Chapter One

Introduction

"Work out the salvation of this land and of the whole world, each of you thinking that the entire burden is on your shoulders. Carry the light and the life of the Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity that is hidden with every soul". (Swami Vivekananda To The Youth of India 51)

This dissertation entitled, “Faith and Quest in the Novels of Raja Rao and Jayakanthan: A Comparative Study” attempts to read the contemporary as well as the universal meaning of human life, as evidenced in the two chosen texts The Serpent and the Rope and Jaya Jaya Shankara authored by two eminent writers of India. This research, broadly addressing the themes of Faith and Quest, precisely attempts a study of the two texts in the light of Adi Shankara’s Advaita philosophy. This idea is traced in the texts of Jayakanthan, Tamil novelist and Raja Rao, the eminent Indian English novelist. Both the writers deal with the idea of non-dualism, which is an important element of Advaita, an area, which has been dealt with, by various saints and scholars of Hinduism. Though many critical minds have explained Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope in terms of Adi Shankara’s philosophy, not much work has been turned out in relating Raja Rao’s text to the contemporary life. Jayakanthan, the eminent Tamil novelist, takes up a discussion of the Hindu religious heritage and its ability to illuminate the inexplicable facets of modern living. Considering the large similarities of the two texts and their apparent religious elements, the present researcher has engaged
herself to consider the relevance of the two novelists' perceptions on human life in the context of modern living conditions.

Faith and quest are common themes in world literature, and the Indian creative minds have always engaged in reading a human life in the context of human faith and the attempts impelled by quests of men and women in a given social condition. ‘Faith’, can be defined as ‘belief, trust in, and loyalty of God’ or belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion. This asks for complete trust and strong conviction in the system of religious beliefs. Hinduism has a vast body of sacred literature, passed down the generations orally for thousands of years, which promote and stabilize faith. ‘Quest’ arises in the minds of people who follow and practice the religion, and it may be defined as an act or instance of seeking some action at a point of time or seeking an answer for a problem in mind, caused by tentative disbelief or confusion. What self seeks with a craving against all odds is ‘Quest’. The impulse of a quest engages the character of Ramaswamy in the novel, The Serpent and The Rope. The illusion and reality in life confuse him and the title of the novel suggests this idea. The serpent stands for illusions and the rope stands for reality or truth, both illusion and reality are not two different, separate things but are essentially one. The idea, the serpent and the rope, is taken from the Advaita or the non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankara. This idea of Adi Shankara runs through both the novels under study, The Serpent and the Rope and Jaya Jaya Shankara. The term Advaita, literally means the ‘Non-Dual’. It is the essential point of argument in the philosophy of the Vedanta of Adi Shankara. Adi Shankara was a philosopher born in Kerala (788-820) and according to him; revelation
is encountering the single reality of Brahman, with which the ‘Self’ is identical. Adi Shankara thought within the philosophic tradition of Vedanta, that the self (Atman) and the Absolute reality are identical. Liberation is the overcoming of spiritual ignorance or illusion (Maya) caused by the superimposition of what is not the self—a distinct entity but onto the self. He asserted that this truth is taught in the Vedas and can be realized through renunciation (Encyclopedia of Hinduism 200). The world as it appears to us in the waking state is an imagined snake, which proves on closer examination, to be nothing but a coil of rope. When the soul passes into the transcendental consciousness it actually realizes the self, which is the Atman at that time. This self or Atman shines as the one ‘Absolute Truth’ or the Brahman, the ‘Absolute Reality’.

