CHAPTER II

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Unlike those scholars who derive a fundamental opposition between myth and history, Mircea Eliade, one of the most important twentieth century scholars on myth opines that the myths of origin constitute a fairly coherent history “revealing how the cosmos was shaped and changed, how man became mortal, sexually diversified and compelled to work in order to live; they equally reveal what the supernatural beings and the mythical ancestors did, and how and why they abandoned the earth and disappeared” (Eternal Return 141).

Both in Indian and Nigerian societies, mythologies function as sacred history that explain the total reality or identity of the respective traditions which express themselves through human existence, society and culture. Sacred history is the history of creation that involves all these elements which are perpetuated through periodical repetition. Eliade declares in The Myth of the Eternal Return:

An object or an act becomes real only in so far as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus reality is acquired solely through
repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is meaningless [that is] it lacks reality. Men would thus have a tendency to become archetypal paradigmatic. This tendency may well appear paradoxical, in the sense that the man of traditional culture sees himself as real only to the extent that he ceases to be himself (for a modern observer) and is satisfied with imitating and repeating the gestures of another. In other words, he sees himself as real [that is] as ‘truly himself’ only and precisely, in so far as he ceases to be so (34).

Eliade’s observation is valid in the context of transformation of the cultural history of a people into a sacred history in the novels under study. The social reality depicted by the two novelists, Achebe and Raja Rao is elevated to a level beyond logic’s reach. The focus of their creative imagination is on “the externalisation of the inner stirring, the emotion of man as he meets the world, his receptivity to impulses coming from ‘outside’ the communality of substance which welds him to the totality of beings” (Dardel 36). The two phases of history in Africa, Colonisation and Christianisation, are well documented in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God with a ritualistic zeal that the narration achieves the quality of myth. Kanthapura is a record of the reawakening consciousness of India under the leadership of the Mahatma during the colonial times and the The Serpent and the Rope is all about the myth of India in contact with the European civilization during the post-colonial period.
History becomes mythical when it is related to the secret springs of one’s awareness of the world, which involves the unconscious wisdom of tradition. And a historical figure becomes mythical when he/she represents the emotionally charged ideals of the community as in the case of the Mahatma in *Kanthapura* who is a mythical figure, a figure who represents the long dormant cultural potential of the people. The myth-history nexus can be traced by a proper analysis of both the terms in a literary work. Campbell defines myth as “nothing other than a picture of the national experience in the light of religious faith” (*Hero* 382). When the individual in a society disentangles himself away from his mythological consciousness he cuts himself from the sources of his own existence. In the modern world, the individual is prominent and the connecting link between the conscious and unconscious zones of the psyche is not functional. The rituals, festivals and ceremonies are attempts to recapture one’s lost link with the mythic consciousness. Therefore the seasonal festivals described in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* can be seen as attempts to link the transient with the permanent in the Ibo scheme of things.

In the words of Richard Chase, “literature becomes mythical by suffusing the natural with preternatural force toward certain ends by capturing the impersonal forces of the world and directing them toward the fulfillment of certain emotional needs” (*Quest for Myth* 70). By the term ‘preternatural’ Chase indicates that which has an “impersonal magic force or potency”. Thomas Knipp explains the two terms, myth and history thus:
Myth the larger construction that fuses concept and emotion, is usually narrative, a story or a gathering of stories. When these stories are or purport to be a chronological and interpretative arrangement of factual events causally explained or connected, they are called history. One of the most useful definitions of history (historiography) is my own: History is myth: It is the reorganization of the past according to the needs of the present. (40)

In other words as Mircea Eliade puts it, “myth is sacred history which relates an event that took place in primordial time; in the traditional societies one ‘lives’ the myth in the sense that one is seized by the sacred exalting power of the events which are recollected or reenacted” (Eternal Return 70)

Philip Rahv comments:

Myth, the appeal of which has precisely in its archaism promises above all to heal the wounds of time. For the one essential function of myth stressed by all writers is that in merging past and present, it releases us from the flux of temporality . . . Hence the mythic is the polar opposite of what we mean by the historical which stands for process, inexorable change . . . (Myth and Literature 110)

These two polar opposites are linked together or history is mythicised through literature when the timeless myths are given focus or prominence. As Jo Labanyi, in his analysis of the place of myth and history in the Spanish novel remarks:
History may be myth in the sense that it is a verbal construct but myth affirms cyclical recurrence and supposes that history is dissociated from origins, while historical writings affirms linear progress and continuity. Myth is concerned with the eternal and universal and attempts to neutralize change; history is concerned with the temporal and particular and stresses the importance of change. Both myth and history are ways of organising reality into meaningful structure that may have little to do with reality as it is experienced, but they remain in opposition to one another. (22)

The atmosphere created by a concern for the eternal or the divine, in the case of the novels of Raja Rao and Achebe helps the reader to enter two interpenetrating systems, namely myth and history. The real events in the story of the two villages Umosia and Umuaro as depicted in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God respectively, are significant not for their historicity, but for the mythopoeic force operating within each and every action. Both Achebe and Raja Rao, have unconsciously transmitted the echoes of certain historical events in the national history of Nigeria and India respectively.

A theoretical discussion on the interrelationship of the concepts of history and myth is a necessary pre-requisite for the study of the link between myth and contemporary life. In the earlier stages of civilizations, when histories were not written, both myth and history governed human imagination as one force. There are numerous myths that grew out of historical events or characters. Historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi or Thomas Beckett assumed the status of mythical
figures in the respective communities. Myths can retain a lot of historical evidence. The cultural heritage is infused into the mythological stories. And myths, sometimes, highlight the reality of a society much better than does the conscious study of history. All myths are the byproducts of the unconscious processes of history. They are the manifestations of the collective imagination. In other words the collective imagination plays an important part in helping history engender myth. Nicole Ferrier Caveriviere in his article, “Historical Figures and Mythical Figures” argues that “neither history nor reality are mythical in themselves, but they may become mythical if, for example, they are imbued with an unfathomable mystery or cease to be comprehensible and to develop logically” (578). Historical figures sometimes become mythical figures when they represent the aspirations of the collective imagination. The Mahatma in Indian history was as good as a myth representing the long dormant cultural potential of the people at the time of the National Movement. The character Moorthy in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura directs the reader’s attention towards this historical figure who assumes the status of a mythical figure.

In fact “mythology records the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age”(Campbell, Hero 382). When the individuals in society lose their mythological links, they cut themselves away from the sources of his existence. The ceremonies, customs, rituals and festivals all form part of the cultural history of the people and, as it happens in Kanthapura or Things Fall Apart or The Serpent and the Rope, help us to relive the past events. Through this, there is a virtual suspension of ordinary time. In the traditional social set up all
meaning was derived from mythology. For instance the seasonal festivals described in *Things Fall Apart* can be studied as attempts to link the transitory with the permanent, the history with the myth. The term history is, not merely a story of a people’s military expeditions and exploits, their conquests and defeats, or a chronicle of events . . . but more importantly the knowledge of how people lived: their family life and social relationships, religious beliefs and customs, rituals and festivals, myths and legends, arts and crafts. It is in brief a study of their cultural ethos which constitutes the internal resources of a people’s psyche, shedding light on their failures and achievements, their ethics and aesthetics. (Singh 133)

If the historical stages like the colonial aggression, the freedom struggle and the aftermath of liberation constitute the background of Achebe’s novels, the latter two stages serve as the socio-political background in Raja Rao’s works. The concept of history in the Asian and the African contexts operates in a different plane from the concept of history in the European context which was predominantly influenced by Christianity. In Africa, as John Mbiti observes: history moves backward’ from the *Sasa* period to the *Zamani*, from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go. In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving ‘forward’ towards a future climax or towards an end of the world. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age or a
radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and the Zamani. The notion of a messianic hope or a final destruction of the world, has no place in traditional concept of history. So African people have no 'belief in progress', the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a lower to a higher degree. (Mbiti 23)

Interestingly enough, the above observation could be read along with Raja Rao's predilection for disregarding the phenomenal, the historical. Africa has no myths about the end of the world since time has no end. History, as referred to here, is the record of the cultural ethos of a society. The terms history and myth are only two different facets of the same process, one temporal and the other eternal. The apprehension of the temporal realities in the context of the European political aggression in Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Rao's Kanthapura is not merely through a mere documentation of the political situation. While delineating the cultural confrontation at the time of colonisation, the role of gods in man's life is a major thematic preoccupation of both novelists. Therefore these narratives are not mere history, but 'sacred history' in the form of fiction. Debezies' remark is relevant in this context:

Though a literary work is not itself a myth, it can gain mythical value for a particular time for a particular audience. Writers express their experience or beliefs through symbolic images which may echo a myth that is already current and be recognized by their audience as expressing a fascinating image. (962)
The ingrained propensity among these novelists to mythicise history is the result of a unique sense of time quite opposed to the linear sense of time which is the basis of any history. The historian can only opt for one among a limited number of choices before him with regard to recording of past events. On the other hand, a novelist like Raja Rao or Chinua Achebe opens up possibilities of multitudinous options through literary representation. The genre of novel itself, unlike history, is an apt metaphor for the world as perceived from a metaphysical standpoint. But myth is not just a random choice among the possible perceived manifestations. It is an all pervasive option formulated by the deeply rooted archetypes operating in the collective unconscious.

The novel Kanthapura, though dealing with history, is not expected to serve the purpose of history; otherwise the difference between creative and scholastic writing will be lost. In societies where history gets privileged over myths, where demythification has been taken up by writers since long back, novel may serve the purpose of history and it will have all the characteristics of history like linear time and detailed characterisation. Thus the novel in the western tradition mostly remains as history that didn’t happen in reality and hence the critical tradition also becomes part of this view of the world.

When the parameters of such a critical tradition are applied in the evaluation of Afro-Asian novelists like the authors under study, it turns out to the rather partially ineffective in the understanding of the total picture. A very obvious example is Helen Tiffin’s conclusion with regard to Raja Rao’s Kanthapura.
By always converting history, including the history of Gandhi’s movement which the novel traces into myth, by placing the narrative of western intrusion as one story of the vanquishing demon by a goddess within the framework of timeless comparable legends, western exploitation is contained as a moment in illusory time on the seamless canvas of Indian space. ("Post-Colonialism" 175)

Curiously enough, the Indian critic, T. N. Dhar’s attempt to counter this viewpoint affirming that Kanthapura is meant to “sharpen awareness by destroying illusions of all kinds” is the other end of the spectrum (Dhar 144). He believes that the conversion of a colonial experience into a moment in illusory time will only neutralize the oppressive character of colonialism. For him “any conversion of colonial experience into myth will amount to erasing it. This does not promise to be a proper form of contesting the master narratives; it will be another form of surrender, this time to Western theorizing” (Dhar 150). Tiffin’s argument that the mythical is used as a potent device to counter the western modes of experience and expression does not address the unique sensibilities of a writer like Raja Rao. The mythic in Kanthapura is aimed at self discovery, regardless of the question of a deliberate countering of western modes of experience. Dhar’s argument that mythicising will erase a historical experience may not be tenable because mythification virtually accentuates that experience to the point of recognising it in the collective consciousness. The specific discourse of colonial history has no such features other than the temporary vanquishing of good by evil.
Set against a metaphysical background, the real conflict always remains in the quest for self discovery. In this context the application of post-colonial theories in evaluating literatures from cultures with a metaphysical background, ultimately leaves the indigenous aesthetics in darkness. Hence the approach adopted in this study is to view Afro-Asiatic fiction from the point of view of the mythic, rather than from the point of view of the historical, of which the post-colonial theoreticians have always been a party to.

