Chapter Five

Summation

"Not that the self can by any means be made to contract. It is unchangeable, the infinite one. It was covered, as it were, with a veil, the veil of Maya, and as this Maya veil becomes thinner and thinner, the inborn, natural glory of the soul comes out and becomes more manifest. This is the one great doctrine which the world is waiting to learn from India". (Swami Vivekananda To the youth of India 88)

This research is a comparative study of Raja Raos's The Serpent and the Rope and Jayakanthan’s Jaya Jaya Shankara. The study traces the themes of faith and quest in the two novels in the light of Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara. Considering the religious element as the common factor, both the novelists have come up with their perceptions of human life in the context of modern living. Adi Shankara proclaimed that the ‘Divine’ is present in every self. This conscious feeling of the bhava is necessary to understand the truth. There are three divine characteristics in all beings. They are Asthi, Bakthi and Priyam – Being, Awareness and Bliss – ‘sat-chit-ananda’. The key characters of the two novels involve themselves in various modes of experiences to attain the bliss – the Advaita Darshan.

For the attainment of the Absolute by a person who practises Hindu faith, Sanatana Dharma, the understanding and familiarity with Hindu religion and practice is essential. The process of growth and change on the part of a Hindu subject involves faith in metaphysical and philosophical quest in life. Advaita Vedanta enables a philosophic understanding of life for a Hindu from a philosophical plane. It takes up the
question of the real and the unreal, the illusion and the reality, and the self and the other. The *Vedanta* finally concludes with the understanding of the non-dual as the essence of knowledge. This is explained by the theory of *Atman* and *Brahman*. The former is the soul and the latter means god. The basic premise of non-dualistic *Vedanta* is that the *Brahman* is in every soul and the final bliss lies in understanding this fact. From the non-dual theoretical position, the theory of being and becoming could be understood as reaching the stage of bliss by means of the supreme knowledge of the *Absolute*. This study equates ‘being’ with a stage of *Atman* unconscious of the *Brahman*, and the stage of ‘becoming’ with the attainment of a vision of the *Absolute*. Since *Brahman* is equated with Brahmin in ideal terms, these stages are termed as “being and becoming a Brahmin”. This is to say, no one can become a Brahmin by birth and anyone can become a Brahmin by attaining the divine consciousness. If being is equal to living with and amidst illusions, the stage of becoming is the attainment of divine consciousness, which is seeing the *Brahman* in one’s self. This is the state of perfect knowledge. Any one who attains this state of knowledge ‘becomes a Brahmin’ and attains the illumination of the *Brahman* that is in his self as well as in others. This stage is known, as “I am thou”. The second chapter entitled “Religion: Being and Becoming a Brahmin” deals with this idea. Jayakanthan’s *Jaya Jaya Shankara* gives illustrations how the characters attempt to become a Brahmin and how they are put on the path of realization. Jayakanthan believes in liberating Hindu religion from Manu’s stigma of birth. Raja Rao glorifies the Brahminical birth whereas Jayakanthan states that birth is not a hindrance in following a religion. Jayakanthan believes in the freedom of space given in Hindu religion, asserts the need and understands the tradition
of *Sanatana Dharma* in the right perspective. At the same time, he accepts the dialectics of life. The characters in *Jaya Jaya Shankara* are drawn from both the upper caste and the lower caste. Their lives of interaction and absorption reveal Jayakanthan’s interpretation of Hindu *Dharma* as at once in subservience to and transcendence of *Sanatana Dharma*. For him, the essential point is understanding the religious rituals at one level and accepting new perceptions at another level. Very subtly Jayakanthan tries to zero down the conflict between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins by arguing that the clash is imaginary and a delusion. Tamil Nadu, Jayakanthan’s home state in India has got a history that has focus on Brahmin – Non-Brahmin rivalry as a political and cultural issue. It is only in the understanding of others one can reach the true enlightenment. A true believer in Adi Shankara’s philosophy may have no difficulty in accepting both the Brahmin and the untouchable as the same for in both lies the ‘Brahman’. If a Brahmin can become or can attain *Brahman* so can a Harijan. Attachment of such consciousness is ‘becoming a Brahmin’. The point is a person born to Brahmin parents cannot be considered a Brahmin in this sense.