In India caste system continues to be in practice in the lives of most Hindus. The Hindu communities are organized as four groups, the three high-status groups being Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. The fourth group the Sudras, represented the low class or the lower status in society. Some groups were almost entirely excluded from social life due to the inability or unwillingness of the society to absorb them. These outcastes lived on the margin of Indian society performing the tasks viewed with greatest disdain and are only recently integrated more fully. In India, caste (Jati) and the sub castes of one’s birth, with their social strictures and customs, have exercised a great deal of influence on Hindu life since ancient times. During the last fifty years the socio-political structure as well as the faith of mankind have been subjected to probing and doubts modern life too has undergone tremendous changes due to the knowledge explosion and the erasure of distance by communication and transport technologies.
The latter have put mankind to diverse sessions of experiences. Also, the socio-
political fabric has not so much been understood by the religious heritage as was in the
past. Hence in the given circumstances Adi Shankara’s philosophy of non-dualism and
its message in disciplining human life provides occasion to interpret knowledge,
experience and the understanding of reality. The present researcher attempts to read the
two texts by using these three key terms—‘Knowledge’, ‘Experience’ and ‘Realization’
applying them to the domains of self and the world. Modern living also engages these
three terms in its strands. Accordingly, this research is a reinterpretation of two eminent
novels so as to highlight the life before us and its meaning for the mankind.

The researcher has taken The Serpent and The Rope of Raja Rao (1960 issued
in 1995) and the Tamil novel Jaya Jaya Shankara of Jayakanthan, which is translated in
English with the same title (2002) by K.S.Subramanian for the comparative study. In
this chapter, the researcher has dealt with the post Independent Indian scenario with
regard to Indian writing in English and Tamil Literature. A historic note of Indian
writing in English is given, which is followed by a profile of Raja Rao and a note on his
major works. The researcher has also thrown light on Jayakanthan and his writings in
the historical background of two streams of heritage namely the Gandhian Realism and
Social Realism of left writers. A brief note on Jayakanthan’s major themes as revealed
in his prominent novels is also given so as to provide a background to the discussions
that follows. A note on Advaita is given in the third section and a note on the
comparative methodology is also given in the following section.
Indian fiction in English took a new shape during the post-independence period. The impact of the West through the British occupation of our land had many deterrent results, but also brought some unforeseen blessings. For instance, the English language was imposed on us as a medium of instruction. The importance of various Indian languages was relegated to the background due to the importance given to English education, and this was impossible for the introduction of the great literatures of the west. In the mid nineteenth century, the western impact on India resulted in the development of formal prose, translation of western classics and modern fiction followed. Novel as a genre came into existence, which influenced the Indian writers to create their own original works in English as well as in their mother tongues. We have a rich heritage of Indian literature dating back to fifty centuries, thanks to the existence of classical languages like Sanskrit and Tamil. However, the birth of modern literature in many Indian languages owes much to external influence. The subject and theme were more or less similar and they were based on the theme of sex and crime, joy of freedom, theme of partition, the evil of corruption, inefficiency, poverty and emulative misery. As Wilbur Scott observes,

“art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important, because articulate part”. (79)

During post-independence days Indian novelists made new beginnings in their narrative and thematic choices. Indian writing in English and other regional languages are the expression of life in a particular space and time. The country also faced many
changes. Western influence was seen in every aspect of life. Thanks to the colonial impact, the writers of that period responded to time with certain views in their writings. The creative writer could not ignore the economical and social actualities of day-to-day life. The collapse of the traditional economical foundations during the British rule brought about drastic changes. Social life, tensions in family life, harassments, misery and exploitation of the low caste people, the disintegration of the Jamindar system and other themes attracted the creators of the Indian fiction. The themes of the time engaged the creative attention of the “Big three” -- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao who attempted to interpret the changes in politic- religious planes in their works.

Mulk Raj Anand, the father of modern English novel in India, attacked social inequalities and made a powerful plea for a social change. The protagonists of almost all his novels were drawn from lower stratum of society. The sweeper boy, the coolie, the villager, the snake charmer, the peasant, the labourers, the factory workers -- most of them are from the oppressed class of society. Anand’s Untouchable is a fictional statement on the tragedy of untouchables in India based on the real life story of a sweeper lad called Baka, mentioned in his autobiographical novel Seven Summers. The Road again dramatizes the destiny of an untouchable, called Bhittu who undergoes sufferings and shame at the hands of caste Hindus. Further, he has devoted two of his novels, Coolie and Two leaves and a Bud, entirely for the study of ills of the caste system and he makes frequent references to the tyranny of class system in his other novels and short stories.
Like Anand, Raja Rao is a product of the Gandhian Age. His fiction stands apart due to its mythological, spiritual and religious overtones. Raja Rao constantly discusses the nationalist and its revolutionary implications in terms of Hindu mythology, religion and culture. His *Kanthapura* (1938) is a realistic epic novel of freedom struggle. In his novel *The Serpent and The Rope* (1960), he makes an earnest attempt to explain and explore the unique vision embodied in Indian culture, history, religion and in philosophy. R.K.Narayan's Malgudi novels stand in contrast to those of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. R.K. Narayan's novels present a blend of comic vision, gentle irony and sympathy quiet realism and authenticity of his descriptions of the every day scenes in the life of Malgudi. He did not probe into the ills of traditions and systems and focused on the individual's actions and omissions. H.M.Williams rightly observes,