The characters in Raja Rao’s fictional world, from Moorthy in Kanthapura to Sivarama Sastri in The Chessmaster tend to move towards a dissolution of individuality rather than to an assertion of their historical role in the particular social context. All his novels aim at reaching a metaphysical realm that leads to a sense of the non-dual, essentializing the philosophy of Advaita. And in the case of Achebe, as Lewis Carroll says, “all the traditions, customs and folklore depicted in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are such rituals which mediate between this world and a world of mystery” (193). The individuality of the characters in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God can be seen only with reference to a mode of understanding which goes beyond the ordinary perception of characters in European realistic fiction. The long history and the experience of the cultural tradition of a society expressed through myths help in the understanding of the meaning of things including the values to be cherished by any particular society.

The Ibo people, like the Indians did not show any interest in the historical or the place of man in history. Both societies prefer the metaphor of myth in
seeking an insight into their societies. Both Achebe and Raja Rao by their concern for the repetitive pattern are linked to the ritualistic foundations of society. It is significant to note Lord Raglan’s observation that a myth is a ritual projected back into the past, not “a historical past of time but a ritual past of eternity (147).

In Things Fall Apart, Achebe presents the ritual act of sharing Kola on social occasions without explaining them. It is his presentation of the Ibo customs without tainting the quality of narration with explanations that provide a mythical aspect to the narration. Another social institution of awarding titles to the eminent leaders of the society, confirms the role of regaining economic balance among members of the Ibo group. Acquiring titles implies expenditure of large amounts of money which means that the accumulation of wealth in one or a few individuals is discouraged.

Rather than attempting a sequential presentation of the historical phase of colonialism in Nigeria, Achebe creates a sequence of situations in both novels so as to mythicise the historical through appropriate strategies of narration. Both authors, thereby attempt to pave the way for cultural renewal in their respective societies.

The mythic approach is perhaps a more appropriate method of interpretation for the literature from the Afro-Asian countries. The Ibo traditional wisdom is found in the character of Ezeulu, the chief priest in Arrow of God, just as Rama’s sensibilities are fostered by the Upanishadic tradition in The Serpent and the Rope. In both authors, the oral wisdom in each society is authenticated by the use of traditional tools like stories, proverbs, prayers and
songs. The village god, Ulu, the personal god, Chi, the ancestral spirits, the sacred symbols like the Udala tree, the interpretations of the Masks, the Mbari and the festivals all help in linking the historical with the mythical. Life in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God is conditioned by man's relationship with God, or with the ancestral spirits as seen in the revelations of the prophetess and in the interpretations of the Masks. In Kanthapura too, temples, goddesses and the myths of the epics influence the thoughts of the villagers. In the The Serpent and the Rope, Rama's consciousness is presented through symbolic configurations like the Ganges and the Himalayas. His confrontation with Europe, through Madeleine, is his confrontation with time and with history. Rama's description of the concubines of Benares, the greed of the priests, the violence after the partition of India, are all historical signposts in Rama's reminiscences of India. The all pervading sense of the spiritual is revealed through the character of Rama who is nothing but a medium of ancient philosophical wisdom in India.

The proposed title for the District Commissioner's book, The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger is Achebe's allusion to the policy of the colonial government that ruled the Northern and Southern Protectorates. Okonkwo's denial and suppression of the feminine virtues shared by this culture opens the way for the colonisers to lure men like Nwoye into another religion and to establish their own power over the disintegrated community. Achebe provides a vivid picture of Nigerian history through the discourse of the novel Things Fall Apart. Zohreh T. Sullivan, on the historical paradigms of Okonkwo's denial and suppression, rightly remarks:
Although the novel's form and its arrangements of characters center on Okonkwo, the elements Okonkwo represses— the feminine, the weak and the gentle—erupt to assault and defy his authority (the death of Ikemefuna) his family (the defection of Nwoye) and the clan (the coming of the missionaries). The feminine and the outcast are also denied by the clan, who condemn twins and outcasts into the Evil Forest to die. But the denied and repressed gain narrative force as they destroy the repressor, who, in the first half of the epic and oral narrative, is Okonkwo. Ironically, in the second half of the narrative, now interrupted by history, the repressed, the gentle and the outcast become first the voice of gentle Christianity but then suddenly evolve into its violent successor: the government colonizer with the gun. (105)

The wrestling match referred to in the beginning of the novel, sets the tone of competition and the importance of physical prowess prevalent in the Ibolond. Okonkwo's achievements in inter-tribal wars described in the beginning of the novel is suggestive of a historical fact - the wars between related clans. Umofia is an archetype of the Ibo village and by extension of any African Village. In Arrow of God, as in Things Fall Apart there is a vivid description of the democratic pattern of oratory in the public meetings practiced by the Ibos in Nigeria which decide upon the policies of the community towards war and peace. This can be contrasted with the hierarchical administration imposed upon them.
by Captain Winterbottom. The Ibo community had no central government and so the warrant chiefs were appointed by the colonial government.

Similarly, the subordination of women to men in Things Fall Apart offers a picture of the actual historical situation of Ibo social structure. But it is the very same system that punishes Okonkwo for beating his wife during the Week of Peace. Evil Forest says: "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman"(22). The problem with the tragedy of Okonkwo's life in contrast to Moorthy's life in the village is mainly that Okonkwo commits the error of deliberately avoiding the Female principle in his life. On the other hand, all the characters in Raja Rao's Kanthapura, glorify womanhood by worshipping Goddess Kenchamma. Characters like Retna, Rangamma and the narrator, Achakka, are embodiments of the virtues associated with the very same Goddess.

The appointment of warrant chiefs from among ambitious men from the Iboland was part of a policy of the British government to rule indirectly. The world of Achebe's novels, corresponds to the historical situation in Nigeria during the colonial period. In Arrow of God there is Mr. Wright who builds roads with the help of some natives. This is historically true as the colonial government built roads linking colonial stations. The Ibos worked without pay in the construction of the roads. In spite of the use of historical materials in fictional space, Achebe does not focus on the denigration of Ibo culture by the colonialist government, but on the ideals of Ibo life operating at the level of the individual and the society. Elaine Fido rightly remarks in his article "Time and Colonial History in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God":

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Perhaps the most impressive aspect of his use of history is his capacity to avoid the most evident acts of colonial violation of Ibo culture and sense of pride, so that the reader can leave both novels with a sense of the great irony of colonial attempts to 'civilize' Africa: rather than a melodramatic portrayal of evil, Achebe shows the evils of idealism. (75)

The legendary history of a village, Kanthapura is a symbolic presentation of India; Moorthy, bearing his archetypal sensibility as a disciple of the Mahatma, is a symbol of the nascent nationalist spirit or the long dormant power of cultural tradition. While Moorthy was fascinated by the Gandhian principles of virtue, Okonkwo based his actions on the Ibo traditional values.

Moreover an all pervading sense of the timeless in the consciousness of the writer inspires the mythification of historical events in Raja Rao. For instance in The Cat and Shakespeare, the actual experience of the world is taken out of its spatio-temporal domain into the domain of the symbolic realm. The narrative mode in his novel is mythical having a "continuous present" with a perspective, that "undermines linearity" (Kothari 154). We can find a cyclical scheme of things in Kanthapura with no fundamental difference between Kanthapura and Kashipura, before and after the brutal holocaust by the British. The Ibos in Umofia also participate in mythical time rather than in linear time which is the source of history. The mythification of the historical experience, in the four novels under study validates the hypothesis that the common Third World
experience has its impact on the nature of the genre which highlights the affinity of those different literatures widely separated by time and space.

On the other hand, the African writers who display a historical sense in writing novels including Achebe from Nigeria, Peter Abrahams from South Africa, Ngugi from Kenya, Ousmane from Senegal, Yambo Ouologuem from Mali represent the conflict between Africa and Europe. History itself becomes the hero in many cases like in Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* or Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*. Lewis Nkosi comments about Achebe’s two novels:

> [In] Chinua Achebe’s two novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the writer is concerned mainly with the rendering and elaboration of a certain cultural ethos which might explain his people’s attitudes to events of central importance in the development of African society.

(31)

Umofia in *Things Fall Apart* is a microcosm of the African world. The motif of the Chi or personal spirit, the role and status of women in the family and society, the bride price system and the system of severe punishment to those who violate the sanctity of the Week of Peace correspond to the details of Ibo social life. The belief in the *Ogbanje* children points out to the high rate of infant mortality in the village. The *egwugwu* ceremony with the masked spirits helping to resolve domestic problems highlights a system where the family and the community has a definite say in the affairs of the individual. The importance of the family is highlighted in the *Uri* ceremony in which all the relatives participate.
Part II of the novel relates the exile of Okonkwo to Mbanta, the plight of the Osu people (ch.18), the missionary attempts to establish their hold in the village, the British policy of appointing local people as ‘warrant chiefs’ and the military aggression symbolised by the ‘Abame’ experience which remains a metaphor of British military clout in different parts of Africa. ‘Abame’ in Nigerian soil is a version of the destruction of Kanthapura in Raja Rao’s novel. The court messenger or Kotma is the counterpart of the maistri in the Skeffington coffee estate in the village Kanthapura.

Another historical situation is the presence of the converted Christians in the Ibo village who are called the efulefui, ‘worthless, empty men’. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, calls the converts ‘the excrement of the clan’ and the new faith is “a mad dog that has come to eat it up” (AT 119; TFA ch.16) The missionaries upset the power structure in the society as the low caste with no social status were converted to the new religion. Like the missionary attitude to other cultures all over the world, the converts in Umofia also started dismissing the traditional gods as ‘pieces of wood and stone’. Part II of the novel ends with an implicit warning about the cultural threat posed by Christianity in the village.