Young Shankaran, one of the key characters in Jayakanthan’s *Jaya Jaya Shankara* is a born Brahmin and later in the narrative is elevated to the status of guru in *Shree Madam*. His friend Adi is a Harijan boy. According to the predominating caste divisions, the two are supposed to be at the extremes in their social order and by strange pervading factors and modes of social practice the contact between the two is prohibited, even the body touch between a Harijan and other communities is avoided, with the result a Harijan is termed an untouchable. This theme of friendship between an
untouchable, a Brahmin comes handy to Jayakanthan to announce his stand points on the issues of Absolute truth. Both the characters names – Adi and Shankara – suggest and symbolize the name of the great philosopher, Adi Shankara. They become fine illustration of Adi Shankara’s theory of *Brahman*, the Absolute Truth being available to one who dispels the illusions. While Young Shankaran revisits the village Shankarapuram as Acharya Swamigal, he sends his disciple Krishnaswamy to invite Adi to have his *darshan*. Krishnaswamy comes to know that Adi is a Harijan and conveys this to Acharya. But the Acharya seems to be least bothered at his remarks on Adi. One of the key aspects of his relationship is the revelation of the fact that one can become a Brahmin only by the consciousness of the *Brahman* and no Brahmin, just because he or she is born a Brahmin, cannot be considered a Brahmin in a metaphysical sense. Jayakanthan believes in the reality that every person can become a divine person provided he or she is illuminated with the knowledge of reality. Thus Adi, a Harijan is elevated to a status of a guru and the future Acharya, Young Shankaran considers Adi as god and guru. Young Shankaran practises the *Aachaara* and only Adi initiates his friend’s Braminization process. Jayakanthan uses the Markendaya myth and the Adi Shankara myth as revelatory to Young Shankaran. Markendaya escaped from imminent death thanks to his staunch faith in Lord Shiva. Young Adi Shankara did not ostracized the Chandals. Jayakanthan calls for a kind of social equality by way of portraying the emotional unity of both Adi and Shankara. If life is a current of waters the vortex is identified as a place of danger by Adi, and for Shankaran, Adi becomes Lord Shiva, the Saviour. Thus Jayakanthan, as the culmination of equality, visualizes the name ‘Adi Shankara’, and shows Adi and Shankaran as two different characters of two different
classes and status. But for a person who is conscious of the Absolute, the apparent divisions like status, class and caste are mere illusions. Sadashiva Iyer transcends the limitations imposed by Manu’s caste code and subjects himself to any flexible interpretation of socialization. In fact his faith and quest lies in changing the tradition. He is making a new reading of dharma based on equality while the traditional dharma had been conditioned by graded discriminations. In such discriminations, the fact is that every living human being is made of god and the godhead within him is often neglected. These events reveal two the aspects of Adi’s growth during his life. The first is his acceptance in real terms as a Brahmin by not only his wife Swatantra Devi but also by the Acharya. Even after a long time, the Acharya is able to figure out the divine, the Brahmin and the Brahman in Adi’s person. Adi’s wife declares that he is the noblest. Brahmin, true to the meaning of Gandhiji’s declaration of Harijans - ‘Son of Hari, Son of God’. Even Krishnaswamy who entertains mundane and common place views about caste divisions has to declare that Adi has grown so much that he is now an untouchable. In Krishnaswamy’s terminology and reading the very term ‘untouchable’ gains its most positive meaning that Adi is an elevated person, a true Brahmin, in an untouchable place to the caste Brahmin Krishnaswamy. Thus Adi succeeds in himself being acknowledged or rather Brahminised by people who are born Brahmin. And when people queue up to get the darshan of the Acharya Swamigal, and get his blessings, Swamigal wishes to have darshan of his own Lord Parameswara, who comes in the form of Adi.
Ramaswamy of Raja Rao believes in his Brahmin birth and the wisdom of a Brahmin. He also shares many Brahmins’ beliefs that a Brahmin has got the ability to transcend the time and space, “he goes backward and forward in time”. The essential point however is that for this mobility, a Brahmin needs a helping hand – a guru or a promoter. Therefore in this essential Brahminism lies the prospect of “Becoming a Brahmin”. According to Sanatana Dharma performance and practice of rituals are enough to be a Hindu but for Raja Rao the religious footing asks for a metaphysical quest, the desire to grow into a Brahmin. This is made possible not simply by the internal effort but by seeking external guidance. From a philosophical point of view this is a kind of union between the self and the others. Hence Ramaswamy’s attempts find favour and assistance in his relationships with different persons like his relationship with Savithri. Ramaswamy entertains a strong obsession about his Brahmin birth. He considers that he is superior to people of other faith and other states because he has been privileged by the unique, the pure and the imperial heritage.

In The Serpent and The Rope, Raja Rao’s description of Brahmanization connotes only reality and not metaphysical. However Ramaswamy is also given to moments of metaphysical flights transcending his ritualistic identity. He feels he has been impoverished by remaining out of the Hindu orbit for some time and he attempts to become a Brahmin is necessitated by the sense of absence which fills him very often. The Brahmin identity for Ramaswamy also revolves around the places of religious significance like Banares, Hariduwar etc. This is also a mental block for his growth into a Brahmin. Ramaswamy is conscious of his ‘orphanhood’, ‘alienation’, temporary
oblivion and the need ‘to be a Brahmin’. But the process of knowing the Absolute – I am Thou – is not forthcoming readily perhaps because of his overriding consciousness of his Brahmin birth the identity that grants the privilege of elevation and advantage in terms of Sanatana Dharma. His problem is one of overcoming forgetfulness on the one hand and of turning to the Brahmin home on the other. As he believes in the privilege of his birth he cannot reject or change to a different kind of living tradition, which would save him from the process of westernization and the entrenched Brahmin identity, initiates his return home. In other words Ramaswamy’s crisis is to become a Brahmin to see the Brahman in him and in others. For this he has to negotiate with his Brahmin consciousness, the Brahmin rituals and Brahmin identity. As he accepts the Brahmin identity, he also accepts collateral problems of pain and detachment, the feeling of orphanhood and the retreat in the rituals. Ramaswamy is conscious of the need to become a Brahmin and seeks an external assistance in the form of a guru. Ramaswamy gives an impression that though a Brahmin by birth, he has lost his true Brahmin nature as a Brahmin and hence he seeks to regain it by performing rituals. Finally he understands that the change is not that easy, the becoming is growing and the growth is painful. He must go to Travancore to find his guru, who can show him the “image of Brahman,” and as a disciple through obedience to the guru he could gains “the world of Brahman”. The story of Ramaswamy does not end with his mission of knowing the Brahmin. Though be becomes not a Brahmin; there is a strong suggestion of his prospect of becoming one, aided by a guru. The fact that being a Brahmin by birth does not ensure the Brahmin consciousness in him, as he understands the fact that feeling the Brahman is being a Brahmin. And when this is not assured and
forthcoming, he attempts to become a Brahmin. Raja Rao takes up the question of Hindu faith and practice, and Hindu experience in the subjective knowledge of the subjects concerned. Through the life of Ramaswamy the need for a transformation is recommended to all. Jayakanthan’s portrayal of Shankaran and Adi, two key characters in the fiction, also reveals this pattern of being and becoming.

