therefore Indian people believed and tried to practice these principles. Europeans considered Catharism as heresy

but tried to practice the principle of self control as it was considered highly honourable and was appreciated by one and all. Ramaswamy's image of a true *Vedantist* 'follower of *Vedanta*', which he is trying to project gets tarnished by his sexual escapades. Reality is that Ramaswamy still has miles to go before he escapes from the cobweb of *maya* 'illusion'. As Ramaswamy is completely trapped in the cobweb of *maya* 'illusion', so he is not able to bring about a balance in his life which is needed for a successful marriage. Ramaswamy's marriage to Madeleine ends in a fiasco and he gets disillusioned from his wife and also from the concept of a conventional marriage.

(G) Disillusionment from *Ardhangini* 'Husband's Half'

The wife is usually called the *ardhangini* 'husband's half'. The connotation of the word *ardhangini* is that the wife is regarded as the left part of the body of the husband. Lord Siva once appeared united in a single body with *Shakti* 'strength', his spouse. Siva on the right and *shakti* 'strength' on the left side is the manifestation of *Ardhanarishwar* 'the half man- half woman' the incarnation of God. This concept of *Ardhanarishwar* 'half man-half woman' is symbolic of *advaita* 'non-dualism' which says that *Brahman* is neither one nor two but not two, similarly the man and the wife in *Ardhanarishwar* 'half man-half woman' are neither one nor two but not two. When husband and wife annihilate their egos and surrender to each other completely, then they reach the *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state of two bodies and one *atman* 'soul'. Ramaswamy once expresses his feelings for marriage: "The real marriage is like oo, not like oio. When the ego is dead is marriage true. Who would remove my ego? . . ." (SR293).

The husband and wife both experience *Brahman* in the state where ego is destroyed. Sage Yajnavalkya gave this Upanisadic dictum to his wife Maitreyi and Swami Amarananda explains this in *Stories from Vedanta*,

Yajnavalkya then began to discourse on the subtle knowledge of the *Atman*. He said: “We love so many persons and objects. But that love is secondary, since they only contribute to the pleasure of the self. It is not for the sake of the husband that he is loved by the wife, but it is for the sake of her own self that he is loved. . . .Therefore our real self, which is the *Atman*, is alone worthy of realization. (67)

This concept of loving and worshipping the real self which one sees in the spouse is the true love and the foundation of an ideal marriage. Ramaswamy is also searching for Maitreyi in Madeleine and he hopes to seek his own self in her. Ramaswamy and Madeleine’s relationship starts with initial attraction. They meet in Paris and their love starts and this attraction is more intense because of their different colour and nationalities. He is obsessed with her golden hair and white skin and tries his best to share Madeleine’s cultural ethos and respect her family traditions by the appreciations of Catholicism. Ramaswamy himself expresses, “For to wed a woman, you must wed her God” (SR 84). The difference in colour and nationalities which brings them together also becomes a reason for their separation.

Ramaswamy and Madeleine had a huge cultural gap between them such that their cultural idiosyncrasies act as barrier in their coming together. Naik observes, “What destroys the marriage is not ‘*incompatibilite de temperaments*’ (on which ground Rama is advised to obtain a divorce) but an unbridgeable gulf between two culture ethos”(82). Madeleine is individualistic, confined to herself endorsing the world of intellectualism. Ramaswamy is the eastern mystic soul contemplating on metaphysical subjects always on the other hand Madeleine is practical in approach. Madeleine has a latent desire for some faith to cling to and this desire of her gets materialized in her voluntary conversion to Buddhism through Ramaswamy’s influence.

A typical European with her intellectual bent of mind, Madeleine could not comprehend her husband's Indian, mystic and metaphysical interpretation of life, she is therefore drawn towards Buddhism. Madeleine herself expresses this in her letter, "Your impersonal approach was strange to me, you yourself so impersonal"(SR36). Their views on sex are also different which also pushes them towards separation. Ramaswamy's views of sex within his own boundaries, have wholeness and sanity and are free from all notions of morality. Madeleine on the other hand fails to accept marriage as a sacrament and regards mere touch as unholy "Touch as I have said, was always distasteful to her, so she liked the untouching Cathars, she loved their celibacy She implored me to practice the ascetic *brahmacharya* of my ancestors . . ." (SR 15). Madeleine also breaks the myth of Ramaswamy that she is an obedient and caring wife. She calls him an inhuman husband but it is actually she who turns out to be a bit cruel in her attitude when Ramaswamy comes to her to perform his dharma. Madeleine instead of welcoming him asks:

"Why did you come?"

"To see you"

"You cannot see anything but eighteen aggregates"

"But eighteen aggregates can see eighteen aggregates," I said laughing.

"Then it is no business of mine", she said and

started counting her beads.(SR 387).

This kind of behaviour of hers gives Ramaswamy a rude shock. Ramaswamy had hoped to find a true companion (physical as well a spiritual) in marrying an intellectual equal. But she could not give him a sense of kinship. C.D. Narasimhaiah observes, "In fact they touched each other tangentially evading the deeper levels of being"(103).The deeper levels of their personalities

suggested by Narasimhaiah refers to their value system which is inculcated during their upbringing in their respective backgrounds and is acquired by them through what C.G. Jung, a psychologist, called 'Collective unconscious'

The collective unconscious features of Ramaswamy and Madeleine are diagonally opposite to each other, she being a catholic and he being a strict Hindu at heart. Madeleine expects a bookish perfection from Ramaswamy that shatters his hopes of reconciliation with her. In despair, she continues her individualistic approach to seek her identity through Buddhism. Marriage to her meant only a contract therefore she breaks it. Therefore in the end a dream marriage ends in a divorce.

After a year and a half of Madeleine and Ramaswamy's physical happiness and joy their life is struck with a tragic incident. Their first child Pierre dies when he is hardly seven months old. After hearing the news of his father's critical illness, he rushes back to India. His visit to India brings new changes in him and also gives a new meaning of life. With a spiritual bent of mind, and the Indian culture and heritage all around him, Ramaswamy is completely lost in his home land. "It was India I wanted to see, the India of my inner being. . . .A patch of triangular earth, surrounded by the three seas, somehow caught the spirit without time . . ." (SR246-247). It appears as if his *atman* 'soul' resides in India.