In Part III Okonkwo returns from exile to his homeland. His village is ready to accommodate him after the lapse of a long period in exile. The redeeming factor in Ibo culture is that a man is always given the chance to come out with his best. But what he finds on his return is a colonial administration with British courts. The link between the colonial British government and the missionaries is clearly perceived by Obeirika.
“It is already too late” said Obeirika sadly. “Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold the government. If we should try to drive out the white man we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power. They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers and we would be like Abame”

(At 144; TFA ch.20).

Chapter 24 explains colonial diplomacy through the remarks of the District Commissioner. The last chapter reports the suicide of Okonkwo, without giving any overt reasons for such an act from a man of his stature and valour. His death or martyrdom is probably an act of warning to the people in Umofia regarding the impending disaster. The people in Umofia failed to understand Okonkwo’s intentions when he killed the court messenger: “They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking, ‘Why did he do it?’ (At 165; TFA ch.24).

Out of historical material, these novelists create patterns of archetypal meaning in fiction through a narration illuminated by the dramatic interplay of the forces of man and god. The two forces, colonialism and christianisation act as the background of the two novels Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. The nature of colonialism in Africa, its impact on traditional society and religion, its psychological impact, the internal as well as external pressures for the disintegration of the traditional set up, are the historical inputs in the
fictionalisation of Ibo social life in the two novels. The failure of the two heroes in the novels is due to that aspect of the Ibo society which contributes to certain cruel customs which end up in the killing of Ikemefuna and also the existence of Osu, the village outcasts, who have to live in a special area, deprived of the right to attend an assembly, or take a title; The Osu finally free themselves from the Ibo tradition by converting themselves to Christianity. The unbending spirit of the chief priest, Ezeulu, is symbolic of the fate of the community if it is left to itself without change. Christianity wins out, says Nkosi, “because Christianity probes and exploits real weakness in the old social order which has begun to crumble internally from its own contradictions” (36). Nwoye’s conversion to Christianity is explained in Things Fall Apart thus:

It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion. Something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul - the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed.

(AT 122; TFA ch.16)

These processes of historical events of colonisation, like the internal and external pressures for disintegration, the confrontation with an alien religious political force form the thematic structure of Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God and Kanthapura. As Frantz Fanon says:
national consciousness which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension. . . . It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture. (199)

In the case of both Achebe and Raja Rao, national consciousness is projected with a propensity for the mythopoeic that mythic potentialities emerge from fiction. The Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand, commenting on the writers of epics says that “by constructing myths they metamorphosed the absurdity of reality, criticised or lampooned the powerful as they could not take on them in other ways” (106).

Moreover, Raja Rao’s mythical perception is strongly rooted in a spiritual vision. The idea of godhood in Raja Rao’s novels has an obvious metaphysical dimension. But in contrast to this, Achebe’s treatment of godhood is devoid of “spiritual dimensions” and “numinous power”. Wole Soyinka criticises Achebe for having reduced “Ulu” to be just an “afﬁrmer of social ethos” in Arrow of God (Soyinka 87). But the responsiveness and sensibility of the Ibo man to the imperceptible forces of Nature, whether through ancestral spirits or through one’s own Chi can be clearly perceived in Achebe’s fictional world. This intimate link of the present to a universe not limited by sense perceptions can be seen in Raja Rao’s Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope as well providing ample occasions for metaphysical speculations.
Mala Pandurangan in "African Literature and the Concept of Culture" says:

The novels of Achebe and Ngugi explain what happened, the courses and effects, and who or what accelerated change. The trajectory of African fiction and its thematic development has been profoundly oriented in social directions. Themes are contingent upon the preoccupations of society at a particular point of time and mirror a corresponding chain of cultural upheavals (34).

Achebe’s concept of history in Things Fall Apart is to view contemporary history with reference to an original mode of mythical perception natural to the Ibos. In the same manner, Raja Rao too depicts social life in an environment of political insecurity which encourages a return to the mythic past. The massive political movement in India in the first half of the twentieth century and the impact of European aggression in the Iboland in the early nineteenth century place on record an archetypal situation of confrontation with the colonizer. The revival of interest in myth is an obvious historical outcome of the emergence of nationalism in both countries. The view of myth as a universal mode of perception and the idea of myth as an expression of the national soul find no contradiction in Kanthapura. But Kanthapura is not merely a novel exclusively about national pursuits nor is Things Fall Apart a novel about the coloniser-colonised conflict alone. The emergence of the conflict is clearly depicted in the light of a deeply rooted mythic perception. The characters Moorthy in Kanthapura, Rama in
The Serpent and the Rope and Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Ezeulu in Arrow of God are all similarly patterned by their subjugation to the mythic tradition. It is not the power of history, but its failure, that we find in these heroic characters.

The characters in these four novels act in the light of a general shift towards wholeness, a spiritual striving guided by the messages from the unconscious. The mythical substratum formed through images, language and characters give these novels a universal appeal. The centre of attention in these novels is not any specific historical event such as the onset of Christianity in Umofia or the Sahib’s excesses in the tea plantations in South India. Hence no critical judgements or sweeping comments are made in these novels as in novels like Rushdie’s Midnights Children, or Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel, or Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich like Us, all of which deal with the history of a nation.

For instance, the death of Ikemefuna in Umofia is totally unjust but no overt judgement is made in the novel regarding the command of the deity to kill an innocent boy. This impartiality, is an effective technique of narration that places the narrator at a level above the historical. Interestingly enough, the concept of history in these countries is different from the European idea of history and progress which is mainly influenced by Christianity which believes history as a fall from an original wholeness. As in India, the oral history of Africa considers no dates important. In India any written record of history is relegated to a subservient position among the people as the legends, myths and stories act as more powerful tools for interpreting the Universe.
In these traditional societies the predominant ontological conception is that reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation. So the tendency to become archetypal and paradigmatic can be seen projected in the repeated references to the deities in *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God* or the references to the benign presence of Goddess Kenchamma in *Kanthapura* or to the image of the Ganges as the archetypal symbol of purification in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Through the repetition of certain traditional images and symbols through the imitation of archetypes, both novelists succeed in the abolition of profane time in their fictional world. The various rituals enacted in *Things Fall Apart*, involve the archetypal idea of sacrifice whether it is the killing of Ikemefuna or the unquestioned obedience to the commands of the priestess of Agbala. On the other hand the self-sacrifice of Moorthy and the numerous followers of the Mahatma in Kanthapura along with the bhajans and fasting involve the same principle of sacrifice in dealing with the conflict and change in society.

But both Moorthy and Okonkwo, in the communal set up, can become real only when they cease to become themselves. They act as instruments of the community and thus become real. Moorthy as a character is a shadow of the Mahatma, imitating and repeating what the Mahatma has enacted elsewhere. Therefore the events that take place assume a ritualistic dimension as the acts of sacrifice by Moorthy take place in mythical imitation. The Mahatma in Kanthapura is a familiar paradigmatic myth of the hero, a reincarnation of Vishnu who protects the people from a serpent "the serpent of the British rule" (K 22).
A mythic image comes alive when Achakka says: "People followed the hero, the Mahatma as the gopis followed, Krishna, the flute player" (K 22).

Rama in The Serpent and the Rope in his quest for the Absolute treads a path that leads to the ultimate cessation of profane time or history. Through the repetition of certain motifs and images, Rama's life is projected into a mythical epoch. Thus mythification of history occurs in fiction when the novelist is concerned with rituals or any other important act which is based on sacred moments in life. So, the novelist's business is with the gods or the divine in Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God as well as in Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope through the repetition of archetypal gestures which encourages hopes for a possible participation in mythic time.

It is not the historical individuality of the protagonist that comes alive in either Things Fall Apart or Arrow of God. And the tragic death of Okonkwo, indicating a spiritual failure, takes place in a society where the dead person is transformed into an ancestor. Death has a mysterious significance imbuing a mythic twist to it. This corresponds to the fusion of the individual into an archetypal category. But the soul of Okonkwo will be denied ancestral status as his suicide was an abomination to Goddess Ani.

In the collective consciousness of the villages Umofia and Kanthapura, personal memories of the characters are irrelevant. The personality of Moorthy is inseparable from the archaic consciousness of the village and whatever personal experiences rendered in the novel are related to the spiritual experience of atemporality during his meditations.
Again both Indian and Nigerian social lives are dominated by the community’s conventions rather than the individual’s personal interests. Among the Ibos, Chi, the personal god of each individual guides him like the concept of Karma in the Indian tradition. C.D. Narasimhaiah says that “Things Fall Apart is not an anthropological document; it is an imaginative recreation of Ibo society, not through plot, dialogue or character but through myth, ritual festivity anecdotes and proverbs”. (Commonwealth Literature 165) Raja Rao also resorts to the same technique of appealing to the mythic stream in society through a deft adaptation of the ethos of a remote village in India. Life in both societies is marked by a series of festivals whether it be the New Yam Festival in the Ibo village or Sankara Jayanthi in the South Indian village. The kind of corporate living both in the Ibo village and the South Indian village is strikingly similar, with rituals and festivals prefiguring the important events in life.

The marriage of Obeirika’s daughter in Things Fall Apart is, for instance an occasion for communal sharing. The death of Ezeudu is another occasion on which we witness the rare sense of equanimity among the Ibos at such exigencies as the departure of a family member to the land of spirits:

The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man’s life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors (AT 103; TFA ch. 13).
The funeral of Ezeudu with the elaborate ceremonies with the shouting and firing of drums, the beating of guns and the brandishing and changing of matchets help the members of the tribal community to overcome the loss of a titled man like Ezeudu. Death is a process that gradually removes a person from the Sasa period to the Zanam. The speech of the one handed spirit sums up the community's response to the man's death:

If you had been poor in your last life, I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So I shall ask you to come again the way you came before. If your death was the death of nature, go in peace. But if a man caused it, do not allow him a moment's rest.

(AT 104; TFA.ch.13)

The last lines are a reminder to the tribal ban on the killing of a clansman. But Okonkwo, inadvertently caused the death of Ezeudu's son, as his gun suddenly exploded during the funeral ceremony. The punishment for such an act, a crime against earth goddess, though a "female crime", was to go in exile. Okonkwo and his family left Umofia for Mbaino, his motherland. The question of justice or acceptability of such tribal norms, as this punishment for Okonkwo or the custom of throwing away into the forest the twin children, are pondered over by Obeirika, a wise old villager, and he does not find a satisfactory answer.
The attitude of the chief priest in *Arrow of God* and the thoughts that motivate him to deal with the whiteman are clearly manifested in the following conversation between the two friends Akuebue and Ezeulu. Akuebue blames Ezeulu for allowing his son to join the new religion and Ezeulu justifies his actions as he cannot be judged by the scale of reason alone:

we have shown the whiteman the way to our house and given him a stool to sit on. If we now want him to go away again we must either wait until he is tired of his visit or we must drive him away. . . . I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am Known and at the same time I am Unknowable. You are my friend and you know whether I am a thief or a murderer or an honest man. But you cannot know the Thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances. I can see tomorrow, that is why I can tell Umuaro, come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it . . . . (AT 455 AG ch.12).