“What unites such diverse writers as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan is that they are all concerned with exposing the significance of India for mankind and for the problems that man faces in the twentieth century, violence freedom and authority, tradition and progress, individual and family, preservation and annihilation”. (209)

Chaman Nahal is of the opinion that a creative writer, especially in the modern times, cannot ignore the economic and social actualities of day-to-day life. A close observation of his fictions reveals that he belongs to the humanistic tradition initiated by Anand and carried on by Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandeya in the fifties and sixties. His first novel *My True face* is important for its philosophical overtones and psychological realism, *Azadi* deals with the partition theme. Kamala
Markandaya presents the grim and harrowing side of life in India. The theme of hunger is dealt with in Nectar in a Sieve. A Silence of Desire deals with the theme of love and class-conflict. The Coffer Drum pictures poverty and love among the poorer sections of Calcutta society. Bhabani Bhattacharya has exploited the theme of hunger in his novel, *He who rides a Tiger*. He attacks the fossilized social traditions, which thwart the progress of the country in *Music for Mohini*. Thus it may be seen that the major writers of Indian English fiction dwell upon the major sociological issues in their writings.

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Raja Rao was born on fifth November 1908 in the village of Hassana in the former Mysore state in an orthodox Brahmin family. The family consisted of scholars and philosophers. Among his ancestors was Vidyananda Swamy who was a great teacher of *Advaita* philosophy. Raja Rao studied Hindu religion and philosophy from his grand father at an early age. On completion of matriculation course, he was sent to Aligarh Muslim University for higher education. Prof. Dickinson directed his interest on French language and literature. He went to France for higher studies in French Literature thanks to a scholarship awarded by the Hyderabad State and started doing his research under a great scholar and literary critic, Prof. Cazamian. Then he married Camille Moully in 1929. They had a son and his first novel *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. Raja Rao was deeply interested in Indian philosophy and religion. After the outbreak of the second world war he came to India in 1940 and visited Ramana Maharishi at Tiruvannamalai and Narayan Maharaj at Kadgaon. He then went to Benares and became so much interested in the religious activities of that place that he...
thought of renouncing the world and becoming a sadhu. Swami Atmananda, a great Vedantist and believer in Advaita philosophy convinced him that a person could attain spiritual salvation by carrying out his duties as a son, a husband, a father and a friend also by meditating on god. Raja Rao accepted him as his guru. At the end of the Second World War, Raja Rao returned to France. In 1947 his collection of short stories entitled The Cow of the Barricades appeared. In 1960 The Serpent and The Rope, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi award, appeared. The author was also awarded the Padma Bhusan by the government of India, and was also considered for the award of the Nobel Prize for literature. Raja Rao’s next novel, The Cat and Shakespeare appeared in 1965. He lectured on various Hindu philosophies and moved to the United States of America. His fourth novel Comrade Kirillov appeared in French in 1976 and then a collection of his short stories entitled The Policeman and the Rose and other stories appeared in 1978.