In India he comes in contact with his recently widowed young stepmother, his young half sister Saroja and with Savithri. These encounters give a new direction to his life. He is dazzled after meeting the woman of her dreams Savithri who is an epitome of Indian womanhood. He tries to have a relation with her which is compared to the relation of Radha and Krsna. The image of an Indian wife which he has in his mind comes alive in front of her.

The concept of forming images in a relationship is very well observed by J. Krishnamurthy in *Freedom from the Known*: 'Relationship between human beings is based on the image forming defensive mechanism. In all our relationships each of us builds an image about the other and these two images have relationships not the beings themselves'(74). Human relationship is a complex phenomenon. A relation between man and woman starts with initial attraction and slowly the emotional bond develops. This is a very interesting aspect pointed out by Krishnamurthy. Both husband and wife have preconceived notions about the relation and about the role of their spouses. Each of them tries to bring the other person as close as possible to the image they have in their minds. This is when the problem starts as one can change oneself but not the other person. Ramaswamy, the protagonist has an image of a wife who is Indian. He expects his wife to behave like a traditional south Indian bride who would put *Kumkum* 'vermilion' on her forehead, flowers in her hair ,wear a sari and worship him like God. Ramaswamy expresses his feelings, "Auspicious, so auspicious with *kumkum* coconut and *cholipiece* ,bangles on the arm, the necklace of black beads-is life"(SR 56).

Ramaswamy's belief that his marriage will be forever and Madeleine is his soul mate turns to be a myth when reality of their divorce emerges. After the breaking of their relation he feels lonely and completely shattered, he moves in search of a Guru to pacify the chaos and restlessness of his heart. Madeleine moves towards Buddhism to find peace, she becomes a nun and almost renounces the world. Kaushal Sharma comments:

Madeleine fails to establish spiritual bond just as Rukmani and Satyabhama, the wives of Lord Krishna fail to do so. For her mere touch is unholy. Thus her relationship remains barren and useless. She embraces Buddhism as an escape from him. She becomes a nun and there is no place for a nun in Hindu religion.

However this step of Madeliene proves a blessing in disguise as it enables ram to move on the path of self realization. (39)

Ramaswamy and Madeliene's relationship ends in a fiasco because of her failure to understand the metaphysical significance of the bond of marriage which is basic to his way of life. Thus her relationship turns out be unsuccessful and it remains 'barren'. Ramaswamy was an *advaitist* 'non-dualist' and for him the bond of marriage was like the bond of Radha and Krsna where the two become the not two. For Ramaswamy, marriage is not concerned with the two individuals but the bond should be strengthened by the family traditions and the spiritual and cultural ethos. "Death and birth mean different things to different peoples of the earth; to me Madeleine's presence would have meant the daughter-in-law coming home, the division of family responsibility; truly it would have been "the crossing of the threshold" "(SR 56).

For Ramaswamy, life is a pilgrimage and a quest for self realization. He does not find in Madeleine a spiritual partner who will help her in achieving self realization. He is an Indian with *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' views and she is a westerner with *dvaitic* 'dualistic' views. Madeleine's fascination for India does not last long as she comes in touch with it only tangentially and never gets the core of it. Madeleine once confesses to Ramaswamy,

"I have failed your gods?" She said.

"No", I said, . . . "You've failed me"(SR 66).

Ramaswamy feels that Madeleine is fighting for a cause and is in support of poor and the suffering. She gets attracted to Ramaswamy as he belongs to a country which is poor and exploited. " What I think . . . she loved me partly because she felt India had been wronged by the British, and because she would, in marrying me, know and identify herself with a great

people”(SR 18). The beliefs of Ramaswamy stand as an iron curtain between them. “She implored me to practice the ascetic *brahmacharya* of my ancestors, and I was too proud a Brahmin to feel defeated. The bridge was anyhow there, and could not be crossed” (SR 15). Ramaswamy and Madeleine believe that they would also reach their spiritual goals through this relationship but their marriage breaks and they go on to their individual paths. Ramaswamy and Madeleine fall apart because they get enmeshed in their own intellectual rigmaroles and philosophical arguments and lose touch with the outer reality. Both are self alienated individuals on their path of pursuit of metaphysical reality and the reality is coloured by their subjective view points. As Ramaswamy gets disillusioned from his wife, similarly Madeleine also gets disillusioned from her husband when her marriage breaks.

(H) Disillusionment from *Purusa* ‘Man’

In the Samkhya system there are two ultimate entities *Purusa* ‘man’ and *Prakriti* ‘nature’. They are symbolic of the two important constituents of the world which are responsible for the propagation of the human race. The union of the two represents the union of body with its soul. Dr. RadhaKrishnan says, “The characteristics of *prakriti* and *purusa* are opposed in nature. *Prakriti* is non-consciousness (*acetanam*), while *purusa* is consciousness (*sacetanam*). . . .*Prakriti* is characterized by the three gunas, while *purusa* is devoid of the gunas; *prakriti* is the object, while *purusa* is the subject”(Indian Philosophy by S.Radhakrishnan 2: 283). One can say that *prakriti* ‘nature’ is the body and *purusa* ‘man’ is the *atman* ‘soul’. In a man-woman relationship this combination of *atman* ‘soul’ and body is *advaitic* ‘non-dualistic’ as it makes the couple one. According to the Hindu philosophy, marriage is that bond which unites the *purusa* ‘man’ and *prakriti* ‘nature symbolic of woman’ in a such a way that they become one. Ramaswamy says, “All women are perfect women, for they have the feminine principle in them, the *yin*, the *prakriti* . . .”

(SR311). This feminine principle unites with the masculine principle to reach *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state.

The western concept is dualistic and thus different from the eastern. Madeleine is a European who believed in dualism where the husband and wife are regarded as separate individual and their identities cannot be annihilated in marriage. Madeleine is a very sensitive and mature woman and it appears many a times that the marriage fails more because of Ramaswamy's faults rather than Madeleine's. She is a teacher in history at Caen university who is fascinated towards India and Indian people. She falls deeply in love with Ramaswamy and dreams of a beautiful blissful life with him. Madeleine's overwhelming fondness for Ramaswamy and her eagerness to die in India the strange land, signify her romantic love for him. "I am happy I shall die in India you will burn me, won't you Rama? . . ." (SR 68). She even worships Lord Siva and *nandi* 'bull'. "And from then on Madeleine never passed by the door of the garden without either touching the huge hump of the bull, or caressing him . . ." (SR 55). She used to pour water over *Shivalinga*. Her emotions and deep love for Ramaswamy leads to an intellectual quest for Indian thought and philosophy. It is an account of her interest in Indian thought, philosophy and culture that she is gradually attracted towards Buddhism.