The whole history of colorisation is summed up in the following words of Unachukwu:

I have travelled in Olu, I have travelled in Ibo, and I can tell you that there is no escape from the whiteman. He has come. When Suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool. The whiteman is like that. Before any of you here was old enough to tie a cloth between his legs I saw with my own eyes what
the whiteman did to Abame. Then I know there was no escape. As daylight chases away darkness so will the white men drive away all our customs. (AT 405; AG ch.8).

In spite of a strong cultural tradition in both countries western religious and political aggression gave way to confusion and resentment in both villages, Umofia as well as Kanthapura. There is a total collapse in Umofia with the suicide of Okonkwo as it is the case in Kanthapura with the brutal colonial suppression of the Freedom movement, leading to large scale evacuation and destruction in Kanthapura.

The social history of the impact of the Christian church in Africa is referred to by Mokwugo Okoye, the Nigerian scholar on Africa, in his book *African Responses*.

Our high social morality buttressed by taboos has been broken down by Christian iconoclasts and our sexual freedom tainted with superstition; our dance the chief mode of the people’s self expression in the absence of literature and drama, has been killed by Christianity, less adaptable and accommodating than Islam, which sees everything African as superstitious and ungodly although its own dogmas are superstition ridden and its tenets were derived from Africa. (15)

The history of the villages Umofia and Mbanta, as well as Kanthapura and Kashipur in the novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Kanthapura* respectively, is intended as a paradigm for the whole of African and Indian experience. The two facets of the same process, the temporal and the timeless - history and myth - are
found in the delineation of the cultural ethos of the Ibos in *Things Fall Apart* and of the South Indian villagers in *Kanthapura*.

Okonkwo gets exiled from Umofia and he gets back to his village after seven years to end up in suicide in order to escape from the consequences of killing a white man. Apart from this outline of the story, the novel is a legendary history of the Iboland with all its rituals, festivals, ceremonies and institutions. The first half of the novel is about a self-contained system in the Iboland and it evokes "the pattern of life in a traditional African setting, notably its order, harmony, poetry and beauty for the benefit of the younger generation. To make the picture objective in the novel he balances this portrait with accounts that reveal shortcomings in the society. In the second part of the novel, Achebe presents the colonial experience and its impact on the traditional culture. The arrival of the whiteman in the Iboland is an archetypal colonial situation and this historical event makes inroads into the Ibo set of beliefs and values. The loss of life of Okonkwo is symbolic of the loss of dignity for the Ibo and for the African, during the colonial encounter.

Similarly *Kanthapura* (1938) records the history of a South Indian village in the 1920's when colonialism was resisted by the Nationalist Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. The village Kanthapura, with its presiding deity Kencharamma, and the innumerable customs and rituals, is the main character in the novel. Moorthy is the local-Mahatma, the Mahatma being the mythic hero in the story with his non-violent methods of resisting colonial political power and correcting the social evils in the community like untouchability. Mahatma
Gandhi's impact on Indian freedom struggle is summed up by M.K. Naik - “... solidly grounded in the ancient tradition, he possessed a profound moral earnestness which enabled him to rediscover the ethical values of this tradition” (Raja Rao 122). The whole novel is about the Gandhian myth and the mythic land of India with the mythological forces operating through rural traditions.

Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Moorthi in Kanthapura are considered mythic heroes because they fulfill the aspirations of the collective psyche of the respective communities though in two different ways. These heroes express the pangs of the colonised and they attempt to heal the wound in the collective unconscious. The dreams or hopes of a community get fulfilled through mythical heroes in history, like the Mahatma during the freedom struggle in India. Moorthi wins the support of the whole community in his fight against the colonial power through a mythicised language and a traditional mode of action based on the principles of sacrifice. The arrangement of festivals and Bhajans help the villagers to reach the revolutionary ideas of non-violence and freedom with a mythical fervour. But Okonkwo who resorts to violent action both in his domestic and public life failed to gain approval from the community. Even his martyrdom is treated as an abomination against Goddess Ani. He deliberately eschews the feminine virtues in order to prove that he is unlike his father who is a failure. The show of masculine strength by Okonkwo is characteristic of the Ibo ethos. He represents a love of freedom and a revolutionary spontaneity.

The character of Okonkwo is more human and more convincing than Moorthi who is overshadowed by the figure of the Mahatma. Moorthi is the
ideal hero who is an instrument in the hands of a divine mythical force. Okonkwo is on the other hand, impulsive and violent which is the tragic flaw in him. Okonkwo is transformed into a mythical hero when his death creates a context for putting him on an imaginative realm where martyrdom is revered as a revolutionary act.

Both heroes stood for change in the society. Okonkwo was impatient to set aside the obstacles to progress in the Iboland. He represents the Ibo culture with his qualities of valour, fearlessness and physical powers. He was not for deliberately violating the will of the community or the design of the deities. He violated the peace during the Week of Peace by beating his wife on an impulse. Both Moorthy and Okonkwo reveal to us the ideas which organise and sustain the village life in the respective communities. In Things Fall Apart, Achebe validates the idea that the native model of justice is more efficient than the European model. These characters are embodiments of traditional values though the fear of failure and weakness in Okonkwo leads him into trouble. Yet he always obeys the community's harsh judgements against him though the mistakes committed are inadvertent.

Both novels assume the status of myth when we read them as expressions of the mental constellation in which the Ibo society and the typical South Indian village community recognise themselves. These novels may be termed 'sacred history' as they depict the operation of the divine in Nature; Rural life in both communities is dominated by gods, deities, spirits and mythical figures. Life, as
depicted in these novels, evokes responses from the mythical stream of thought in the respective traditions. Like myths that narrate the realities that religious tradition explains, these two novels express the native beliefs and highlight the potential strength of the native tradition in both societies. Both novelists show a preoccupation with the role of gods in society and present the colonial situation with a rare sense of objectivity. They have not glossed over inconvenient facts in recreating the historical encounter with colonialism.

Both Okonkwo and Moorthy are embodiments of the community’s values and were adored by the people. Okonkwo is well known courageous, and wealthy, having two titles to his credit, with three wives and two barns full of yam. He is a man who symbolises the Ibo community’s scale of values. Moorthy too is a type who is described by the novelist as one “who had gone through life like a noble-cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and Brahmanic, a very prince” (K 12). People love Moorthy and people in Umuofia adore Okonkwo for his valour, wealth and titles. As G.D. Killian rightly observes:

*Things Fall Apart* is the expression in terms of imaginative art of the tensions, stresses and conflicts, presented in personal social and spiritual terms, of late nineteenth century Ibo society. The men and women in the novel are real, they live in the world and seek to control their destinies, sometimes successfully, sometimes painfully and with difficulty and error. The inevitable processes of history are suggested by the struggle made concrete in the novel and
conceived and presented in actual and particular terms, without idealism and without sentimentality (33).

Killam’s commentary can be extended to Kanthapura as well, with its life and politics of the 1930’s India when the Gandhian ideals aroused a non-violent resistance against the imperialistic hegemony. Okonkwo fails to win the support of the community in his action and things fall apart. The Congress Movement wears off before the ruthless persecution in the Skeffington Coffee Estate and there is large scale evacuation and destruction. Kanthapura is destroyed but not defeated; in Things Fall Apart the martyrdom of Okonkwo provides an occasion for an examination of the collective response to his high heroic expectations from the community. Obierika tells the District Commissioner: “That man was one of the greatest men in Umofia. You drove him to kill himself, and now he will be buried like a dog...” (AT 167; TFA ch.25). Obierika’s words are pointers to a new awakening, which historically speaking, led to the achievement of Nigeria’s freedom in 1960. “The turmoil in Kanthapura is equal in magnitude to the tragedy of Okonkwo, but the kind of spiritualisation of politics carried out by the ‘Gandhimen’ enabled them to build Kashipura, a metaphor of resurgent India. It was historically true that the India of the 1930’s witnessed the emergence of thousands of congress committees working among the villagers spreading ideas of Satyagraha, non-violence, and Civil Disobedience.

The historic non-violent struggle of India for freedom was rendered a success by the efforts of thousands of ‘local Mahatmas’ like Moorthy in Kanthapura. The principles of self sacrifice, embodied in fasting, Brahmacharya
and the denial of luxury were the salient features of Congress ideology when Gandhiji's mystical conception of non-violence was the springboard of action for freedom from colonial rule. Gandhiji's use of simple direct language with symbols and images from mythology and religion appealed to the collective psyche of the country. He tried to define the national character in terms of the eternal quest for Truth, and the symbols used by him like Charkha, Khadi, Salt, Mudhouse and so on are all archetypal manifestations of the common man's belongings in India. The nationalist myth of Ramrajya touched the hearts of the illiterate villagers.

Interestingly the 1857 upsurge against British atrocities in India was sparked off by the author that violated the mythical reverence to the holy cow which compelled Hindu soldiers to use cattle-based products. Gandhiji's political activities were grounded on a firm belief in self purification which has revitalised the spiritual springs within the community. S. Balaram commenting on this mythic nature of Indian heroes says: “Both Krishna and Gandhi were made mythological heroes speaking in symbolic popular language. Krishna and Gandhi were leaders of two wars, who held no positions” (7).

Gandhiji's success in motivating the illiterate masses in India during the National Movement was a miraculous act of revolution in the history of colonialism. It was made possible through a language replete with mythological images and symbols. Kanthapura shows how this miracle was enacted with Moorthy as the local Gandhi acting within the framework of Gandhiji's political programmes like eradication of untouchability, economic self reliance including
boycott of foreign cloths and the practice of weaving khadi cloths. These two novels explain the resistance to colonialism in terms of the mythical national character represented through Okonkwo and Moorthy. In the case of Okonkwo, his “recklessness and extremism lead him to transgress the traditions he is trying to embody, to distort the values he seeks to defend and to neglect or ignore other traditions which his village holds equally dear” (Wright 78). In the words of Gerald Moore, Okonkwo is “sort of Super-ibo, an exaggeration of certain qualities admired by his people” (127). The flaws in the national character like occultism in Umofia or the orthodoxy and caste system in Kanthapura are also presented with great poignancy.