When Raja Rao visited America in 1950 he read the works of American writers Emerson, Thoreau and Walt Whitman who showed keen interest in the Vedantic philosophy. In an article published in The Illustrated Weekly of India in 1963, Raja Rao has mentioned the various regional languages, books and authors that had influenced him. He is an ardent lover of Sanskrit poetry and he feels that the greatest wisdom is contained in the Vedas and the Upanisad. Malayalam and his mother tongue, Kannada that touches the elemental chords in him, fascinated him. He regarded French as the language of the aristocracy of the spirit. He liked English language because Shakespeare wrote in it. He considered Hamlet, King Lear and The Tempest as great
works. He liked Urdu for Ghalib’s poetry. French writers Paul Valery and Andrew Glide influenced him tremendously, as were W.B. Yeats, R.M. Rike, Kafka, Gorki, Thoreau and Walt Whitman. Andre Malraux cast a great influence on him. Also Mahatma Gandhi’s *My Experiments with Truth* exercised significant influence on him. The writer who appears to him to be the closest to the spirit of India is Anand Coomaraswamy. Raja Rao was cosmopolitan in taste, thanks to his wide learning. He has his admirers all over the world, and they include eminent writers and philosophers like Andre Malraux, and Lawrence Durrell. Writing about *The Serpent and The Rope*, Durrell states,

“Hurrah for you. You not only do India a great honour, but you’ve honoured English literature by writing it in our language, truly magnificent. Patched with the real magic of poetry … a truly contemporary work, one by which an age can measure itself, its values”.

(Mentions the blurb of *The Serpent and The Rope*).

*The Serpent and The Rope* is probably the best novel of Indian English literature and while reading the novel, the reader would find the novelist effecting an intellectual bridge between the East and the West. Kanthapura (1938), Raja Rao’s first novel in English, is a classic on the Gandhian movement for India’s freedom. Moorthy, who is an ardent follower of Gandhi, spreads the Mahatma’s ideas of truth, non-violence, spinning, emancipation of Harijans. He engages himself and the villagers in the passive resistance campaigns like picketing of toddy booths, non-cooperation with the government, non-payment of land revenue and other taxes. This Gandhipurana is
narrated in the style of Puranas by an unlettered grandmother. She describes the great poverty and misery of the workers of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The villagers had faith in their gods and goddesses. They are divided by caste prejudices and petty jealousies and greed. The Harikatha narrator tells them that Gandhi was the modern Rama fighting to liberate Bharatmata (Sita) from a Ravana, the British. Moorthy gradually makes the villagers Gandhians and mould them to face the repressions by means of non-violent struggles advocated by Gandhi. Many of them are imprisoned, many women suffer their lands are sold and the whole village goes up in flames. Yet they remain loyal to the ideas and values of Mahatma. Kanthapura is hailed as a great village novel and an epic of India’s freedom movement.

Raja Rao’s The Serpent and The Rope, (1960), which appeared twenty-two years after Kanthapura, is an encyclopedic exercise which includes the myths and legends, with interpenetrating discourses on the cultures philosophies and the religions of the East and the West. Its characters and settings are drawn from India, France and Britain. Raja Rao highlights the wisdom of the Indian scriptures – the Vedas, the Upanisads and the Gita in the novel. The very title of the novel suggests the philosophical content of the novel. Ramaswamy the protagonist is in France writing his thesis trying to connect the Albigensian heresy with Brahminical influence. He is married to a French lady, Madeleine five years elder to him. While Ramaswamy is on a visit to India, he meets Savithri, detached and desperate like himself. They are drawn towards each other. While he is researching in London and Cambridge they meet each other and spend their time together in a spiritual marriage. But Savithri marries a
government officer and carries her despair to garden parties in Assam. Their first child
dies as an infant and while Ramaswamy is on his visit to India, Madeleine delivers a
still child. He returns to find that his wife has taken up Buddhist practices for
purification. She was surprised to know the fact that her Buddhism was in conflict with
his Brahminism and had caused the rift between them. Slowly she withdraws from him
behind sandalwood and penances. He finishes his thesis and applies for a divorce as
Madeleine suggests and finally he determines to go to Travancore in search of a Guru —
“in search of him to whom I have to go, though I’ve always known him without
knowing his name.” The novel thus tells about the sensuous mystery of life, the
existence seen as a complex combination of appearance and reality. Ramaswamy’s
entire life is conditioned by his abiding faith in Advaita philosophy, which he equates
with the Hindu philosophy. The truth, the reality, is spiritual which is the fact. It is
Brahman. This is compared to a rope. This is masked by the material world, which is
maya or illusion. Maya is compared to a serpent. Man in his ignorance sees the rope as
a serpent. When a Guru gives the true knowledge, the illusion disappears and what
seems to be serpent is now a rope. The novelist suggests that each individual has to
arrive at a private solution to solve his problems under the guidance of his own guru.