Jayakanthan gives greater emphasis to the changes that have arrived in the social fabric in India due to Gandhism and Marxism. He also presents the caste-ridden Hindu society in its conflict – prone status and recommends a greater understanding of Shankara’s philosophy would facilitate the process of becoming a Brahmin by anyone including a Dalit. Raja Rao’s thematic design takes up three important aspects, namely Ramaswamy’s Brahmin birth, his burden of Brahmin consciousness in west, and his return to the Brahmin orbit of practicing the Sanatana Dharma. But the process of becoming a Brahmin is not yet complete in the case of Ramaswamy perhaps because his problem is the burden of his Brahmin birth, the false notion of superiority. Jayakanthan depends on Sanatana Dharma and finds that the tradition provides the need for success for one and all. In fact, the philosophy of non-dualism conveys the essential message of equality of all lives. The place for attaining the awareness of the Brahman may be the Shree Madam and the facilitator may be a guru. But Jayakanthan finds the Shree Madam of Acharyas does change according to the changing times. As far as Jayakanthan is concerned, there is no difference between the Shree Madam of Acharya and the Gandhi ashram of Sadashiva Iyer and Manaveli Illam of Singarayar. People in these places are liberated souls, transcending the worlds of caste and status,
fully involved in psychological quest which assures a growth and this could be considered as the process of ‘becoming a Brahmin’ for each of the individuals.

Creativity involves continuing the life of human beings who enter a series of relationships which may be either bending or breaking. The two novels provide the traveling and questing minds craving for attaining the Absolute through their experience. Ramaswamy’s experience is physical, intellectual and religious. He attains these three levels of experiences by a process of pursuit, which places him in chosen relationships bonding as well as breaking away from his moorings of monotony to new domains of excitement. The key point to be recurrent in Ramaswamy’s experiential life is that he is able to transcend himself in a spiritual axis for which he does not hesitate to bond with some and break from some others. The Serpent and The Rope gives a detailed picture of human relationships, which are familial, marital and even extramarital.

The third chapter entitled “Relationship: Breaking and Bonding” highlights the significance of experiences through relationships. The chapter details the web of relationships that includes bonding and breaking, each one providing an appropriate experience. Each experience provides him with a movement further from ignorance to knowledge from Avidhya to Vidya. The story of Ramaswamy accords a central place to family and marriage. In spiritual terms, man understands the essence of life in woman. His existence is read and felt as truth because woman is a truth, a fact of existence. Raja Rao seems to assert the point that man realizes himself by dissolving himself in women. The same could be stated from the point of view of the woman, that man is the
truth and the woman the essence. This way of relating oneself in the other, binds people resulting in the realization that the fact and the essence are within everyone. The Brahman is in every identity. Jnanam and its identity with knowledge and existence are made available by the way of man’s relationships with the other. The entire novel The Serpent and The Rope addresses this issue of realization of Self, in one’s Self and also in others. Marriage is one important factor by which one can attain various, multiple experiences. Hence Ramaswamy regards, marriage as an important step in one’s life to attain the Absolute truth. In Indian marriage system, the ritualistic ceremonies are intended to bring together the concept and idea of “purusa” and “prakriti”. Ramaswamy, however, does not seems to bother about his marriage. He is ready to break it so that he can enter into the domains of intellectual and spiritual plane. Ramaswamy’s marriage with Madeleine was a love marriage. They were happy initially but finally both of them lost hope and trust in each other, which resulted in their separation. Ramaswamy married Madeleine as a part of his quest for self-realization. But the death of their son hastens the break of their marital bond. This agony and pain makes her adopt Buddhism; the religion that calls for total detachment. Raja Rao uses Ramaswamy’s relationship with other women like Savithri, Pratap’s wife and Lakshmi to highlight his ideas on Hindu marital life as well as spiritual love, which turns out to be an exploration in search of self’s kinship with the eternal and the cosmic.

Ramaswamy’s marriage with Savithri is a spiritual marriage by which he thinks that he can attain self-realization. While Madeleine seems an alien, Savithri seems to be
his traditional bride. For Savithri, Ramaswamy is her Krishna and she is his Radha. The
deathless soul and the soul bonding with another soul are suggested in the narrative.
Savitri loves Ramaswamy as Radha, the Gopikas and Mira loved Krishna. Their
bonding is a kind of spiritual marriage. For this reason it may be concluded that the true
marriage was possible between Ramaswamy and Savithri but not between Ramaswamy
and Madeleine. Savithri could successfully detach herself from the claims of the body,
but mentally she is so profoundly attached to Ramaswamy. She is content to accept him
as her spiritual husband before she takes Pratap as her wedded husband. Savithri
achieves spiritual development in love, like Madeleine who attains self-realization
through love. What is to be recognized in these marital bonds and breaks is the fact that
both the kind of marriages – self-realizing love or self-suffering love – are relative and
cannot exist in the realm of the Absolute. What appears, as a serpent at the level of the
relative becomes a mere rope when looked from the angle of the Absolute. Hence the
love of a self-realized soul becomes impersonal and universal. When truth is born, the
person dies, and this very Advaitic truth is told through Madeleine’s spiritual progress
in love. Madeleine divorces Ramaswamy not out of hatred, animosity or jealousy but
out of love. Ramaswamy’s failure in his married life makes him seek the spiritual side
of life where he realizes that he has to literally break up all the bonds in his life. Inspite
of the self-realization in a spatial domain known as home, people have broken the
relationships choosing larger spaces involving greater emphasis in spiritual enterprises.
The knowledge that home is a place where you gather grace does not freeze the willing
minds from seeking something in an unknown world. Ramaswamy marries Madeleine
but she detaches from him completely. Savithri marries Pratap and soon Ramaswamy
realizes a sense of alienation and he bends towards the spiritual guide or a guru. Ramaswamy thus breaks up his family life and prefers to bond with the spiritual life. At this stage he realizes it is not god but it is a guru who can guide him to have Atmā Jnana. Raja Rao portrays many marriages in The Serpent and The Rope. But the marriage does not bring happiness to the subjects involved in it. Marriage and family life seems to be a sort of illusion for Ramaswamy compelling him to seek a guru, who can show the reality – the Absolute Truth. In Jaya Jaya Shankara Jayakanthan portrays the marriage of Adi, a Harijan with Swatantra Devi, a Brahmin. This marriage is accepted as a ‘true marriage’ and has a noble cause of creating a casteless society. Adi marries Swatantra Devi and he does not have any affair or relationships with other women, as is the case with Ramaswamy. Jayakanthan, through the marriage of Adi and Swatantra Devi gives a social call for sanction to marriages of partners hailing from different castes.