Raja Rao’s Kanthapura begins with the thirties highlighting the emergence of the National Movement, the various campaigns against the British Government under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi till the time of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1938. All the important political events like the Salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement and the Round Table Conference serve as background as the story of Kanthapura unfolds through the voice of a grand old woman, a symbol of the past. The achievement of Raja Rao is in mythicising a particular phase of Indian history through employing a fusion of language and thought, by uniting the sacred and the profane. The story moves on at three levels, political, social and religious but all are integrated into a total awareness of a mythic consciousness.

Moorthy a young Brahmin boy in the village turns a Satyagrahi after listening to the Mahatma and it is through him that the revolutionary ideas of
change set in. Renge Gowda, Rengamma and young Ratna support him in his activities to wipe out social evils like untouchability and also the malaise of the ‘Red man’s’ government. A small congress committee is formed in the village and the popularisation of spinning Khadi, a fundamental lesson in economic self sufficiency is initiated. When the initial indifference wears off, almost all the villagers including women who forms a ‘Sevika Sangha’ become active volunteers in the congress programmes to fight the ‘Red- man’s government. But they are brutally suppressed by the police at the Skeffington Coffee estate. The valiant struggle attains the dimension of a heroic myth and the outward failure is not without any redeeming factors. The fight ends up in the total destruction of Kanthapura as “there is neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura”.

The description of Kashipura, the village to which the people in Kanthapura flee, is a place for rejuvenation and rebirth, affirming the permanent within.

Throughout the novel, the figure of the Mahatma is an avatar, a mythic presence that raises the whole narration to the level of a mythic narrative. It is not the historical figure of the Mahatma who comes up in the story, but a radiant divine presence that guides the villagers. The very description of his birth is suggestive of his divinity: “As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the Kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom” (K 22).

Mahatma Gandhi is equalled to Prince Rama resisting the demonic rule of the British. When he was about to go to the Round Table Conference the villagers think thus:
They say the Mahatma will go to the Redman’s country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. and Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air. (K 257)

Here the events in the spatio-temporal domain raise itself to a timeless realm. The Mahatma was a historical figure turned mythical hero, a symbol of great principles, whose actions were never contradictory to his ideology of Ahimsa. In the novel, the Mahatma is an all pervasive presence, like Goddess Kenchamma guiding them in all matters of life. There is an intermingling of the human, the divine, and the natural worlds. This is a manifestation of the principle of unity. The process of conflict, dissolution and re-emanation that is in the offing in the village points to a disregard for historical time in the structure of the novel. At the moment of total dissolution of the village by the British police, Goddess Kenchamma acts as a benign presence.

Similarly, in Things Fall Apart, the use of myths and fables in the apprehension of history serves as devices to escape from a psychic distress in the life of the protagonist as well as that of the community. For instance the appearance of the masked spirits or egwugwu, each one representing a clan, is an occasion when the Ibo man conceives his mythic ancestors (AT 79; TFA ch.10). Joseph Campbell in his article “Historical Development of Mythology” comments on the role of masks in primitive societies:
The mask is revered as an apparition of the mythic being that it represents, yet everyone knows that a man made the mask and that a man is wearing it. The one wearing it, furthermore is identified with the god during the time of the ritual of which the mask is a part. He does not merely represent the god; he is the god... there has been a shift of emphasis from the normal secular sphere, where things are understood to be distinct from each other to a theatrical or play sphere where they are accepted for what they are experienced as being and the logic is that of 'make-believe' (244)

This observation is very much true of the characters of Achebe's novel and it also raises the novel to a higher mythical plane.

The fall in Things Fall Apart has both historical and mythical connotations. The fall is a historical fall in the sense that the community failed to support Okonkwo's resistance. The fall is also mythological in the sense that the hero as an individual forgets that the power of the collective identity is the true authority for any kind of action. Okonkwo's sense of isolation from the community, his departure from the mythological forces precipitated a historical crisis leading to his suicide. His killing of the Kotma or the court messenger from the British was an impulsive action without social sanction. His error is in disregarding the myth of Goddess Ani as he failed to win the support of the clan for his action. Okonkwo, is a product and a victim of Ibo mythology a symbol of the cultural history of a tribe in transition. The ambivalent attitude of the individual towards
the community in the time of crisis is possibly due to the European aggression into the tribal culture.

The cultural changes are transmitted through myths, rituals, folklore, and language. The pre-colonial period is depicted in Things Fall Apart as it records the gradual disintegration of the hold of religious, judicial and social institutions in the Ibo community. Arrow of God tells us about the community's history during the time interval between the implementation of the decision to appoint warrant chiefs and the withdrawal of them considering it to be inconvenient to the interests of the administration. A Man of the People tells the story of Nigeria, during the post-independence period when the political system falls prey to unqualified corruption. 'Anthills of the Savannah', highlights the need for deprogramming the Nigerian from the neo-colonialist traps. Though not obviously political or historical in tone, Raja Rao's Comrade Kirillov has a specific historical period, the period of Independence when the Indian intellectuals strove hard to put a democratic form of government into the country. In The Serpent and the Rope, the historical setting is not at all important as Rama is concerned about India as a continuum, not a geographical entity trapped in time. It is not cultural transition that Raja Rao is preoccupied with, but meaningful cultural discovery in the mythopoetic stream of thought in The Serpent and the Rope. The Cat and Shakespeare and The Chessmaster.

In Comrade Kirillov Raja Rao depicts a phase of Indian history in which one finds the Indian intellectuals torn apart between two divergent ways - the rightist and the leftist as demonstrated in the character of Padmanabha lyer alias
Kirillov who is a diehard communist unable to escape from Indian emotionalism. Raja Rao by naming Padmanabha Iyer as Kirillov, the name of the absurd character in Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*, has made use of a historical truth since Dostoyevsky’s novel and his characters can be considered as part of the historical consciousness. Among the protagonists of Raja Rao Iyer is the only character who problematizes the existential question with his rationality going to the extremes.

There is so much disruption and violence in *Things Fall Apart* as well as in *Kanthapura*. But the link between the spiritual and the mundane through the mediation of the religious rituals and social institutions, help the villager in Umofia and Kanthapura to overcome the stress of a tragic chapter of history. With regard to the redeeming factors in the life of these traditional societies, the following distinction is observed by Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah in his article “*Things Fall Apart. An outsider’s view*”

It is some small comfort to know in comparison with the Ibo, an Indian, for all his failings through the ages, has somehow preserved himself intact. As Camus has remarked, “If with all the ravages of invasions India has suffered, she has preserved herself it is because of a spiritual principle deeply embedded in her . . . While Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* a story of seeming disintegration of the village thanks to the Whiteman’s superior political power, people do put up a fight to vindicate their honour. Mere students have shown their capacity to lead a revolt
against the ‘Red Man’s Government’, Helpless women like Rangamma could organize a woman’s movement...

(Commonwealth Literature 165).

Making a comparison of the characters in Achebe and Raja Rao, C.D Narasimhaiah opines that while Achebe’s characters fail again and again, we see in Raja Rao the individual growing from strength to strength - Moorthy, Ramaswamy, Govindan Nair all symbols of spiritual strength inspired to reach the highest philosophical wisdom.

Raja Rao’s success is in mythicising the historical experience by focussing on the narrator’s inclusive consciousness like the narrator, Achakka in Kanthapura. Rao’s success, in style is noted by Birje Patil thus:

In Kanthapura Rao’s language soars, swings, is incantatory, liturgical, generally celebratory of Indian consciousness. Okara in The Voice, Wole Soyinka in The Interpreters and Achebe in Things Fall Apart create poetic structures which project their African sensibility through images of great power and beauty. Raja Rao’s narrative flow suggests collective consciousness, whereas the Africans, despite the tribal background of their characters individuate each of their central figures and the consciousness of each individual operates at some remove from the author’s own. (105)

While Raja Rao in Kanthapura evokes a common vision and a collective voice of the land, Achebe defines reality in terms of the individual perception of the characters. The perception of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart or Ezeulu in
Arrow of God is particular, not general. In both writers, the language is domesticated to suit their own mythic consciousness through a turn of phrase, an image, a proverb or a folk song. The mythical relationship of man with his ancestral gods is the prevalent motive force behind every expression related to their historical encounter with colonial forces. Achebe’s novels could be seen as creating an atmosphere of familiar Ibo strength which comes out from the traditional Ibo mythology as fictionalised in the novels in a language potent with the power of orality.

A very significant social change in the Ibo village is the gradual dissemination of Christianity among the Ibos. Okonkwo fails to provide a strong footing for his son Nwoye in Ibo religion. Nwoye, disgusted with the cruel customs of the religion was attracted to the ‘music of Christianity’. It is relevant in this context to see how Mulk Raj Anand’s character Bakha in Untouchable, who is seen successfully resisting the temptation of the missionaries. Unlike in India where the Christian experience has not affected the mainstream of Indian cultural life at any phase of Indian history, Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are moving documents of the inroads of Christianity into Nigerian religions. The death of Okonkwo, is in a sense an ironic challenge to Christianity. This tragic death highlights the high expectation of Okonkwo regarding the community’s responses to the changing order. The kind of social change initiated by Moorthy in the village, like the idea of eradication of untouchability, is a more difficult task than the challenge of consolidating the villagers in Iboland against the white man’s government in Umofia.
The fable of the tortoise and the bird, told by Ekwefi one of Okonkwo’s wives to her daughter Ezinma, manifests indigenous folk wisdom. Barbara Harlow reads the story as an allegory of resistance. The tortoise represents colonial power. The story says:

*The tortoise full of cunning and sweet coercion persuades the birds to include him in their feast in the sky. They gave him feathers with which he made two wings. However he managed to eat everything at the feast that nothing was left for the birds. (AT 86 TFA ch.11)*

*Things Fall Apart* challenges the authority of Western literary conventions and European colonialism to define an African reality. The parrot in the “Tortoise and the Birds” story is the colonial subject learning to safeguard his destiny from the deceptive tortoise, the coloniser. Okonkwo failed because he failed to be like the parrot which resorted to rhetoric as well as armed struggle to retaliate the deception.

It is interesting to note that Edna Aizenberg in “The Third World Novel as Counter History: *Things Fall Apart* and Asturias’s *Men of Maize*” says that Achebe while speaking for his people speaks for much of the people outside Europe and North America. The reclaiming of history in *Things Fall Apart* is similar to the vivid portrayal of Nationalist history in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. The commonality of spirit among Third World writers is striking when these novels are taken for comparison. An African approach to the employment of myth in fiction will definitely supplement attempts to assert cultural identity for the people within the Third World. Achebe dramatises the saga of African
civilization in transition by recording the social insecurity and nostalgia of a people. The novel is “a brilliant resolution of the conflict experienced by his generation between traditional and Western notions of manhood, courage and the construction of communal values” (Cobham 99).