Madeleine like any other woman has dreams of an ideal marriage, a perfect husband who will stand by her through thick and thin. All her dreams and expectations come crashing down like castle in the air when she realizes that Ramaswamy is not the man of her dreams and not a good husband. The reality emerges when their first son dies. When their son dies she is totally devastated and broken, she wanted her husband to stand by her in this moment of crisis and share her grief. Madeliene wrote in a letter to Ramaswamy, "I bore him, your son, with such love,

for he was a child of love; but you were more interested in his sonship than in his being my son. The feminine to the Indian must always be accessory, a side issue.”(SR 36)

Ramaswamy on the other hand, instead of sharing her grief remains unaffected by it, his behaviour appears insensitive towards Madeleine. Leaving her alone, he comes back to India on account of his father’s illness. On reaching his motherland India, Ramaswamy’s Indianness surfaces and he gets attracted to Indian women. He totally forgets his grieving wife and indulges in two extramarital affairs out of which one is totally based on lust. He commits adultery which is a big ground for a woman to leave him. Madeleine’s myth breaks and her dreams are shattered. Her second son also dies leaving her completely shattered and on the brink of a break down. He disassociates himself from her as no matter how much she tries she cannot be an Indian wife. She suffers from the pangs of loneliness and waits for her husband to come back. Madeleine writes in one of her letters, “I could not visit the church without you; . . . And how sad, Rama, is a lonely woman. Without a man she can see nothing great or holy. There the Hindus are right. Man must lead woman to the altar of God” (SR 39-40).

It may be observed that the entire novel is presented from Ramaswamy’s point of view. The autobiographical tone goes well with the subjective vision, of the world. The readers get only a faint glimpse of Madeleine’s fears and frustrations, ideals and anguish. The information is filtered through the consciousness of Ramaswamy. One wonders what it would have been had Madeleine been given a chance to narrate the story in the first person. Even as matters stand, one gets puzzled over Ramaswamy’s relationship with women, which is guided by his very personal concept of the feminine principle. Uma Parameswaran attributes the failure of their marriage to Ramaswamy’s inability to interact,

Marriage involves interaction and Rama's essential weakness is that he cannot survive interaction. Rama lives within his illusory realm, a snake - charmer, piping tunes to serpents that dance as and when he wills them to. Madeleine is the only rope, the only reality that intrudes upon his insular world. He builds a romantic image of her also, but the very state of cohabitation makes continuous idealization impossible. . . no marriage could have brought him happiness.(155-156)

Communication is the key to any successful relationship. Both Ramaswamy and Madeleine are very reserved in expressing their feelings. 'This communication gap is one of the major reasons of the failure of their marriage. The state of cohabitation demands maturity and not 'continuous idealization'. Partners in a relation have to learn to forget and forgive as they cannot exhibit ideal behaviour always. Ramaswamy seems to have failed her with his refusal to step out of his self-endorsed subjective view-point regarding the role of a woman in man's life which leads to the final separation.

Ramaswamy fails as a husband at two levels. Firstly because of his 'self endorsed subjective view point' regarding women. He is so rigid about his views on Indianness and Indian woman that he fails to understand the reality, who is 'Madeleine the rope of his life'. Secondly he betrays the trust of his wife by indulging in infidelity which is considered a sin both in India and the West. Madeleine is a good wife, a good human being, but very lonely. She is all alone in her quiet grief and pain and with no one to cling to she turns towards Buddhism. "I am not writing a thesis. I am studying Buddhism for my own spiritual benefit" (SR 303). Her restless and grieved soul finds peace in teachings of Buddhism as Ramaswamy is not around her but busy in his own world of *advaita* 'non-dualism' and relationships with various women.

It appears that Ramaswamy had never loved Madeleine. He was just infatuated by her but love did not exist in his heart. He himself confessed, "Did I love the self in Madeleine? I knew I did not. I knew I could not love: that I did not even love Pierre"(SR24). In her search for identity, Madeleine drifts aimlessly from one meaningless abstraction to another only to embrace Buddhism, and renounces her ties with her husband. Ramaswamy is conscious of his ego and realizes that marriage cannot be a true bond until the ego is dead. A very important conclusion is drawn by Narasimhaiah in his article "The Serpent and the Rope: A Study"

The failure is not due to any one cause exclusively, such as Raja Rao's understanding and sympathy. It is not due to the feeble mingling of cultures, though it is there; not due to the difference of nationalities, ("What fools we are to think the Rhone Divided mankind" for the Rhone is sister to Ganga and flowed into her); nor due to difference of outlooks and ideas wholly-though all these have contributed, but primarily because true marriage is possible only when the ego is dead and when the duality of life is resolved in the One.(94)

'Duality of life' has to change to non-duality. Madeleine's marriage would have lasted if she and Ramaswamy had annihilated their egos. Ramaswamy being believer of *advaita* 'non-dualism' should have done it easily but he could never let go off his ego. Madeleine was also a strong independent woman with her *dvaitic* 'dualistic' views and she was not ready either to annihilate her ego. Their principles and value systems appear to be in conflict with each other. She declares "You people are sentimental about the invisible, we about the visible. And to me you were the invisible made concrete, so visible, incarnate, beside me-and my husband"(SR 37).The gulf of their spiritual thinking was too wide to be bridged.