Jayakanthan brings the family life of Adi into sharp focus so as to highlight the extraordinary in the attitude of the partners. Adi respects his wife, trusts her and gives her equal freedom in her thought and deeds. Trust is another Hindu ethical code, which builds up the marriage and keeps together the life of a man and a woman from any danger of collapse. It provides strength to the couple caught by a relationship and well anchored in mutual understanding. Jayakanthan gives a clear idea of the marriage of Adi and Swatantra Devi and its impact on their life, society and children. Sadashiva Iyer, is kept out of his caste just because he mingle with Harijan people and works for their upliftment. Finally he shifts to the Gandhi ashram started by him, to spend rest of
his life there. After the death of his wife, he is alone with his daughter Swatantra Devi. Adi, learns all ‘sastras’ (holy books) and Hindu mythical stories through Shankaran. His soul and mind are like a pure Hindu, devoutly following the Hindu dharma. And by marrying a Brahmin girl and giving her a life and a status in the society, Adi moves up in the social ladder, and his success lies in his perfect understanding of his wife. He knows the dharma that transcends the apparent illusions.

Jayakanthan brings out the conflict between the Gandhian ideas and anarchism. Mahalingam, who walks out of his home, does not accept the Gandhian principles of Adi. The illusion that is external is dispelled by the illumination of the reality within. The very separation of the father and the son becomes the cause for their reunion or bonding again, symbolically understood as “understanding the Absolute”. True service is a step towards self-realization. In Jaya Jaya Shankara, Swamigal points out that Adi had failed to do his duty as a father to his son Mahalingam whom he sends out of his house just because of his faith in Communism, which is very much against his Gandhian ideals. Jayakanthan reflects on ascetic renunciation. The parrot which is fed with fruits and taken care of, one day is let out free which flies high in the sky like Mahalingam fluttering in his own ideas and principles. Young Shankaran at that time thinks of becoming a samnyasin to get free from the worldly life, which is full of desires.

Jayakanthan takes up the experiences of individuals as beings caught up in social, political and of personal spheres of life. These experiences are also physical as well as spiritual. Jayakanthan traces the principles of Hinduism in the interconnected
segments of human life that ding-dongs between the ‘Samsara’ and ‘Sannyasa’, married life and ascetic life respectively. The most important point Jayakanthan emphasizes is the fact that the mission of quest is not always an exercise of Self within. It also extends outside the home and the mind. The true meaning of life lies in striking a soulful relationship with fellow human beings, cutting across the states of caste and age. Jayakanthan informs his audience that the process of salvation is not achieved either by a ritualistic worship of god or a state of introspection of the soul. Both ‘karma’ (an action) and ‘karma veera’, (a facilitator for a meaningful action) matters much. This process asks for a helping hand of a Guru, undergoing a process of enlightenment that occurs at different stations engendered by the process of education. A great soul is an emitter of a meaningful message to the other, irrespective of man’s social station or barriers of birth. Hence Jayakanthan advocates the institution of an Ashram (matt or a religious station) by the side of each temple. A conscious illuminative process of education should discipline the unconscious movement towards godhead. The story of Adi and Mahalingam and Vedavalli revolves around this message of leading a disciplined life--a life which takes care of the human code of living in true reverence to traditions and customs, in true faith of teaching and service. It is apparent that Jayakanthan’s story moves into a philosophical plane at the eternal level, while Raja Rao’s philosophy is grounded in the inner experience of truth by characters. While it is a quest internal for Ramaswamy, for Jayakanthan it is something visible, apparent, eternal and social. Adi is transformed into a very unique person. He is well versed in Vedas and Sastras and staunchly follows the Gandhian principles in his life. Adi is firm in his beliefs unlike Ramaswamy who wanders from place to place in
search of truth, breaking the Hindu culture and tradition. Adi knows very well that his marriage to a Hindu Brahmin woman does not make him a Brahmin. But as far as Swatantra Devi is concerned, Adi is a ‘noble Brahmin’ whose Vedas are Gandhian principles. But Adi acknowledges himself to be a Harijan to Krishnaswamy.

The term, ‘Harijan’, literally means the child of Hari, Lord Vishnu, while ‘Shivjan’ means the child of Lord Shiva. While former term, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi stays with entire connotation associated with the term untouchable, much against the very spirit of brotherhood that Gandhi wanted to invest it, the latter term, ‘Shivjan’ is Jayakanthan’s subtle counterpoint. Even a staunch believer of Lord Shiva does not employ this term. Jayakanthan tosses the term ‘Shivjan’ as a counterpoint to the usage ‘Harijan’. In reality Gandhi’s term is well meaning attempt, which ended in failure. The facts are simple; post-Gandhi days have witnessed no attitudinal changes, and people, burdened with hierarchical caste stamps, continue to suffer the emotional divide. Acharya Swamigal’s rejoinder to his assistant, Krishnaswamy lands on him as a riddle. Acharya remarks very subtly that like sannyasins having first station before renunciation, Poorvashram, followed by an elevated status of the saint, Adi’s ‘Poorvashram’ was the Harijan station and now he has transcended it. Normally the term ‘Poorvashram’ is reserved for saints, and the family man is considered to entertain only one station, the Samsara, the family life.

Jayakanthan has structured a two-tier process of signification in Adi’s characterization. He is married to a Brahmin woman who loves him and respects him. He is also ‘becoming’ Brahmin by a process of appropriation. He has read Vedas and
Sastras. He does not dismiss them like a modern Dalit does. But amidst this two-tier process of invested Brahminhood in him, he also has faith in Gandhism. The relationships, physical, intellectual and emotional provide an opportunity for inner growth. Acharya Swamigal understands this change in him, and acknowledges his greatness. When he is at loggerhead with his son, a phenomenon of change from Gandhian to post Gandhian politics, Adi’s crisis is heightened. He finds that the Gandhian in him disowns his Marxist son. It is a conflict between ideational loyalty and parental passion. Like a real sannyasin the value-maker and value-worshipper in him prevails over the father in him. When Acharya happens to know this, he reads correctly the conflict in Adi’s mind. One should be a real sannyasin to disown his family and plod on his path of a quest. Adi’s growth makes the Acharya respect him, and yet in perfect understanding of Samsara Dharma, wants to put Adi in the right slot, and advises him to seek his son’s present station and bring him back home.