_The Cat and Shakespeare_ (1965), Raja Rao’s third novel is a “metaphysical
comedy”. He regards it as a prayer and he invites the reader to weep at every page of it.
As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar states,

“all Raja Rao’s writing is a part of his Sadhana or spiritual experience
and so is Kanthapura, The Serpent and The Cat should be reviewed as
steps or paths towards realization. If *Kanthapura* could be described as a purana, as a Gandhi Purana, The Serpent and The Rope as an epic, a mini Mahabharatha in the idiom of our age, then, The Cat and Shakespeare is more like one of the longer Upanishads, part narrative, part speculation and part dialogue or discussion.” (79)

C.D. Narasimiahah observes,

“In The Serpent and The Rope, the intellectual preoccupations did not always get accommodated into the structure of the novel, and often stayed out of it, thus exposing the author to critical attack for considerable bits of unassimilated philosophy and metaphysics” (127)

The novel provides a ground for many variant perspectives on India’s religions and culture. It accommodates different notes on Indian life, and yet there is danger agreement on the fact that the novel is philosophical in its context and hence addresses larger reality of modern life.

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Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and The Rope* is taken here for the comparative study with *Jaya Jaya Shankara*, written by Jayakanthan, one of the most eminent Tamil novelists, which have been translated in to English with the same title *Jaya Jaya Shankara* by K.S.Subramanian. Jayakanthan, son of Thandapani Pillai, was born in 1933 at Cuddalore. Having squandered all his riches, his father, ended up as a pauper. This drove Jayakanthan to a life of harsh and bitter days right from his childhood days.
He was exposed to the pangs of hunger and poverty. And his father, an inveterate profligate, dealt a stunning blow on him, by eloping with another woman. Jayakanthan, his mother and his doomed younger brothers, watched helplessly when the angry creditors threw away their household utensils, one after another, and eventually he found, yama – like ruffians appeared suddenly on the scene, and whisked a cot off. It seemed we were suddenly becoming poor…” (Nenaiathu Paarkerean 3).

Young Jayakanthan was seized with an ever-increasing anxiety over the possibility of his father being arrested for failing to clear his enormous debts. Further, it was the period of the Second World War, and every time the siren raised alarm the little boy was filled with the fear of a possible explosion. The most shocking experience Jayakanthan had as a youth was, when his father suddenly left his family in the lurch and ran away to Chennai to live with his second wife and her children. (Nenaiathu Paarkerean 10) Now driven by the need to seek a job in order to look after his mother and brothers, he arrived at Chennai. But contrary to all his expectations, he landed himself straight away in an underworld of evil and crime. He tells, “Liars, thieves, smugglers, corrupt accountants, anti-social elements, murderers, hypocrites, misanthropes – life in this vast metropolis highlighted only the countless atrocities of these hardened criminals” (Yocikkum Velaiyil 15). The city was nothing more than a hotbed of all vices. The lure of hypocritical and propagandist brand of politics, prostitution, bribery, brokerage, fraud, violation of law, crimes against the government in general and women in particular, threats of violence, mindless hooliganism – Madras (Chennai) was the veritable breeding ground for all such solid evils. (Yocikkum
Velaiyil 15). Later Jayakanthan left for Tanjore, where he stayed in an inn, which harboured gamblers, drunkards and prostitutes. He found employment there as a handyman bringing them food, refreshments etc. Soon he moved out of the place switching from one job to another. As he himself states:

“An assistant in a provision store, a doctor’s attendant, a labourer in a flour mill, a compositor, a treadle-man, a book-seller; a news paper boy for the communist party; a seller of film song books, a fire man in a foundry, a helper boy in a soap factory; a worker in an ink-factory, a rickshaw puller; an assistant to a rickshaw - wallah, a proof reader and an assistant editor in a news paper.” (Nenaithu Paarkerean 15).