The social practices mentioned in the novel, the celebration of Obeirika’s daughter’s Uri or betrothal, the funeral of Ezeudu, presentation of egwugwu to settle a marriage dispute, deliberations of the elders about Ikemefuna’s fate, the interference of the priest of the earth goddess, Ani, and Chielo, the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves are all seen as rituals established for a long time in the history of the clan. There are references to the past customs which disappeared from the clan’s social order; Ezeudu’s recollection signifies to this change:

My father told me that he had been told that in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoilt the peace which it was meant to preserve. (AT 38; TFA ch.4)

Some other practices in the clan which are questionable even for an Ibo like Obeirika include the disposal of twin children into the forest. He complains about the community’s punishment to Okonkwo to go in exile:

Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? Although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away.
What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed.

(AT 106; TFA ch.13)

The custom of the twins being thrown away into the forest is again mentioned: Nneka had four previous pregnancies and child births. But each time she had borne twins and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance.

(AT 125; TFA ch.17)

Achebe points out to the social reasons for the desertion of the Ibo religion in favour of Christianity by the Osu people and by women like Nneka who suffered rejection for bearing twin children.

In Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, the social institutions, customs and ceremonies, festivals and rituals are all watched over by Kenchamma, the spiritual centre of village life in Kanthapura. Perhaps the most significant deep-rooted canker in the social set up in India is the stratification of villagers into different castes - with “four and twenty houses with a Pariah quarter, a potter’s quarter, a Weaver’s quarter, a Sudra quarter and a Brahmin quarter” (K 10). The socio-economic divisions in the community is depicted through the spontaneous life enacted in the drama of Nationalist struggle under the leadership of Moorthy. Moorthy attempts to practice the ideal of equality and castelessness by visiting Pariah Ranchanna’s hut. As C.D. Narasimhaiah remarks, “It is a very trying moment for Moorthy - and for his creator; ‘it is something new’ (Raja Rao 45) and the
novelist relates the distress felt by Moorthy with astonishing faithfulness to experience: “with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor.” (K 104)

Another historical context is the political situation with all the economic deprivities as seen in the description of the coolies marching to the Skeffington estate, poor half-starved armies of coolies to work under the Sahib. The social, religious and political dimensions of the life in the two villages Umofia in *Things Fall Apart* and Kanthapura in *Kanthapura* place on record the history of a people confronting the same sort of European aggression into their traditional culture. Obeirika in *Things Fall Apart* sums up the political situation in the village Umofia.

The whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (AT 145; TFA ch.20)

The inevitable changes at that historical moment is the focus of attention for Achebe, rather than the comparative merits of the Ibo and white systems of administration and religion.

Achebe’s *Arrow of God* too seek to record the socio-cultural aspects of the respective communities which are based on a ritualistic foundation. The presence of the missionaries, the administrative presence of the white man through
the appointment of warrant chiefs all contributed to the disintegration of native Ibo religion and traditionalism in Umuaro. The history of a small village called Umuaro is told through Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, who is the religious leader of the clan. The events that took place in the novel are set in the year nineteen hundred and twenty one.

The transition from Moorothy in Kanthapura to Rama in The Serpent and the Rope can be seen as an ironical comment on the history of change from colonialism to freedom in India. The Serpent and the Rope looks at the past with irony and superiority. As Stephen Hemenway remarks:

the imperialist “Red-men” from Kanthapura here become insular, ignorant shopkeepers of Rama’s philosophy. It is with a mixture of condescension and sympathy that Rama sees a chastened England changing for the better rising to a new life at the time of Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation. (83)

But Arrow of God is set in the context of the white man’s aggression creating havoc in a traditional Ibo village. The protagonist Ezeulu, is the religious leader in Umuaro like the character Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart who was a leader of the village, holding several titles. The conflict between the British administration in Umuaro represented by Captain Winterbottom and the native system represented by the Chief Priest of Ulu, Ezeulu, is the historical framework depicted in the novel Arrow of God. Such internal conflicts between Ezeulu, and Idemili representing two different deities also constitute the structure of the novel. The social history of the clan is enacted through the human drama of the
chief priest's decisions and its impact as the society's social structure. The questioning of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves was not even a remote possibility in *Things Fall Apart* but in *Arrow of God*, the changing social sense is depicted through the attack on Ezeulu's authority, who represented Ulu, (the deity granting security) with the help of the combined historical changes like the presence of the Christian Church, and the new colonial administration. Nwaka's success in challenging Ezeulu's authority in *Arrow of God* is an instance of the changes that occurred in the Ibo society.

In *Arrow of God* the pre-colonial society is contrasted with the colonial present on several occasions. Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to join the Christian sect, but Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* never approved his son's desertion of his traditional religion. Ezeulu's attitude of pragmatism by sending his son to be 'his eye in the new religion' is an irony as he as chief priest is supposed to protect traditional religion. But both Okonkwo's inflexibility and Ezeulu's pragmatism end up in failure in resisting the colonial forces. Oduche, son of Ezeulu, becomes a firm believer of Christianity and tries to put the royal python into a box, the python sacred to Idemili. Thus Oduche's actions increase the schism between the priest of Ulu and Idemili. At this time Captain Winterbottom selects Ezeulu as a warrant chief for the Umuaro district which isolates him from the community. He did not go to Okperi as ordered by the whiteman and Tony Clarke the new man in place of Winterbottom, imprisons him for rejecting the order. After two month's of imprisonment he goes back to his village. He could not eat the ritual yams while in detention. He is ready to declare the
harvesting season only after finishing all the ritual yams. This delay in harvesting creates great havoc in the village resulting in famine. Tragedy strikes the chief priest, through his own son Obika's death and later through his own madness. The failure of the British administration to rule indirectly through warrant chief's in the nineteen twenties in the Ibo land is historically true. Dr. P.C. Lloyd in *Africa in Social Change* explains:

In attempts to "find a chief" men were often selected whose traditional roles had little to do with political authority. They were ritual experts or merely presided over councils of elders with equal status. Indeed the introduction of Indirect Rule on the Northern Nigerian pattern to the Ibo peoples and their, similarly organized neighbours of Eastern Nigeria proved impossible. From the beginning of the century, administrative officers had created "Warrant Chiefs" - men who often had no traditional authority but who seemed powerful enough to act as British agents in recruiting labour. (65)

Achebe's focus is not merely on the historical process, but on the interaction of the human and mythic forces in the Iboland. Achebe draws out of history the mythic substratum that is centred on many human and divine characters who represent the ritual and mythic basis of life in the land. Ezeulu was only a mere instrument of Ulu, as the fight was always a fight between gods. As Ulu tells Ezeulu "Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his python may again come to power".
He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god. "One half of him was man and the other half mmo—the half that was painted over with white chalk at important religious moments. And half of the things he ever did were done by this spirit side". (AT 517; AG ch. 16) The events that take place in Ezeulu’s house, the conflicts at home are only secondary in the novel. The various conflicts at the communal level gather significance in the overall development of the plot which signifies the historical and cultural changes in the Iboland during the early part of the twentieth century. Like Ezeulu’s character, one half of the novel is sacred and the other half profane.

Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* is the story of Rama’s quest for the Absolute, his journey is both physical and metaphysical, and the setting is France and India. In fact the Indian and European characters in the novel represent stages in India’s and Europe’s intellectual, moral and spiritual development. The novel is full of references from history—place names, names of historical figures, and events from contemporary history. The references to the Upanishads, Sankara, Coomaraswamy, Cathars, Dante, Rilke, Paul Valery, Lezanne, Marx, Gide, Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin and Sri Atmananda Guru makes the novel epic in its sweep.

Rama, the young Indian scholar is working in France and England on the Albigensian heresy in the Middle Ages, and he is married to Madeleine, a French woman, researching on the Holy Grail. His novel, like Achebe’s *Arrow of God* is also an exposition of tradition, indicating the lasting significance of Vedanta philosophy. In *Arrow of God*, the decline and fall of traditional religion is depicted.
while in The Serpent and the Rope, there is glorification of the Upanishadic vision of the world. The various commentaries about topics of historical and contemporary relevance in Europe and India can be read like digressions in an epic narrative. Ramaswamy analyses the important movements in European history - Communism, Nazism or the Tantric movement or the Buddhist contributions in India.

The story of the cultural elite striving to become the governing elite is what is represented in the character of Bhatta in Kanthapura and the same idea is repeated in the history of India as seen in the following commentary about the decline of the priest class, the Brahmins in The Serpent and the Rope:

The Brahmins sold India through the backdoor - remember Devagiri - and the Muslims come through the front. Purniyia sold the secrets of Tippu Sultan and the British entered through the main gateway of Seringapatam. Truth that is without courage can be the virtue of slave or widow. (SR 350)

The whole ancient history of India is told through the character of Rama, who feels himself a descendant of the Sage Yagnayavalkya. The entire novel, The Serpent and the Rope is about the mythification of history in India, India being presented as an archetypal image. Savithri, the Cambridge educated friend of Ramaswamy speaks about Independent India in her letters to Ramaswamy: "Some want India to become like our neighbour China, and others like their foster mother, white England. And nobody wants India to be India" (SR 390).
The India that dwells in the imagination of Rama is not the geographical entity, 
"not a historical presence among nations, but a hypostatic presence." (SR 193)

Rama tells Savithri:

Indian history plays a melody to itself, creating and re-creating itself 
standing not against sound but in silence. India is apart, that is why 
she has no history. India is everybody's. India is in everybody. It 
is in this sense, I think, that Mahatma Gandhi said, "When we are 
free, all will be free". Let us truly be Satyagrahis - graspers of the 
Truth - and that humbly is my India (SR 193).

Colonialism in India was seen by the Mahatma in a unique spiritual 
perspective which is summed up when Gandhi is reported to have said- "My 
freedom is not when the British leave India, for that is inevitable and will be 
soon, but when we become true Satyagrahis - when we seek the Truth humbly, 
fervently and with non-violence in our hearts"(SR 193). Rama explains to 
Lakshmi that Vedanta must become real again before India can be truly free. It 
is not considered as going back in time for there is no going back in Vedanta.

There are numerous instances of the historical, the real, the limited being 
mentioned in the novel along with the metaphysical, the infinite, the Absolute, 
Rama's long discourses about communism, Buddhism, Stalinism and so on are 
all directed towards a final affirmation of what India stands for. It is the very 
same India that separated Rama from Madeleine. Explaining the reasons for 
their estrangement Rama says:
Well, for me India is the Guru of the world or she is not India. The sages have no history, no biography - Who knows anything about a Yagneyavalkya or Bharadvaja? Nobody . . . we know more of king Harsha than we do of Sankara. India has, I always repeat, no history.