She behaves like a saint, or a monk. She often keeps long fasts, shifts to a small house and is least interested in performing the worldly duties. Behaving like a mature and enlightened being she sets him free to pursue his own dreams."I am sure it would also be wise to give Rama his freedom. He must marry someone younger from his own country. He will be happy with an Indian woman, I have no doubt."(SR 394). This reveals the magnanimity of Madeleine, where as Ramaswamy shows complete immaturity and is not bothered much about Madeleine's future. Ramaswamy's attitude towards her appears inhuman and far away from spirituality. Madeleine expresses her anger in one of her letters, "You were cruel, as you would have been to a Hindu wife.(SR 37). Madeleine realizes her illusion about the *purusa* 'man' of her life and initiates for divorce. K.R. Rao comments:

Madeleine is not deceived either, she realizes the utter incompatibility of her interests with Rama's rituals and values and slowly drifts away from him. At the end she even snaps her ties with her husband in order to free herself from the *samsara's* bondage and finds a personal solution for her problems. By equating her catholicism with Buddhism and attains near-sainthood, . . .(85)

Samsara's 'worldly' bondage refers to Madeleine's relationship with Ramaswamy. She gets disillusioned by this relation and marriage to her proves to be a myth. This reminds us of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in which marriage is regarded as a myth by one of the characters. It is said by Mephistophillis, "Marriage is but a ceremonial toy;" (2.1.157). Marriage is considered just a ritual which is insignificant. A lifelong relationship cannot be formed based on the ceremonies and rituals. Both the individuals need to have compatibility and oneness of the mind body and soul. This could not happen in case of Ramaswamy and Madeleine and so they remain lonely in their individual pursuits.

Madeleine realizes her loneliness and so clings to the faith of Buddhism as she finds some solace in Buddha's teachings. The most important relationship of her life turns to be a myth. Here also there is a *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' philosophy emerging of *Brahm satya jagat mithya* 'Brahman is the reality, the world is an illusion'. The husband and wife relation as one perceives is a myth as there is only one reality *Brahman*. Ramaswamy also feels that for a real union of two souls there should be a complete surrender from the side of both the partners. An Indian woman, as she is spiritually inclined, is considered an epitome of sacrifice and total surrender. Thus Ramaswamy believes that a true marriage is possible only with an Indian woman, whom he calls 'A Benaras born bride'.

(I) Benaras Born Bride - A Myth

Raja Rao has used this phrase 'All brides be Benaras born' at many places in the novel. Ramaswamy tells Savithri, "Man must unto himself be himself and his bride. You remember I told you, all brides be Benaras born"(SR 360). This phrase epitomizes the eternal love of the women who have transcended moral and social inhibitions and who endeavour to seek immortality through true love. As Prabha Dayal puts it:

All brides be Benaras born is one of the most controversial ideas in Raja Rao's novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*. The recurrence of the observation at several places, particularly in relation to Saroja and Savithri is imbued with symbolic ramifications. . . .It is obvious that the Benaras born brides mean the brides who have spiritual inclinations or the keenness for contemplation of the Divine.(64-65)

This phrase is used by Ramaswamy in the novel for Indian brides in general. Ramaswamy has a strong feeling that India is a land of spirituality where "duality is anti Indian; the non dual affirms

the Truth” (SR41). All Indian women are spiritual and they completely comprehend the principle of *advaita* ‘non-dualism. As Ramaswamy marries a French woman with dualistic thinking, he constantly compares her with her Indian counterparts. He realizes that only Indian women can be Maitreyi for their husbands. This image of Indian women being divine is there in the minds of people all over the globe. The ideals of Indian women have been Goddesses like Sita, Radha and Parvati. These Goddesses are totally devoted to their husbands and annihilate their egos and surrender completely to their husbands. Indian women also try to emulate these ideals in their lives. These women help their husbands to reach the *advaitic* ‘non-dualistic’ stage and through total surrender to them they also reach that state. Thus Ramaswamy feels that all brides or rather all wives should behave like Indian brides.

A Hindu woman knows how to worship her Krishna, the lord. . . .The cattle tear their ropes away, the deer leaves the forests and come leaping to the groves, and with the peacocks seated on the branches of asoka, Krishna dances on the red earth. What *Gopi*, my Lord would not go to this festival of love? Women lose their shame and men lose their anger, for in Brindavan Krishna the Lord dances.(SR 209)

This is a magnificent description of the *raaslila* ‘divine play’ of Krsna with his *gopis* ‘devotees’. *Gopis* ‘devotees’ leave their coyness in their love for the Lord and merge themselves into him reaching *advaitic* ‘non-dualistic’ state. *Raaslila* ‘divine play’ is the play of the union of *atman* ‘soul’ with *paramatman* ‘divine soul’. According to Raja Rao an ordinary Indian woman can also become a *gopi* ‘devotee’ to her husband .Only an Indian bride has the capacity to become a *gopi* ‘devotee’ as these values and traditions are inherent in her and thus she becomes the ‘Benaras born bride’ who represents eternal love.

Instead of India, Benaras is used in the phrase as Benaras epitomizes our culture and tradition. It is a place where dead reach heaven and living are purged of their sins. "Ah, brother, Benaras is Benaras, Kashi the Holy, and whatever sins you commit in Kashi-well, there even a dog, or a bull or a four shoulder Brahmin attains liberation"(SR 191). Benaras stands for purity and truth as it is a symbol of Indian spiritualism and *Vedanta*. Therefore the phrase has been coined by Raja Rao that 'All brides be benaras born'. This phrase comes to Ramaswamy's mind especially when he comes in contact with Indian women like Savithri, Saroja and his little stepmother.

Savithri is the actual 'Benares born bride' for Ramaswamy. She is the perfect Indian woman who surrenders herself completely to her man without ego like Radha and Mira. "Not not so with Savithri. Having accepted bondage she was free. To be a woman, she knew, was to be absorbed by a man"(SR187). She is the one whom as the critic Prabha Dayal calls has 'an inclination for the divine'. She hero worships Ramaswamy as he is Krsna and she is Radha. They meet at the spiritual level where physical union seems insignificant. It is an *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' union of the two *atman* 'souls'. The *gopis* 'devotees', too love Krsna without the sense of social restraint, as their love for the God was true and eternal. Though married, the *gopis* 'devotees' were above the social bonds and enjoyed freedom in love. Raja Rao has always emphasized the freedom in love. He characteristically remarks, "To be free is to know one is free, beyond the body and beyond the mind; to love is to know one is love; to be pure is to know one is purity. Impurity is in action and reaction: what is born must die; what has form must vanish and stink"(SR 382). Raja Rao believes that freedom and purity depends on man's own attitude and thinking. The bodily sins are no sins for the body is to get destroyed. Love is beyond the body and mind. Ramaswamy conversing with Savithri says,

“But love can never be a movement, a feeling, an act “All that acts can only be of the body, or the mind, or the ego. Only the selfish can love.”

“And the love less?”

“They become love”(SR 177).