All these uncommon and unhealthy events provide multifarious experience needed for a writer. It is interesting to note against such a bleak backdrop of the evil world surrounding him, Jayakanthan came across a number of men and women who were extraordinarily humane. One such person was an army man who paid him his ticket fare and procured him meals after rescuing him from the hands of an irritable ticket examiner. “The military man was extremely good and gentle towards me. Casting the ticket fare on the face of the ticket examiner, he chided the latter for beating me inhumanely, seated me close by his side and consoled me” (Yocikkum Velaiyil 9).

Another such person, who showed extraordinary goodness towards him, was a prostitute who gave him breakfast and money for buying a shirt. And third such character was an old poor rickshaw-wallah at Madurai. For a time, Jayakanthan lived with him even thought of marrying his daughter and looking after his family.
(Yocikkum Velaiyil 15). On another occasion, W.V.Kiri, a staunch communist called him a genius and decided to help by giving him all his savings to start a film institute. Jayakanthan confesses that Malliyam Rajagopal was another such good character that “moulded and shaped me one through his kindness and gentleness” (Yocikkum Velaiyil 17). It is this awareness of evil and good that transformed Jayakanthan into a humanist in a practical sense (Raja Durai).

In short Jayakanthan’s view of the world can best be understood only in terms of humanism in the profoundest sense of the term. In his autobiography Ninaittuparkiren he asks, “whoever is not good amongst this human race? (34). He defines worship only in utterly humanist terms. “Should I pray to my god in my privacy? Isn’t it enough that I long for the safety and happiness of my (our) child?” (35). He has nothing but compassion and “pity”(43) for prostitutes. He can’t bear any harm done even to animals (79). He admires “selfless, disinterested youth who are filled with love and prepared for any sacrifices ...(85). He hopes; it is not impossible to create such mighty personalities like Swamy Vivekananda out of our youngsters. (85) Like Ghandhiji he advocates total remission of punishment even for murder (93). He accepts in plain terms that he has grown up and become gentle in his attitudes and hence there is no violence in him. He wants every one to live without fear as fear alone is the prime source of all sins”. Jayakanthan’s life of deprivation of love in his family circle, indifference to the need of formal education, suffering at the hands of the older, his option for a vagrant life -- all these add to the valuable understanding of his characters. Jayakanthan’s principle protagonists can be termed as “Anti-Heroes” in few
of his novels. Most of them, unlike traditional heroes, are disintegrated beings, frequently figuring as neurotics and sometimes as psychotics. They are all victims in a world of violence and cruelty. Most of them have to struggle in their life and the main cause for their failures primarily lie on their childhood experiences.

In his first novel Vaalkkai Alaikkirathu [Life Beckons] (1957), Jayakanthan fictionalizes his early experiences through Raja, the protagonist whose father becomes a yogi [ascetic], forsaking his family. In Unnaipol oruvan [A Man Like You] (1964) Jayakanthan portrays Chiti, a fatherless vagrant who finally gets himself reconciled to his dying mother who delivers a bastard child like himself. Athmaraman, the boy-hero on Karru Velli nile [In the windy Moors] (1984) is an exact replica of little Jayakanthan. He works as an assistant to an old rickshaw-walla in Madurai; almost falls in love with his daughter, passes on a secret-message to the communist headquarters, becomes a full-time communist party worker, breaks away from the party eventually over certain difference of opinion, comes home to look after his mother and becomes a book-seller, helps others in distress and finally marries a prostitute who turns over a new leaf, choosing to live with him.

The protagonist of Paal isuku po [Go Back to Paris] fights till the end for basic rights and convictions and when he is not able to exercise fully his personal freedom, he gets himself ready to go back to Paris from where he came. Murali, in the same novel, says that there is nothing costlier and healthier than human freedom. Ganga in Sila Nerankalil Sila Manithargal [Some Men in Some Occasions] (1970) fully exercises their will and individuality, which prompted her to marry the man who had raped her.
Prabhu, “a dissolute person” undergoes a tremendous change in *Gankai Enkae Pokiral?* [Where goes the Ganges?], a sequel to *Sila Nerangali Sila Manithargal*, on the hands of Jayakanthan, a humanist one maintaining his individuality, dignity and self-reliance.