In the narrative Jaya Jaya Shankara, Jayakanthan stresses that the older generations still follow the values and traditions in life but when the younger generation thinks of changes and reforms and are ready to break the tradition, ideas and values, there is a clash in the family and as a result, one of the members of the family has to walk out of the house to seek his principles. Adi and Swatantra Devi are involved in a happy life of human values and principles with religious fervour. However, their faith and principles do have an impact on their relationship with the society. The badly affected are their offsprings. Their son and daughter find themselves pushed to oppose their parents. Adi’s daughter Vedavalli possesses all the goodly
qualities but is referred to by people only ‘as one born of an illegal wedlock’. The society will neither accept her as a Brahmin nor a Harijan. But she bears these brunts bravely and remains calm unlike her brother Mahalingam who walks out of the house. The bonding and breaking of relationships are not just emotional incidences but they are ideational ones as well as pragmatic.

Marriage in Indian social system is not just a physical union of a man and woman in a relationship; it is ordained by divine sanction’ and it involves ‘acceptance of the other’ rather than enjoying physical pleasures. Adi, hence, remains a dedicated husband accepting the other in his Brahmin wife. When he errs, in his rejection of his son, the Acharya enforces the relationship. Adi’s social and familial role completes the vision of Brahman.

Jayakanthan glorifies the woman characters in Jaya Jaya Shankara. Swatantra Devi, Vedam, Uma are all presented as various forms of Sakthi in a refined manner. Raja Rao considers woman in their various strength. His portrayal of Madeleine and Savithri are idealistic. Raja Rao’s idealization of woman “pertains to poetry, sainthood and paradise rather than truth”. Woman in Raja Rao tend more to break away than unite with man. After the brief temptations spiritual or physical relationships, they tend to recede. Hence Ramaswamy fails in his ‘Samsara’ tenor. His failure in family life and his relationships with many women make him seek the spiritual life. Adi and Ramaswamy attain ‘knowledge’ and need to quest the ‘Brahman’ by a process of relationship with the other. In the case of Adi, it is progressively a cementing kind of relationship, and increased tripping into Samsara. For Ramaswamy, the relationships
are constantly shifting. It is by breaking the relationships that he gains the space for reflection and the drive for spiritual quests.

Jayakanthan concludes that marriage is for a social cause and the man woman relationship in the society is meant for a noble purpose. The marriage of Ramaswamy and Madeleine does not have much purpose or a noble cause he realizes that the basic question is to reach god and the chief issue is dhrama. Raja Rao works out in terms of Ramaswamy’s soul search and his relationship with Madeleine and Savithri. This results in various displacements and travel leading the characters to reach the state of Advaita Darshana. Both Raja Rao and Jayakanthan conclude that marriage is nothing but a social commitment and it involves bondage for those who do not love as well as those who realize love. There is a kind of interlocking in Jayakanthan’s novel and the levels are not demarcated or distinctively different. The one overlaps the other so that an ultimate experience is available as a thread that connects all these levels. When self-realization is attained illusions disappear and the reality is sighted. For this one has to undertake a strenuous journey or travel, through the experiences attained at the various levels, attends one to reach the Atma Jnana. In both the novels The serpent and the rope and Jaya Jaya Shankara, the guru plays a vital role. In Jayakanthan, the guru appears at the beginning and remains a guiding spirit for Adi and others, while in Raja Rao the guru comes in the final stage. In other words Ramasamy undergoes the spatial, temporal and experiential process and becomes fit enough to meet the guru and receive enlightenment.
Ramaswamy's experience is configured in three levels of space and time. Spatially, he lives in India and France, moving into different cities in India and finally turning his mind towards Travancore, where he expects to meet his guru. Raja Rao describes his mobility in non-linear terms and yet in psychological plane there is steady movement that takes place in the psychic sphere of the protagonist. Ramaswamy's problem is a problem of understanding his dilemma, which is made possible as he traverses the different domains, intellectual and philosophical, sensual and physical, metaphysical and spiritual. These stages could be termed as the cornerstones on which rises Ramaswamy's illumination. This is carried out as he enters into physical relationships with many women and a kind of traditional immersion by a process of ritualizations. His discussions with Madeleine are intellectual leading to a separation. His relationship with Lakshmi is a sensual temporary escape, a state of avidhya. His encounter with Savithiri is something spiritual providing a release from avidhya to vidhya. Each of these experiences provide him gradual understanding of human life. Madeleine symbolizes a different course of life. Lakshmi stands for the transcending time. Savithiri is a point of transcendence. Ramaswamy gains experience at each level, which are in fact knowledge about human life.

Raja Rao subtly suggests the possibility of meeting a Guru at Travancore. For Ramaswamy, this is a ray of hope. Therefore, the steady process of temporal journey enables this course of vidhya. The novel deals with many deaths, each departure assuring the possibility of new meeting with the Absolute. Ramaswamy refers to the death of his father, mother and his newborn sons. These disappearances trigger in his
mind disturbances leading to the pain of separation and the inevitable quest for illumination. Only after a process of such experiences, Ramaswamy is brought to a stage in which he waits for his guru. This is to say only when the sessions of avidhya come to a close the process of initiation into the world of Brahman begins. The entire stages of avidhya keep Ramaswamy and his world apart, Ramaswamy and his woman apart, Ramaswamy and his space apart with the process of vidhya, initiation begins where illusion comes to a halt and reality sets in.