(SR 332)

Indians are a set of gamblers as they, throughout history, have questioned the existence of the world and Ramaswamy upholds this Adwaic vision of the world. The theme of the novel could be termed as the opposition of two attitudes to life explained by Rama thus: “Either you believe the world exists and so - you. Or you believe that you exist - and so the world. There is no compromise possible” (SR 333)

Being a Vedantin, Rama has no faith in the superman be it Zarathustra, Sri Aurobindo or Stalin, for he too is perishable. His concept of the guru who brings him light is not the superman but the impersonal principle which is pure knowledge. He doesn’t see much difference between materialism and moralism. Rama remarks that when Sri. Aurobindo died, his disciples must have been terribly disturbed, when the “deathless master, who wanted to consecrate any other left them”. For Rama, the “undying is a moral concept - for death is a biological phenomenon, an anti-life phenomenon, against the nature of the species. Not to die, to drink the elixir of life, is moral - celibacy is the transcending of nature.” (SR 206) Thus the attitude to death - death of his child Pierre, death of his father in India - becomes rather magisterial in its impartiality in sentiments and strong in spirit to face the drab reality.
Rama in his metaphysical heights comes down to earth, to reality when his weak lungs remind him of the limitations of the body. He is a combination of contraries, spiritual and sensual metaphysical and historical. Another force in his life that brings him down to history - to time and space - is woman. His Woman appears as Little mother, Madeleine, Savithri, Saroja and Lakshmi, each one of them influencing him in a major way except Lakshmi who is a symbol of the woman who kills.

The following words of Ramaswamy testify to the thematic concerns of the novelist -

'I am not telling a story here, I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life, with no art or decoration but with the 'objectivity', the discipline of 'historical sciences', for by taste and tradition I am only a historian. (SR 231)

Rama's research topic, the Albigensian heresy, itself is central to an attempt to integrate the Indian imagination with western sensibility. Alastair Niven commenting on the attitude of Rama towards history affirms:

'It [history] is a presence, a spiritual entity which links and solves civilizations, expressing the connection that exists between all men. History is, for Rama, humanity. Beyond humanity it is knowledge. There is nothing arbitrary and disconnected about it: history had the logic of Truth. To understand the nature of History is to understand that in the actions of men there is a determining force, impersonal though it is, which binds men of all continents together. (Truth Within 41-2)
It is this philosophical treatment of history that raises the mind to a realm beyond time and space. To his imagination Rama and Savithri, Tristan and Isolde, Abelard and Eloise are part of the same archetypal relationship. Rama's question whether the Cathars are Vedantins comes out of an awareness that the Cathars feared no death, and they believed in Truth when the Church believed in God. The historical background of Catharism is detailed by Alastair Niven:

Catharism was the potent of the anti-Roman heresies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It conducted its work in the vernacular, just as one of its sources, Manichaeanism; had often been rendered into Asiatic languages. The Cathar (from the Greek word for 'purity') elevated poverty and humility, in imitation of Christ, to the highest level. Madeleine's rejection of her own Roman Catholic upbringing in favour of fasts and self inflicted humiliation can be interpreted as a Cathar gesture. (Truth Within 42)

Rama with his quest for the Absolute Truth is naturally attracted to the principles of Catharism which builds up a bridge across two kinds of sensibilities, the eastern and the western: Madeleine's fasting for purification, in spite of her proclaimed Buddhist convictions, reflect aspects of Catharism in her.

In discussing the albigensians in his thesis, Rama is developing a philosophy of history in itself. Thus Rao in his treatment of history in fiction, mythicises the universal in the temporal, thereby mythicising history of the East and the West. While describing the gradual separation of the east and the west, through Rama and Madeleine there is shared space, like the sky that transcends.
national barriers. The whole novel is moving towards this atemporal area in oneself. For Rama it is Truth. Rama’s pilgrimage to India is to learn this ‘Unknown principle’ at the feet of his guru.

The very first paragraph of the novel *The Serpent and The Rope* is full of reminiscences of ancestral history - Yagnavalkya, Sage Madhva, Sri Sankara, signifying the throbbing tradition in the consciousness of Rama. He declares:

I can feel them in me, and know they know they did not die. Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me. So my ancestors went one by one and were burnt and their ashes have gone down the rivers. (SR 5)

The physical death of the ancestors and their continued existence in the awareness of Rama are placed together here. This co-existence of the historical and the mythical, the involvement of Rama in the real world and the urge to ‘see God face to face’ is fundamental to the thematic structure of the novel. The concluding lines of the novel, the hot chocolate and plush chairs in the last sentence remind us of the inescapable actuality of human existence, of human history. And Travancore remains the magic land of Rama’s Great Sage, who could initiate one to that knowledge which is the ultimate point of all knowledge, the Absolute.

It is the mythic innocence of India, the essentially mythic character of the idea of India that is highlighted by Raja Rao through the consciousness of Rama, who is the archetypal Indian seeker in search of the Ultimate. Rama thinks, “It [India] was like a juice that one is supposed to drink to conquer a kingdom or to reach the deathless... It gave me sweetness and the delire of immortality.”
(SR 15). The Himalayas, the Ganges, the City of Banares are all mythicised entities acquiring such beautiful associations bearing an eternal fascination. Rao renders the description of these geographical entities with phrases and images that impart a mythical radiance to the narrative. The Himalayas for Rama was—like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable and yet very intimate there where you do not exist . . . It led you back through abrupt silences to the recesses of your own familiar but unrecognised self . . . For in the deepest sleep, as every pilgrim knows, one is wide awake, awake to oneself. And the Himalayas was that sleep made knowledge. (SR 42)

At the same time Rama is not unaware of the harsh realities in history like the partition, and the communal riots, the seamy side of the history of the land of Buddha and Sankara. Here is a touching description of the agonies of communal violence that broke out soon after independence.

Delhi was so sad with the refugees and the dirt on the streets and the stories are heard of what had happened on the border. Mothers had lost their daughters, and fathers their wives, but when the Women’s Commission went to recover the abducted women some of them laughed. . . . “Sisters, you call us! what sisters are we to you, O respectable ones? The Muslims took us and here we are of their harems, they treat us better than the cowards that left us and ran for their lives. Tell my daughter, I am happy. And tell that man called my husband spit on his face . . . (SR 43)
Rama’s encyclopaedic knowledge and depth of vision enables him to express his opinion on every historical phenomenon, whether it be communism or Buddhism, the two important challenges to the tradition of the ancient past. Rama tells Savithri that “Communism is a positive movement - It is a spiritual movement. It moves in the direction of life.” (SR 188) His observation about Buddhism is: “Buddhism died in India because it became ascetic, and so denied womanhood its right to exist” (SR 170) Rama’s profound impressions of the major events in European and Eastern history reveals his Vedantic convictions. Here is Rama’s judgement of the role of Stalin and Hitler in the history of Europe: Look at the difference between Hitler and Stalin. Stalin, the man of Iron, the mystery behind Kremlin, the impersonal being, to whom torture, growth or death are essentials of an abstract arithmetic. As the Catholics looked for Omens in the Bible, Stalin looked impersonal history for guidance. Stalin lives and dies, in history as history, not outside history. Hitler, on the other hand, lived in his dramatic Nuremberg rallies . . . (SR 204)

The place of these men from history, their historical role, is interpreted metaphysically so that history dovetails into myth; Rama’s search for the roots of human understanding is always a pervading influence on his vision of history. While Mother Ganges is a symbol of the sacred flow of life, he notices the half burnt bits of dead bodies reminding him of the mortality of existence. Rama integrates the myths of different countries into the essential oneness of history. Therefore he perceives no difference between the Ganges and the Seine, between
George VI and Indian Bharata for both of them believed in the impersonality of monarchy.

Even the British queen's coronation, for Rama, is the enactment of the Feminine principle. Rama feels that the occasion helped the Englishman to gain a "momentous insight of men into himself" (SR 199). Rama being an Indian who disliked British presence in India, feels in the coronation of the queen in England, that he "an Indian who disliked British rule, should feel this only revealed how England was recovering her spiritual destiny, how in anointing her Queen she would anoint herself (SR 200). For Rama "civilization is nothing but the familiarity with which we go into this inner property, cultivated and manured from age to age" (SR 90). Ramaswamy's philosophical perception of the world's different streams of thought, the varied facets of historical reality, is summed up thus: "Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Hitlerism, the British Commonwealth, the Republic of the United states of America - all are so many names for some unknown principle, which we feel but cannot name. For all the roads lead but to the Absolute" (SR 90). Here Rama partakes in the primordial choice between the phenomenal and the spiritual, which is in fact the source of creativity that offers man the right choice for the aviodance of history repeating itself. Societies that have that choice stuck on them are blessed with gurus to help them out of it as in India.

Thus the historical, whether from the East or the West, is raised to the realm of the metaphysical. True to the epic tradition, the novel encompasses through the employment of images, phrasing, symbolic representation, or
mythification of the historical - the historical figures, places, rivers or regions gain symbolic significance in order to reinforce the metaphysical vision of history.

Numerous instances can be cited to demonstrate Raja Rao's rare skill investing a sacred significance to seemingly plain historical events or places: Here are a few examples: Paris is somehow not a city. It is an area in ourselves, a concorde of one's being...." (SR 51). "The sacred capital [Benares] was really a surrealist city. You never know where reality starts and where illusion ends" (SR 12). Again he thinks: "What an imperial river the Thames is - her colour may be dark or brown but she flows with a majesty, with a maturity of her own knowledge of herself . . ." (SR 41).

*The Himalaya* is a symbol and a myth working in the consciousness of Ramaswamy. He thinks:

The Himalaya made the peasant and the Brahmin feel big, not with any earthly ambition, but with the bigness, the stature of the impersonal, the stature of one who knows the nature of his deepest sleep. For in the deepest sleep, as every pilgrim knows, one is a wide awake. And the Himalayas was that sleep made knowledge.

(SR 42)

For Rama, even the concubines in Benares or Paris evoke the same kind of metaphysical concern, for everything is a symbol of the great unifying Vedantic principle, the 'I'. In Benares, the beautiful concubines "Made you leap into yourself, with the feeling that knowledge is of oneself made, that the knowledge of knowledge is fathomless, unnameable . . . (SR 218) and Rama is grief stricken.
when he wandered down the Champs Elysees where the "holiness of womanhood is torn asunder" (SR 218).