The love between Ramaswamy and Savithri calls for such growth and understanding. Savithri may marry Pratap but she will continue to act as *gopi* ‘devotee’ to her Krsna. Ramaswamy meets Savithri and gets attracted to her Indian beauty and intellect. He feels intuitively that Savithri can be the right companion in life. On the other hand, Savithri is charmed more by Ramaswamy’s intellect than anything else and her feelings are more of admiration and respect. Narsingh Shrivastav, in this context comments:

She is so much impressed by Rama’s ability to discover values and metaphysical truths from the analysis of the vast canvas of world history that she accepts him as her Guru. As a result her love remains of such an abstract and rational nature that it does not allow the development of the emotional nature into a passionate urge. She loves the very idea of love and her love has clearly a platonic touch about it, so much so that she worships him knowing that he is already married. (78)

Savithri considers Ramaswamy her Guru and worships him. Her feelings are not just of love but she respects him and is in awe of him. Therefore there is no scope of physical love as it was love of a spiritual kind. It is Ramaswamy’s myth that he equates this love with the love of an ordinary man and woman as it is more of Guru-discipline relationship. The disciple Savithri worships the Guru as equivalent of God. She touches his heart and praises him always. He was like the Lord and she her

gopi 'devotee'. Savithri exhibits the power to rise from the level of the body to that of the mind and ever higher.

Ramaswamy believes his true love is Savithri and their symbolic marriage is true marriage. In a hotel room he pushes the toe rings given by his stepmother into the toes of Savithri "Slowly I anointed her with *kumkum* from my home, offered her the coconut and betel nus-there were eight, round and auspicious ones. And now I shall place the toe-rings on your feet"(SR 212). This symbolic ritual marriage represents another milestone in his journey from illusion to reality. Ramaswamy believes that it is the marriage of *Purusa* 'man' with *Prakriti* 'nature'. The feminine principle is united with masculine principle. Savithri humbly submits to Ramaswamy, "Yes", she said . . . "I have known my lord for a thousand lives, from *Janam* to *Janam* have I known my Krishna."(SR 212). She feels that she is Radha who is worshipping her Lord. Ramaswamy realizes that there can be no self illumination without the incorporation of the feminine principle into one's being and that he could reach the *advaitic* 'non-dualistic' state with her as he had annihilated his ego in this relationship. "Saint I had to become if I would know Savithri, not a saint of ochre and bone- bowl, but one which had known the extinction of the ego"(SR 169).

The belief of Savithri's love turns into a myth when Savithri marries Pratap her fiance, Ramaswamy gets frustrated and disappointed. At this point he forgets his definitions of love which exists between two souls. He admits, "How I would have loved to have taken Savithri into my arms; how natural, how true it would have been! But we were not one silence, we were two solitudes" (SR 179) . He behaves like an ordinary lover who has lost his love forever it appears that one jerk of his life shakes him and he forgets all his *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge which he has often boasted of. Ramasamy gets disillusioned from this relation too. He confesses,

“Rumours of Savithri’s marriage reached my ears through people . . .” Ramaswamy exclaims, “My Indian pilgrimage was ended”(SR 295-296).

Ramaswamy feels that his link with India is broken completely. In his desperation he establishes physical relation with Laxmi. K.R.Rao is of the view: “This ritual marriage is the consummation of Rama’s quest, it cleanses him as it makes him a free man so that he welcomes even a casual sex relationship with Laxmi, the wife of captain Shamsunder in Bombay”(81). If this marriage consummates Ramaswamy’s quest then he should exercise more control over physical desires like a true *Vedantist* ‘follower of *Vedanta*’ and should not indulge in a liaison with no purpose or meaning. If he still has no control over sexual desire then there is no consummation of quest. The reality is that he goes astray and this uncontrollable sexual passion is characteristic of a man who is completely lost in illusion *maya* ‘illusion’.

Ramaswamy behaves like an ordinary man who is miles away from the path of self realization. It is his myth that Savithri and his relation with her, pushes him onto the path of self realization. True marriage does give a man freedom but the freedom is not to go astray and behave immorally, but the freedom to grow as a human being and take oneself to higher levels of spirituality. The critic K.R. Rao’s statements are not fully agreeable. Therefore this relation has not cleansed him from inside but increased his restlessness and frustration more and more.

Savithri is the Benaras born bride is also a myth. As one analyses Savithri’s character, one perceives that she is hardly capable of meditative contemplation. She is extremely modern and western in her life style. Her fixing of dance engagements on the telephone or her craze to visit European countries reveals her longing for worldly pleasures “Savithri came with that sweep and nervousness of the modern girl and sat near me: She was fascinated with the idea that I was working on the Albigensians; . . .she was too modern for me; she had already started

smoking”(SR31). It’s not in the mettle of Savithri to realize God, by understanding the self or by *yogabhyasa* ‘practice of yoga’.

The theoretical knowledge of scriptures or mere *Vedantic* ‘related to *Vedanta*’ verbosity would not lead one towards God or self realization. She had *Vedantic* ‘related to *Vedanta*’ knowledge, both Savithri and Ramaswamy held discussions regarding the truth. When Ramaswamy questions her about truth she replies,

“Is-ness is the Truth”, she answered.

“And is- ness is what?”

“Who asks that question?”

“Myself.”

“Who”

“I”

“Of whom?”

“ No one”

“Then ‘I am’ is”

“Rather I am am”

“Tautology!” She laughed. (SR130)

This myth of Savithri being the Benaras born bride is broken when she marries Pratap and he goes in search of a Guru to move ahead on the spiritual path. He believes that Savithri will help

him move towards this path. Ramaswamy realizes that his marriage with Savithri or for that matter with Madeleine is not true. There is always an ego in between in all his relations which he could never transcend. His relation with Savithri was full of expectations and ego. The reality is that true marriage is of spirit and it takes place when man and woman transcend their psycho-physical identities which give rise to the sense of the ego and become united in spirit, the state of perfect unity or oneness. Ramaswamy believes that his marriage is true with Savithri. The marriage with Savithri does not take place in actuality and is never consummated even spiritually. Ramaswamy realizes that for true marriage of the souls, ego is the greatest impediment.