The fourth chapter entitled “Realization: Displacements and self-realization” detailed the travels and displacements of the major characters of the two narratives – towards attaining the perfect knowledge of Advaita Darshana. The supreme bliss is attaining the knowledge of the self, which makes one to accept and respect the other. Hindu religion provides the possibilities of experiences in terms of space available to mankind. For a Hindu, there are four stages of human life. They are Brahmacarzanz or (bachelorhood) which is considered a learning stage, Girhastham or family life, Vanapprastham or the life of Vanavasi [literally a forest dweller] and finally, Sannyasam or the spiritual life devoid of all worldly pleasures. Each stage demands discharge of certain duties that enable man to reach a particular height in life. These four stages referred to as ‘Four Ashrams’; lead man step by step to attain self-realization. Hindu religion grants guru an eminent place, as could be seen in the famous saying in Tamil, “Matha, Pitha, Guru, Theivam” where guru is considered next only to god. From ancient days, gurus or teachers are considered as god’s messengers sent to spread the divine message. Jayakanthan places great emphasis on a religious guru, for
the true experience of teaching stems from such meetings with a guru. In fact, one of
the prominent characters is Shankaran, a guru. Raja Rao conceives a role for a guru, a
promoter, the one who helps each soul, to achieve the divine light, the Absolute truth.
Knowing god itself is a process of experience, for which one needs a guru. When life is
torn by conflicts and tragedies the Ashram, a school of learning, or the guru provides
the art of experiencing god. Jayakanthan’s Adi and Raja Rao’s Ramaswamy seek the
help of a guru one time or the other. Raja Rao and Jayakanthan further stresses not only
gurus but also involvement in “Satsanga”, which could enable man to attain sadhana,
thereby reaching the atma jnana. True devotion lies not in mere adherence to
meaningless involvement in prayers, or chanting of Vedas and mantras, but in true
service to mankind. Such a service compels one to leave one’s home so as to engage
the other. During the process of service one picks up experience and through
experience, the knowledge of the other and of the self is attained.

The crisis at home leads many characters to the doors of a guru. In other words,
a man engaged in Girhastha – family life is unable to solve the riddles of life all by
himself and the crisis many a time prevail over him, so as to seek the guidance of
people who lead a spiritual life. This is also to say that the philosophical quest begins
when existential problems threaten man and his routine in modern living conditions.
The shake up occurs in the case of Mahalinga Iyer when he finds the moral and the
social order is defied and he is unable to overwhelm the crisis or to undertake the
encounter all by himself. The travel from one station to the other – Mahalinga Iyer
leaves Shankarapuram and goes to Varanasi – is necessitated by the energies of the
human life. Sadasiva Iyer, the family man, finds himself weak and seeks his strength outside his home. For him, the emotional or spiritual support exists, or is supposed to exist at the next station – the Gandhi Ashram.

Mahalinga Iyer, disturbed by the behaviour of his brother, seeks the audience of the Acharya Swamigal, so that he could get some peace of mind. For Mahalinga Iyer, the Acharya or guru is one who knows the past, the present, and the future. Hence, he visits the Shree Medam of the Acharya with his son Shankaran. Sadashiva Iyer observes the practices of the Brahmins by habit, which has reached his heart by the faith practiced by his family and elders, while in reality his mind is engaged by the quest to serve others. The service to humanity takes him out of the limited fold of the family and places him in the wide spectrum of society. His quest lies not in merely following the religion and chanting the Vedas and the Mantras but in seeking the Brahman in others. He seeks the path of service and believes that truth in life is achieved by serving the Harijans. His quest ends as he sets up the Gandhi Ashram in the Harijan slum Moongil Kudi and feels happy serving them. When Mahalinga Iyer comes out of the Agraharam and goes to Varanasi, he leaves Shankaran in the Shree Medam. Both the brothers thus are seen moving out of their home space venturing into new experiences.

In Jaya Jaya Shankara almost all the characters seek the guidance of the guru. Unlike Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope, who finds his guru in the final stage, Jayakanthan’s characters are lucky enough to get the guidance of the guru somehow at the proper time in their lives. Young Shankaran, had the inner urge, to become a
Sannyasin and due to this faith in Sannyasam he reaches the Shree Madam. Shankaran’s quest illuminates in his elevation as the Acharya. Jayakanthan places his characters in different stations. Mahalinga Iyer and Sadashiva Iyer are Girhasthas, in family life, while Shankaran chooses the life of the Sannyasin. Jayakanthan highlights the point that there are different kinds of experiences available from different modes of living. However, one can enlighten the other. Young Adi has enlightened Young Shankaran and Adi in thirst enlightened by Acharya Shankara later in the pursuit of knowledge, in the quest for the Brahman; one could be the guru to the other. What is important is the faith to achieve the realization – the Absolute Truth.