The entire narration in the novel is centered round the transformation of the historical into the metaphysical. The narration takes place through the protagonist's preoccupation with the Absolute. The mythical space attained through the cultural inwardness of the characters with archetypal significance raises the novel to the level of myth. In the end of the story Rama, fulfills his quest after meeting his guru in Travancore. Like Nachiketa who conquers death, Rama's quest for the Absolute takes him to the mythical realm of pure experience. Like the Mahabharata story, images of travel abound in the novel which correspond to spiritual progress. For Rama's consciousness, everything, every symbol is spiritually significant as seen in the line: "The sacred is nothing but the symbol seen as the "1" (SR 60). Everything spiritual and temporal, every river, every religion, every pilgrimage has an ontological significance. The chanting of Sankara's 'Nirvana-Ashtakam' which Rama learned from his father, with the ending 'Shivoham - Shivoham' laid the leit-motif with the metaphor of pilgrimage serving a vital role in the narration. Rama comments:

In Vedanta there is no going back or forward . . . In the same way Indian history plays a melody to itself, creating and recreating itself, standing not against sound, but in silence. India is apart, that is why she has no history. India is everybody's; India is in everybody. It is in that sense that Mahatma Gandhi said, when we are free, all will be free. (SR 193)
Raja Rao's infatuation with the mythification of history persists as exemplified by these comments by Rama about the nature of history itself. What we find in The Serpent and the Rope is the mythification of all heroes from history, from the East and the West. This is exactly the opposite of what happens in historical novels. This effect is achieved by a variety of techniques right from naming to language use. Ramaswamy's unique interpretation of history through various commentaries cited above further reinforces the author's view of history. Even this self-analysis of Ramaswamy has its origin in the prophetic discourse of mythical entities from Krishna to Buddha. It is not in relative terms but from an omniscient point of view. Thus the novel is compelled to assume the status of myth and not of history as the author, the character and the mythicised heroes can coexist only in a world beyond linear time and tangible space.

History might have made a value judgement about any of the choices since history is suppose to be a guideline on choices. When the duality is accepted and the unity is acknowledged and sought, in the case of both Raja Rao and Achebe through creative efforts, mythification takes place. For Ezeulu in Arrow of God, for instance, the only possible choice is not between two paths of action but between wanting or not wanting to choose. As the title of the novel indicates, he is merely an arrow in hands of god, himself having any choice but to be or not to be.

Achebe realises this nature of the human situation proposed by traditional wisdom and makes his novels unhistorical. There are no guidelines to be given.
about parts of action but only a suggestion of the futility involved in the paths of action and glorification of man's true place and position in the Ibo scheme of things. Calling crimes, masculine and feminine, implies that they are there opposites if seen the other way. The masculine crime could easily be a feminine virtue and so on. This again is a lesson about the futility of history in privileging one choice above the other.

The responsibilities of a chief priest, Ezeulu, in guiding the spiritual and practical affairs of the Ibo community is the major concern in Achebe’s novel Arrow of God. Though set in two different historical contexts, the two novels provide a mythical framework for projecting certain archetypal concerns including the role of the spiritual in the mundane life of the two communities. The protagonists in both novels contain representative values from the respective traditions. Rama in The Serpent and the Rope lives by myths so that temporalities do not affect him. The death of his son, Pierre, is faced by him with rare equanimity for he is a man who has a profound sense of the ephemeral and the real, the Absolute. Ezeulu plays the role of a victim of a particular historical situation among the Ibos, who acts as the priest of Ulu, half man and half spirit, symbolising spiritual authority over his clan. Being the arrow of god, he is both an agent and a victim; one who carries with him all the strong points and weak points of tradition. The mythical predominates over the historical as the arrow has no choice in its own direction. The crisis due to famine is cleverly exploited by Mr. Good country, Catechist of St. Marks C.M.S. Church and the clansmen deserted their gods for the new god.
But the redeeming factors in this story of defeat for the Ibos are the inherited myths of the land, the proverbs and stories which are deeply embedded in the collective psyche. Ezeulu’s friend Obeirika is a representative of the spiritual resources of the Ibos whose position is one of a moderate understanding of traditional powers and historical trends. Both protagonists, Rama in *The Serpent and the Rope* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* see the past as represented in the novels as true history, something that actually happened. Dan Izevbaye puts it:

> Although Achebe keeps the characters and the setting of the action fictional, he remains faithful to the historicity of the action itself. The novel thus preserves the essential features of Igbo history and by extension, African history, at the point of contact with colonizing Europe. (45)

The two novels *Arrow of God*, *The Serpent and the Rope* bear a conceptual framework that imparts a mythical radiance to the narrative. Like Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and the Rope* is a representative national character with a tendency to philosophise so that he gains a remarkable ability to overcome suffering with ease. Rama’s attitude to the death of his son, Pierre is an instance of this rare capacity to sustain suffering.

In both novels, we can find the presence of the spiritual as fresh, vibrant, alive, and intimate. Ezeulu’s failure is not the failure of a deity, but a man’s failure. The fundamental reason for the final failure of the marriage of Rama and Madeleine lies not in his philosophy of life per se but in his inability to
initiate her into his level of understanding of the metaphysical Truth. The intellectual hero in The Serpent and the Rope is not different from Ezeulu, as both draw sustenance from the mythic consciousness of the land to which they belong. Ezeulu plays a crucial role in the social and religious life of the people in Umuaro. It was he who named the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and also The Feast of the New Yam, both rituals creating a sacred mood of solidarity among the people. “The Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves”, as Ibe Nwaga says, “provides occasion for a dramatic renewal of the myth of the founding of Ulu, the communal god of Umuaro.” The Ibo history in Arrow of God is seen by Ibe Nwaga on three aspects - the nature of traditional religion and its challenges, the social organisation in Ibo society and the threat from British imperialism (Nwaga 20).

The role played by the deity Ulu is revealed in the prayer of Ezeulu who is the archetypal figure of an Ibo priest who carries with him the mythical thought of the land. Ezeulu prays: “Ulu, I thank you for making me see another new moon, This household, may it be healthy and prosperous. May god meet the face of everyman and every woman” (AT 324; AG ch.2). The powerful deity Nwanyieke, fulfills the need of the villagers to attract customers from all neighbourhood. This deity is an old woman, who appears with a broom in her right hand and dances round the vast open space beckoning with her broom in all directions of the earth and drawing folk from every land. There is a mythical as well as a social dimension to this deity. The Feast of the New Yam is described as an occasion “in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbour and look to his left and see a god standing there” (AT 528; AG ch.17). The New Yam festival brought men and gods together in one crowd as all the minor deities...
in the six villages would gather near the Shrine of Ulu, the presiding deity. The festival reminds the people of the unification of the six villages, and the “continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the ravages of the Abame”

(AT 527; AG ch.17).

Thus the festival has a historical as well as a spiritual significance, bringing the two strands together. The feast marked the end of the old year and the opening of the harvesting season of the king of crops, yam. No man was allowed to taste yam before the festival. As Ibe Nwaga says, “these then are festivals in which human activities are given sacred dimensions and ritual reinforcement, in which the unity within the community and between human beings and the gods, is revalidated.” (21). The relationship of a man to his Chi, the celebration called Aku Nro accompanied by the presentation of ancestral masks, the power of medicine men like Otaokpeli the apparition of Eru, god of wealth, confirm the role of gods in the Ibo scheme of things. In Arrow of God the character of the chief priest is supposed to be an impersonal figure acting as a model for taking decisions on secular and spiritual matters. But as Nwaka in Arrow of God says, “the man who carries a deity is not king. He is there to perform his god’s ritual and to carry sacrifice to him” (AT 346 AG ch.2). But Ezeulu commits the act of hubris by refusing to pronounce Ulu’s consent for harvesting. The rise of individual consciousness, replacing the collective consciousness of the community, brings him to his fall.

The white man’s exploitation of the political situation of war between Umuaro and Okperi resulted in the final authority of Captain Winterbottom over
the two villagers. Later the forces of change take precedence over the uncompromising chief priest who becomes a martyr to change. He is therefore a victim of a historic situation when people instead of starving themselves to death, accepted a new god. Achebe depends on social and historical material and his depiction of that reality is directed towards the plight of the total society and its transition. The white man in Iboland, Captain Winterbottom, the district officer at Okperi, has totally misunderstood the Ibo traditional life. Mr. Clarke, the assistant district officer, is also a young European who arrived in Africa to civilize the ‘savage’. And unfortunately the Ibo people who act as agents of the white man’s administration are more vicious than the Europeans themselves.

The raw material of history is transformed into a mythical narrative through the ritualization of events and the deification process in Ibo social life. Both novels are elaborations of a certain cultural ethos which offers a convincing explanation for people’s attitudes to events of central importance in the development of African society. The colonialist experience depicted in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* are evidently a paradigm for the whole of African experience. The flaw of Ezeulu could be read as a reciprocation of the possible flaw of the social order to which he belongs. The mythopoeic consciousness in Okonkwo and Ezeulu put them as representative heroes, of the respective cultural milieu. The character of Rama is archetypal in the sense that he embodies a typical mode of behaviour of the seeker in quest of the Absolute. Ezeulu represents the Ibo sensibility towards the deities as he remains an integral part of the mythopoeic consciousness of the community. Both Ezeulu and Rama...
try to resolve the conflicts arising out of a tension between two contrasting value systems with the historical being dovetailed into the mythical.

Characters are symbols of certain archetypal traits in the national character of each nation, with actions oriented towards ritual. For instance, Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope is a symbol of Indian womanhood, a Radha who identifies herself with her lover, who in turn is dependent upon her as the primal universal power for the realisation of the self within him.

Rajà Rao's Comrade Kirillov (1976) and Achebe's No Longer at Ease are set in the post independence period of the two countries. The confused state of mind of the Indian intellectual torn between his Vedantic wisdom and western ideologies is evident in the character Padmanabha Iyer alias Comrade Kirillov. In Achebe's novel No Longer at Ease, Obi Okonkwo suffers from the conflicting pulls of his village life and the charm of city life. Padmanabha Iyer in Comrade Kirillov is facing a metaphysical problem, a crisis like that of Kirillov in Dostoyevsky's novel The Possessed. Iyer presents a characteristic Western preoccupation with the metaphysical problem of explaining the absurd nature of existence. Comrade Kirillov presents the whole philosophical question engendered by existentialism.

These novels exert a fascination due to the presence of the sacred in various forms in the narrative as they serve to create an intense awareness of the mythic consciousness in the two cultural traditions. These texts assume the status of myth when themes such as the historical experience of colonialism are presented.
in such a way that the respective communities could recognise a picture of the collective consciousness. *Things Fall Apart* *Arrow of God* and *Kanthapura* are novels that explain a collective experience but implicitly directed towards the future. *The Serpent and the Rope* on the other hand exerts a power and fascination by an explicit way of linking myth and cultural history. Like myths, these novels are concerned with the collective cultural phenomenon. The status of myth for these novels can well be sustained as long as the literary attempts to savour the oxymoronic relationship between polar opposites (itself mythical), are there to guide us to new pastures of perception.