The only conspicuous thing that Savithri did was to make him realize certain things in life. The Savithri episode in his life, brought clarity about the problems of life and he started viewing them in new light. He understood that he is still lost in worldliness and if he had to move towards *Brahman*, he has to seek a spiritual guide, a Guru. It is Savithri who becomes instrumental in making him aware of the ego being an obstacle in his quest for truth and in making him turn to his Guru propeller for spiritual enlightenment.

Woman plays an important role in man's life. It is through her that a man fully realizes himself as man is incomplete without woman. A woman alone enables a man to be in a world that is familiar and whole. A man like Ramaswamy who is seeking *Brahman* through the relations with women, ultimately realizes that reality is somewhere else and so he goes on a quest for a Guru to solve his problems which actually are neither physical nor sexual but spiritual.

(J)Is Guru a Myth?

A Guru has an exalted place in the Hindu society and he is considered even greater than God.

S.N. Huddar says in *Shri Guru Charitra*:

Gurur Bramha Gurur Vishnu Gurur devo Maheshwara

Guru sakshat parabrahma tasmai shri guruve namah

O Master; you are the creator, the sustainer, the divine and the destroyer. You are the omnipresent and the glorious transcendental divinity, I salute you.(trans.mine)

A Guru is considered as equivalent to the creator. Each one of us requires talent, knowledge and skill to conduct ourselves in this world for achieving success. The Guru helps us in recognizing the talent in us and accordingly provides the necessary knowledge that can help us honing our skill for conducting the worldly act for success. Guru is also the sustainer, through his knowledge and experience, helps us in taking the right decisions in our life to move ahead in the path of spirituality. Guru is the divine and the destroyer, during the course of worldly act; we accumulate bad feelings, greed, fear and other ailments that may take away our humanity. Guru, the master, helps us get rid of such negative thoughts and energies from our life and help us remain pure. Guru is the omnipresent and the glorious transcendental divinity. The very awareness about the world is instilled in us by Guru. We know God because Guru has introduced and helped us identify the god. The path to the Godliness is through the Guru and that's why Guru is the living transcendental divinity. Showing the significance of a Guru, the famous poet Kabir has written a verse which is included in the Website *903 Verses of Kabir in Hindi Kabir ke Dohe*,

Guru Govind dou khade kake lagoon paye

Balihari guru aapki Govind dio bataye.

When Guru and the God both are in our front, we should first bow our head to Guru because he is the one who has told us about the god.(trans. mine)

Kabir has also said that if God is angry one can consult the Guru to learn the skill to make God happy but if Guru is angry then one cannot go to anyone as one has lost the source of consultation. The main theme of *The Serpent and the Rope* is the quest for knowledge which can alone enable a man to distinguish between the serpent and the rope, illusion and reality. Ramaswamy, the protagonist believes that he can be saved only by a Guru. It is the Guru alone who can dispel all illusions, clear away the darkness of ignorance and make him realize the truth. Ramaswamy is completely disillusioned from his life and he is left behind even in his goal of self realization. In his desperation, he seeks the help of a Guru. He thinks that a Guru is the one who can show him the light. It is the Guru who can dispel the darkness of ignorance and bring some clarity in his life. Ramaswamy says towards the end: "Do I long for God? . . . No, not a God but a guru is what I need . . . Lord, Lord my Guru ,come to me, tell me; give me Thy touch, vouchsafe, I cried, the vision of Truth, Lord my Lord"(SR 402-403).

In the very beginning of *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswamy traces his lineage to the Upanishadic sage Yajnyavalkya. His forefathers had great knowledge of the *Vedas* and the Upanisad and he himself has knowledge of *advaita* 'non-dualism'. He always feels that the aim of human life is to realise the Absolute and to win freedom from the bondage of ignorance or delusion and misery. Like a wanderer on earth or a holy vagabond, Ramswamy is depicted to be passing through various phases in his life. He meets a dead end in all his relationship as his wife divorces him and his children die. He can neither become a head of the family in India nor perform his duties as husband in Europe. Ramaswamy is totally disgusted from his life as he faced failure on all fronts. He even cannot complete his thesis and all his beliefs with which he starts his life prove to be myths and he appears to be a broken man from inside."I roll and roll in my bed. Not that I am ill; . . . I weep into my bed. I am ashamed to say I weep a lot these days. . . " (SR 402). All his beliefs turn out to be myths and his life appears to be in total mess. The *Vedantist* 'follower of

Vedanta' in him seeks for knowledge, for self realization. He cannot move properly in any direction.

All the efforts of Ramaswamy start directing towards the new questions of his existence in the universe, his past present and the future. He has to find the real answers to his problems. He needs someone to guide him in this mess. In India, the Guru occupies the central place in the lives of the people as he is regarded higher to the place of parents. He shows the way to salvation and is able to lead the people to the purpose of human existence, of attaining *mukti* 'final emancipation'. The Guru is someone in whom *vidya* 'knowledge' is personified. The Guru is able to perceive the real and distinguish the real from the unreal. Swami Satprakashananda says, "Vedanta, more than any other religion, emphasized that through devotion or through knowledge, illumined by the teacher, you can proceed and ultimately realize God as the soul of your soul. You will be one with Him, that is the goal of every life" (49). The Guru has always played an important role in the social and religious life of India.

Mythological heroes like Sri Rama, the Pandvas and the Kauravas never did anything important without consulting their Gurus whom they called *Rajgurus* 'Guru of the kings'. The Guru-disciple relationship is part of the rhythm of Indian life and thought. The archetypal saint hero or the Guru is a pervasive influence in the collective unconscious of a tradition bound society like India. The Guru-disciple paradigm is recurrent in the epics and it helps society transmit traditional wisdom to posterity.

In India the role of a Guru is very significant and important but in the life of Ramaswamy, the role of a Guru appears to be a myth. He himself tries to act as a Guru to his wife, Savithri, little mother and so forth. An important aspect conspicuous in all the novels of Raja Rao is that the protagonist who is equipped with *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' knowledge plays the role of a

Guru to the fellow beings. The seeker himself becomes a guide to the people around him. Ramaswamy is no exception to this, he indulges in *Vedantic* 'related to *Vedanta*' verbosity. " Maya, on seeing the Truth born from herself-that is, man in seeing his own true nature as Truth-sees that illusion has never existed, will never exist. So Maya did not die; Maya recognized truth being truth;"(SR 110). His preachings do not guide anyone but only exhibit his bookish knowledge.