Adi and Shankaran represent the two paths of life towards reaching the truth - Sanyaasa and Samsara. At one stage, Adi goes out in search of his son, Mahalingam, who represents the modern generation. For Mahalingam "Life is not frozen but relentlessly on the move". He is convinced that one has to adjust to the changing times. And one’s parents should also understand the growth – inner and the outer, of their children. It is their duty to teach the children when they are young and when the time comes the sons and daughters have to bid farewell. A toddler’s cart once used by a child has to disappear into the attic. Every one has got his or her moorings. Mahalingam’s parents were rooted in Gandhian Ashram, spinning the Kadhi cloth from the wheel. As the wheel rotates the moorings has to change. The intense desire of Mahalingam seems to free himself from the home and engage in a new quest. As the Gandhian era comes to an end, a new age to face a new life has emerged.
Adi, as a Gandhian is convinced that the Harijans need to be brought under the religious umbrella. Harijan’s temple entry should coincide with Acharya’s leading the Ashram. He even recommends that each temples should have its own abide guiding forces, the Ashram. Jayakanthan takes up the reality of the changes in the world order. He identifies the new paradigms of changes in society - the concept of equality, the notion of self-esteem and self-respect and relationships with fellow humans with no discrimination. The new generation asks for new values in life—equality, liberty and fraternity. In this changing society Mahalingam seeks the meaning of life in his service to others. Jayakanthan’s pointer is that the different kinds of displacement and experience in the every individual character’s life enlighten others and shows how one becomes a guru to another. Mahalingam’s new learning against his parents’ Gandhian principles is his new idea or Veda. A problematic situation arises when they are labeled as children born to an illegal wedlock. Hence the younger generation get involved in a kind of ‘Satsanga’ through which they could get a kind of experience, which would lead them to their goals. Jayakanthan brings out the concept of creating an ashram near every temple. According to Jayakanthan the Manaveli Ilam is a Marxist commune or in other words a ‘Satsanga’, which consists of members like Singarayar – with his rebellious thoughts to fight against the social and political situation. His son Sathyamoorthy follows the same footsteps of his father leading a group of young people like Mahalingam, Uma and others. Their displacements and mobility teaches them or rather leads them to the Sadhana. For Mahalingam, the Manaveli Ilam is in a sense an ashram and his relationship with Singarayar, Sathyamoorthy and Uma makes him realize the reality. Thus Singarayar is a guru to Mahalingam who teaches him
reality at his ashram, the Manavelli Illam, inculcating the principles of equality and fraternity. For Sathyamoorthy, the Jail is his Madam or ashram where he is a guru to the Jailer, Moorthy. This riddle of ashram, as a house of faith and motivator haunts Jayakanthan’s narrative. He traces the concept of ‘Satsanga’ from the beginning of the narrative. Gandhiji is a guru for Sadashiva Iyer. His ideas and principles teach Sadashiva Iyer to join hands with ‘the sons of Hari’, thereby his journey of quest ends finding or rather creating his Gandhi ashram which is a ‘Satsanga’ for all human beings irrespective of caste and creed. For Adi, Sadashiva Iyer is his guru, who teaches not only religious scriptures like Vedas, Sastras and Sanskrit but also moulds him to be a confidant and brave enough to marry a Brahmin girl. Thus Adi’s sadhana begins at his marriage and ends in his reunion with his son, Mahalingam. For a brahmachari like Sathyamoorthy, Jail is a vanavas. He accepts it as a penance where he becomes a saññyasin or a guru to the Jailer. The ‘Satsanga’ resulted in spatial and temporal displacement of the characters makes them reach the Atma Jnana. For Sadashiva Iyer, it is creating the Gandhi ashram; for Adi, creating an ashram near every temple – A place of holy and noble thoughts near a sacred place of worship. Thus Jayakanthan portrays different ashrams and Madams in the novel – Sadashiva Iyer’s Gandhi ashram, Shankaran’s Shree Madam, Adi’s own ashram, the Manavelli Illam, which is an ashram for Mahalingam and Sathyamoorthy, and the Jail too is an ashram, where each becomes a guru to the other. The ‘Satsanga’ resulted in spatial and temporal displacements of the characters making them reach the Atma Jnana. Thus Jayakanthan concludes that the displacement leads to a ‘Satsanga’ which shows the path of sadhana, thereby suggesting the possibility of the Advaita Dharsan.
Raja Rao, too, believed that the displacements of Ramaswamy could lead him to various experiences and with the ‘Satsanga’ of others both in India and abroad initiates him to the state of Sadhana. The mind has to transcend the emotional conflicts and material interests. Life mundane makes the self-target the reality. During the sessions of emotional crisis, man seeks the reality. The beginnings are caused by a desire to depart a kind of displacements a travel or a pilgrimage to seek the truth. He leads a life a grahastha in India and a life of vanavasa when he is abroad. His travel starts from Banares in India and he returns to Europe. When Ramaswamy returned to Europe after visiting India, he was not quite a new man, but certainly a man with a new awareness, with a different viewpoint. The barbaric city of Bombay had no meaning for a Brahmin like Ramaswamy. His return to Villa Sainte-Anne from India was with a new expectation. The expectation did not bear fruit was also due to this new awareness of his loneliness and alienation. Madeleine had not received the telegram announcing his arrival; she was not at home when he had arrived; and all his dreams of making Madeleine his own evaporated. He felt himself as a foreigner in France. So great was the change in him that when Madeleine came and kissed him, she felt it was like kissing a serpent or the body of death. Ramaswamy’s alienation from either his faith or from his wife, creates a crisis that only leads him to introspection and further involvement in metaphysical musings that prepare the ground for embarking on a meaningful quest. Madeleine’s alienation begins a new phase in the life of Ramaswamy. He begins his journey on a mission to know about his identity, meet men and women who could not interpret the life before him, and seeks to assure him of his Hindu tradition and Brahmin identity. Once he enters into the ‘Satsanga’ of new found
emotionally rewarding friends, he is turned to sessions of *sadhana* and the process of journey from *Avidya* to ‘*Atma Jnana*’ sets in. Savithri, his perfect spiritual partner could be termed as a key figure in his ‘*Satsanga*’. Interestingly, his very alienation from his Buddhist wife provides occasions to reflect upon the reality and illusion. Thus she becomes the first member of his ‘*Satsanga*’. Though she does not accompany him, she makes him reflect upon the life before, and drives him to a session of *sadhana*. He feels that his discussion with his life is like a battle. When Savithri enters his life, his marriage, disintegrates rapidly. Ramaswamy’s realization of Absolute is initiated by his encounter with Savithri that makes all purpose in Ramaswamy, fully and truly conscious of his true spiritual heritage. His love for her becomes a stepping stone to his quest for the ultimate realization of Truth. Savithri, in a sense, becomes a kind of guru to him, before he sets out to seek his guru proper. But he soon realizes that he has taken the wrong turn. He now comes to terms with Savithri’s mundane relationship with her husband Pratap, a relationship that need not clash with the spiritual bond between him and her. In the end, Ramaswamy finds most of his worldly ties cut off. He has to absorb a divorce from Madeleine, break from Savithri who has her own marriage and so has Saroja; Little Mother has assumed her place in the family at home; his thesis is now completed. He spiritual is suddenly filled with a strange longing, for a meaning. The crisis and problematic situations arrive at a schema of different stations possible in a single life. Only by shunning away his ego and desires completely he can overcome the illusions in life and face the reality. Thus by attaining the true meaning of “*tat-vam-asi*”.
Hinduism has entertained a larger understanding of human life as different stations of life in spatio-temporal terms. The Advaita Vedanta asserts that the growth of the self lies in the vision of non-duality. Its reading of one atman in all beings grants a kind of universal, metaphysical equality and unity to human life and the most is that such a vision is not easy and readily forthcoming. The strength of human mind is to be read in its ability to challenge the illusions around and hence Adi Shankara asserts the significance of ‘Satsanga’ and gurus. A soul’s attempt to discipline and strengthen it seeks for a mobility traversing through different stations of life, acquiring experiences at each stage resulting in reaching the end of the quest. Both Raja Rao and Jayakanthan have understood this feature in Hindu religion and subject their characters to pass through various stations of life – Madams wherein one gets into a ‘Satsanga’ guided by a guru and obtain Advaita darshana. While Jayakanthan makes a plain call for the institution of Madams, Raja Rao highlights the significance of ‘Satsanga’, which enables Sadhana and Atma Jnana.