Most of the characters of the novel give him a patient hearing and seek for his blessings as if he is some divine soul. The reality is that he is a Europeanised Brahmin who is neither completely Hindu nor completely Christian or Buddhist. As P. Dayal puts it "Rama's ancestral spiritual compulsions impel him to observe *Vedantic* discipline while his liberal European upbringing evokes the desire for erotic freedom. He therefore oscillates between matter and spirit pleasure and truth, between the call of the flesh and the love of God"(31).

It is the oscillation between the East and the West that is the focal point of Ramaswamy's life. It is this oscillation which makes him a man of divided consciousness and a restless soul. His quest of self realization and his worldly attachments go hand in hand. Sometimes he is so much after his quest for reality that he forgets duties of his life. Every Guru or an enlightened soul teaches us first to finish our worldly duties without attachment and then move towards self realization. Ramaswamy at times fails in the performance of his duties. He himself admits towards the end, "Could I give Little Mother such joy if I were back? What can a poor professor in Hyderabad do? At best I could take her on a pilgrimage once in two yearsWhere so ever I am is my country, and I weep into my bed"(SR 402). It appears that he is full of remorse that he couldn't perform the duty of a good son.

Ramaswamy is not clear about the meaning of a Guru. A Guru is himself a refined human being who has renounced the world and has experienced *Brahman*. To know the Absolute is to become

the Absolute, if Ramaswamy is not aware of the role of a Guru in his life then how can one be sure that a Guru will bring about the transformation in his life and can lead him to renunciation. A person like Ramaswamy who is so much involved in worldly affairs, and is miles away from the detachment and renunciation could attain the Absolute, appears to be a myth. His perception and his thinking are deeply involved in *maya* 'illusion'. The attachment of ego, wealth, fame and name gets submerged when one begins the quest for the truth and divine. On the contrary Ramaswamy is completely submerged in narcissism. He is only worried about his life, his interests and aims. He appears to be an egoist, absorbed in self love. "I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything, such is the pride of caste and race, . . ." (SR 19).

Ramaswamy's pride and ego is very much reflected in the above sentence such that he could not think beyond himself. Ramakrishna Paramhansa says, "All trouble and botheration come to an end when the 'I' dies. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the 'I' doesn't disappear. For people like you and me, it is good to have the feeling, 'I am a lover of God' " (*Thus Spake Sri Ramakrishna* 83). Supreme sacrifice, renunciation of the world and worldly possessions are important factors in not just being a Guru but also in becoming a traveller of the path of self realization.

Gautama Buddha , RamaKrishna Paramhansa are the few perfect examples of a Guru. They had not only realized *Brahman* but were one with *Brahman*. To find such an enlightened soul is quiet difficult nowadays. To find such an enlightened soul who has renounced worldly goods and possessions, one who has renounced selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage is very difficult in this world. There are many self proclaimed Gurus in the world today. The Gurus hold public attention, organize *satsang* 'discourses', *bhajans* 'hymns', teach art of living and thinking, but after sometime one finds them involved in some scandal. Their activities, their lifestyle comes

under suspicion for they teach renunciation and asceticism but they themselves lead luxurious lives. It appears a myth that Ramaswamy will ever find a true Guru and if he does find one, it is doubtful whether he will be able to achieve enlightenment or not. Therefore the role of Guru appears to be a myth in the present context. As Ramaswamy moves ahead in his spiritual journey, slowly the myths break and the reality emerges. This reality of the Absolute outshines all the myths of his life.

(K)Reality Overshadows Myth

When the ray of reality strikes the darkness of myth is dispelled. In the novel there is an interesting conversation between Madeleine and Ramaswamy over myth and reality, *maya* 'illusion' and the ultimate Truth, "Did it not mean, Truth was born to illusion? And because Truth came into existence *Maya* died, and so the mother of the Buddha died. . . .Truth- sees that illusion has never existed, will never exist. So *Maya* did not die; *Maya* recognized truth being truth; *Maya* was as such nothing but the truth"(SR110).

These meaningful lines explain that when the reality is born myth dies and merges with the truth such that myth and reality are all one. The principle of *advaita* 'non-dualism' advocates, that everything is merged into one ultimate reality *Brahman*. Where there is non-duality there is no difference of myth and reality, all become one pervading consciousness. An ordinary man leads his life in a manner which is in complete contradiction to *advaita* 'non-duality'. He takes his life and his problems as real and *Brahman* which is alien to him as unreal as his mind is engulfed with the cloud of *maya* 'illusion'. Ramaswamy is also drowned in the ocean of *maya* 'illusion' and *avidya* 'ignorance'. The irony is that he claims to have knowledge of *advaita* 'non-dualism' as is evident in the above quoted lines, still he is miles away from the detachment and self control. His life

revolves around his ego and it gets ruined ultimately as his major relationships break on its account.

Ramaswamy is the seeker of truth and self realization but it appears that his journey is at a very primary level. He has to cross big hurdles of ego, attachment and so forth. He has *vidya* 'knowledge' but only theoretical as it has not gone into deeper layers of his subconscious mind. *Vedanta* has enumerated five impairments in the path of self realization. They are: *Avidya* 'ignorance,' *Asmita* 'notion of I am I', *Raja* 'attachment', *Dvesa* 'repugnance' and *Abhinivesa* 'the will to live'. *Avidya* 'ignorance' is the root of all the other the impairments as it casts its spell over the reasoning faculty, impelling it to false predictions and wrong deductions. *Asmita* 'notion of I am I' creates the ego which is a big hurdle in the path of self development. *Raja* 'attachment' and *dvesa* 'repugnance' are at the root of all the pairs of opposites in the sphere of human emotions, reactions and opinions. They tear the soul unremittingly upsetting its balance and rendering it incapable of reflecting without distortion the reality of *Brahman*. *Abinivesa* 'the will to live' blurs one's mind and vision such the one strongly believes that one will live forever that life is permanent and death is the ultimate reality. As Heinrich Zimmer states,

These five hindrances, or impairments, are to be regarded as so many perversions, troubling consciousness and concealing the essential state of serenity of our true nature. They are generated involuntarily and continuously, welling in an uninterrupted effluence from the hidden source of our phenomenal existence. They give strength to the substance of ego, and ceaselessly build up its illusory frame. (295).

These hindrances build 'up the illusory frame' of life which is also *maya* 'illusion'. *Maya* 'illusion' hinders the process of realizing 'our true nature' which is pure unlimited, infinite

Brahman. These obstacles could be overcome by the practice of self-restraint. Once these obstacles are crossed, we can identify with our true nature which is of everlasting bliss. Ramaswamy is also the seeker of self-realization. He is on his journey to realize *Brahman* through the process of *neti-neti* 'not this not this'. He undergoes various experiences and negates them realizing that it is not *Brahman*. Through *neti-neti* 'not this not this' one ultimately reaches *Brahman*. This path is adopted by Ramaswamy as he undergoes relationships with women and is disillusioned from them. He starts his thesis leaving it in the middle again to get disillusioned. He tries to find reality in his Indian traditions and culture again to negate the experience.

Ramaswamy is totally under the grip of the five hindrances enumerated above. *Raja* 'attachment' and *dvesa* 'repugnance' are part and parcel of his life. He is attracted to women and is involved in deep bonds with them like Madeleine and Savithri. He has pangs of jealousy when his wife is friendly with another man. He says, "She cared for his presence a great deal, did Madeleine, and the respect she showed him was not altogether happy for a Brahmin husband to bear"(SR73). He gets involved with Savithri and when she marries Pratap and he gets utterly frustrated and experiences *dvesa* 'repugnance'. These emotions tear him from inside and make him desperate. Ramaswamy also has *abhinivesa*, 'will to live' a deep longing to live his life to the fullest. He takes pride in being a Brahmin who belongs to a spiritually inclined clan. He wants to write a thesis to bring a revolution in the philosophical world. Ramaswamy states, "I did not want merely to write a thesis, but to write a thesis which would also be an Indian attempt at a philosophy of history. I wanted to absorb more than to know"(SR103). All these desires make his life complicated and push him off from the path of *jnana* 'knowledge' yoga.

These impairments could be conquered by three yogic disciplines : asceticism, learning the holy teachings and complete surrender to the will and grace of God. Zimmer states categorically,

The serene substratum is reached, released and made known to consciousness, only as a result of the most severe and thoroughgoing yogic process of disentanglement and introversion. To which end, three lines or ways of yogic disciplines have been developed : 1.asceticism, 2.'learning in the holy teaching' and 3.complete surrender to the will and grace of God.(301).

Asceticism is a preliminary exercise to purge away the impurities that stain our intrinsic nature. According to the *Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary*, asceticism is "strictly self-disciplined and avoiding any pleasure or luxuries". Ramaswamy was not self disciplined as he could exercise no control over his emotions. He develops incestuous crush for his half sister and step mother. Ramaswamy needs to practice asceticism if he seriously wants to pursue the goal of self realization. Ascetic practice dispels the impairments just as the wind dispels the clouds that hide the sky.

The next aspect in crossing the hurdle is 'learning in the holy teachings'. First one should get the sacred texts by heart and then keep them alive in the memory through a methodical recitation of holy prayers. This practice imbues the mind with the essence of the teaching, and so draws it away from the worldly things stepping it in the pious atmosphere of religious detachment. Ramaswamy does practice this, he not only repeats the teachings of the Vedas but also chants mantras like Gayathri mantra which purifies his mind to certain extent. Ramaswamy states, "I said it day after day, almost for twenty years; I must have said it a million million times: OM, O face of truth with a disk of gold, remove the mist(of ignorance) that I may see u face to face"(SR 246).

The third aspect is complete surrender to the will of God and this aspect is not followed by Ramaswamy as his ego is so dominant that he behaves like a male chauvinist, he expresses his feelings to Madeleine, "But I'm a Brahmin, and for me touch and knowledge go with the holiness

of surrender, of woman not taking me there, but I revealing to her that”(SR 66). Ramaswamy does not have the humbleness to submit his deeds onto the feet of the Lord. It is a practical exercise of spiritual development based on the Karma yoga of doing one’s work and surrendering the result to God.

By implementing the yogic principles one can cross all the hurdles and reach the ultimate reality. Ramaswamy’s heart is yearning to experience the supreme bliss. This supreme bliss can be achieved when one reaches the *advaitic* ‘non-dualistic’ state and becomes one with it. *Brahman* is the source of all the things, it is the self in all the beings, it is also the *atman* ‘soul’. It is the eternal conscious irreducible, infinite omnipresent spiritual source of the finite universe. Upanisads define it as *tat tvam asi* ‘that thou art’ or that is what you are. To quote M. Hiriyanna again, “As a matter of fact, however, the *advaitins* assign Upanisadic statements like *neti-neti*-‘Not this,nor that’-a secondary place while the primary place is given to those like *Tat tvam asi*, which point to the reality in us as the ultimate. . . .Negation is only a preliminary to affirmation”(375).

Instead of attempting to negate everything in life which Ramaswamy was doing by getting disillusioned at all fronts, he should have tried to see the reality in everything. Every sentient or insentient being is made up of the same divinity called *Brahman*. The substratum of all things is *Brahman*. Saints and seers have attempted to explain it as *Satchitananda* ‘truth consciousness bliss’.

Sat is ‘truth’, the eternal existence. *Brahman* exists and nothing else exists. The world is merely a projection like the idea of a snake projected upon a piece of rope. The idea of the world is projected upon *Brahman*. The phenomenon of the world does not have a true existence without *Brahman* just like the waves do not have an existence without the ocean. *Maya* ‘illusion’ is the projection of consciousness similar to subconscious thoughts projected as dream stuff.

Cit is described as 'consciousness'. *Brahman* is the supreme awareness which is modified to take various forms under the influence of *maya* 'illusion'.

Ananda 'bliss'-It is neither sorrow nor happiness. It is absolute bliss beyond all modifications. It is the source of all happiness.

This *Satchitananda* 'truth consciousness bliss' is the aim of all living beings. All the *jivas* 'sentient beings' will realize their true nature sooner or later. Ramaswamy will also realize *Brahman* one day but how and when that is a big question *jnana marg* 'path of knowledge' seems a difficult path to reach the *Brahman*. The easier path is the *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion' which is of total surrender to the Lord. The next chapter analyses the myths in the life of the protagonist of Raja Rao's next novel *The Cat and Shakespeare*, who moves on the *bhakti marg* 'path of devotion'.