Ramaswamy’s grahashta life has paralleled to vanavasam. He lives in two different worlds. He is a Hindu but attempts to practice the catholic belief of his wife. He is married to a foreigner but feels detached on his religious tradition. He is married to Madeleine but his mind seeks a Maitheryi. In real terms, he lead a life of a grahashta and undergoes the mundane and routine passions associated with grahashta life. He is shocked by the death of his son and also shaken by the death of his family members in India. His association with Savithri is philosophical and metaphysical very much in tune with experiencing the counsel of a true religious teacher. At the same time he is
emotionally involved in physical sessions of desires with Lakshmi. If one can say that his grahastra life is also a kind of vanavas, his spiritual sessions with Savithri are forwarded by physical desires. The true spirit of a sannyasin is necessary and yet he finds it eludes him. Even when he seeks relief from the emotional crisis, he finds that he is traveling the North while his prospective guru is in South in Travancore. Raja Rao very subtly makes the life of Ramaswamy dual in several respects. This duality could be left behind only when he attains the reality. Raja Rao announces the promise of such a possibility for Ramaswamy when he makes his protagonist travel towards Travancore.

Jayakanthan’s text is more normative while Raja Rao’s text is illustrative. Raja Rao’s novel has a Brahmin and Hindu bias. His vision is entirely conditioned to the Hindu perspective of human life. Hence it easily accommodates Adi Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta. Jayakanthan stresses that it is difficult to escape from tradition, being born in a Brahmin family. Religious faith is noticed here. However, the quest lies in creating an ashram near every temple. Jayakanthan believes in Hindu Dharma and yet attempts to negotiate with the other philosophies, social and political, like Gandhism and Marxism. This religious as well as secular digressions commit Jayakanthan to reinterpret the Hindu Dharma to its available flexibility with regard to Sanatana Dharma, Shree Madam, the caste divisions of Manu as well as the concept of guru. Raja Rao’s Ramaswamy is committed to Hindu faith and involves in a quest for truth through a possible guidance of ‘Satsanga’ and a guru. Raja Rao provides a realistic picture of Ramaswamy engaged in a philosophical quest by accommodating women in
his *Satsanga*, the most important one being Savithri. Many critics of Raja Rao consider the relationship between Savithri and Ramaswamy as a spiritual marriage. This researcher however defines Savithri as a member of the wisdom house, a *‘Satsanga’*. One of the important aspects that this researcher concludes upon is with reference to identity. Ramaswamy is burdened with a Brahmin identity and mistakes it as a Hindu identity. His illusion has to be dispelled only by disbanding the Brahmin identity and visualizing the ‘*Brahman*’ in him. This runs parallel to Jayakanthan’s focus on Brahmin and Harijan identity. Jayakanthan makes both his characters Adi and Shankaran to transcend their Brahmin identity by transforming them as gurus for one another. In the process Adi becomes a Brahmin and the Harijan becomes a guru to the Brahmin. Hence this researcher has argued that ‘*atma darshana*’ lies in not being a Brahmin but in becoming a Brahmin.

Both the novelists lay emphasis on man guiding man towards reaching the Divine. For Ramaswamy ‘*atma darshan*’ is possible only through a ‘*guru darshan*’, with the help of a philosophical guide towards understanding the “Absolute Reality of Divinity” in each human being. Jayakanthan believes that a guru can be Gandhian, a Marxist and even a revolutionary. When the ideal chosen by the different philosophies are towards elevating man and the society, there is a touch of divinity in them, and then each intuition that promotes such ideals becomes a temple. Hence Jayakanthan believes in the progress of society assisted by such temples of service. Hence Adi proclaims his desire that each temple should have its own *Shree Madam*. Jayakanthan in accommodating these secular standpoints, does of course transgress the chosen limits of
religious discussions and the spiritual quest. Yet one can find that Jaya Jaya Shankara
has got a strong emphasis of a religious and a philosophical theme in which he attempts
to reconcile the apparent illusions often clouded and that is not seen. However, for one
who sees the reality, these changes are meaningless. While many human made ideas
and concepts become obsolete with time, the consciousness of the Brahman alone
remains the same. Any one who attains this state attains Brahman. But in a conflict
situation like Brahmin Non-Brahmin enmity, or Brahmin – Harijan divide, or Gandhian
and Marxist conflicts of ideals. Jayakanthan finds a paradigm of ideal stations in Shree
Madam, Manavelli Illam, Gandhi Ashram and the commune in Manavelli Illam. The
characters who converge at these places are a group of men and women who choose a
new path towards the new idea. There is a strong desire in them to dispel the illusions
of progress and unity. Advaita Vedanta proclaims the larger unity of divinity, since
both the novels attempt to read the divinity in and through experiences and teachers.
India’s Sanatana Dharma is not of a time but it should be read throughout changing
times with a proper perception and a vision. This researcher feels on the proof of
discussions made so far that the novels The Serpent and the Rope and Jaya Jaya
Shankara are anchored in the philosophy of non-dualism. In range, magnitude and
characters, Jayakanthan and Raja Rao differ and yet there is a unity, an Indian Vedantic
element that unites the vision and the treatment of life shown by both the novelists.