Jayakanthan is nurtured by the religious and cultural life of the middle class Tamils and in Gandhian humanism, which according to Mulk Raj Anand lies “in the ever-recurrent-question which he [Gandhi] asked himself throughout his life: ‘Oh God, how shall I serve the people now?’” (*My Experiments with Truth*, 30). Jayakanthan also redefines Hinduism, a caste-ridden religion, and deals with the need to render justice to the oppressed, the sinners and sufferers. Critics like Peryakaruppan and M. Thirumalai have already noted this over riding humanistic concern in Jayakanthan, “we perceive the humanism, that stands out in the works of Jayakanthan fashioned essentially from a spiritual point of view better a man”. Jayakanthan focuses his attention on three issues, namely love for the others, duty-consciousness and selfless service, which he believes, besides making people socially more advanced, endow them with an unmistakable religious identity.

The novelists of the post-independence India, focused their attention on social evils like caste system, dowry system, corruption, exploitation of the poor and the oppressed and the suffering of women. Jayakanthan in his novels has chosen from the sociological and psychological points of view, many kinds of women of various ages. It was during this time that a host of communist writers entered the field of Tamil fiction “who introduced the Marxian perspective and brought about as a result, a number of changes with the new clarity offered by their realism.” (Veerasamy, 72). T.M.C.
Ragunathan in this regard, took the first effort, with his “panchum pasiyum” [cotton and hunger] in which the working class people affirm that they are not born simply to die. Their activities and slogans inspire the common people and Ragunathan breathes this new passion into his lively fictional creations. Most of the communist writers of this period in fact, belonged to a new movement known as ‘Manikodi’ of early thirties started by writers like T.S. Chokkalingam and Va. Ra. (Sundararajan and Sivapathasundaram 87). Having personally experienced the sufferings of the working class Jayakanthan was in a better position to depict the plight of the downtrodden in his fiction. To him, all concerns of life seemed to acquire their merit only in relation to human issues. Hence he became a popular companion to the underdogs of the society, castigating in his novels the evils of caste and class and highlighting the predicament of women.

Jayakanthan deals elaborately with the evils of caste system in Jaya Jaya Shankara, Pirelavam [The Deluge] and Moongil Kattu Nila [The Moon Of The Bamboo Forest]. He studies the issues of untouchables from the point of view of religion and locates the reason for this evil in the unhealthy conventions of Hindu society. In Jaya Jaya Shankara, he makes the Acharya, the Hindu religious head, “grant admission to Adi, a man of low caste and his three children into the temple and holds a long conversation with him” (Muthiah 289). In ‘Bramoupathesam’ [Brahman’s counsel], he transforms a boy of low caste into a Brahmin, making him don the sacred thread. According to Jayakanthan, the only solution for the problem of caste system is “humanism” which according to him is proper inter-personal human relationship based
on egalitarian brotherly love. In novels like Yarukkaka Aluthan [For Whom Did He Weep] and Unnaippol Oruvan [One Like You] Jayakanthan deals with the tyranny of class system and the wretched conditions of the society, which marginalizes the happiness of the poor. With regard to the problems of women in society, Jayakanthan presents a good variety of modern women in his works. Kalyani in Oru Natikai Natakam Parkiral [an actress witnesses a play] is presented as a strong soul, who considers that marriage and love should not destroy the individuality of a person. It is against such literary background of Tamil fiction, that the literary achievements of Jayakanthan as a Tamil novelist have to be studied. Jayakanthan handles themes in a new perspective. He strives to find solutions for human problems, particularly those relating to caste, class and women from an entirely new angle.

In Jaya Jaya Shankara, the story takes place in a village called Shankarapuram. Mahalinga Iyer, is a Brahmin and a very strong believer in Hindu religion, its traditions and customs. He cannot give up his religious principles at any cost. Young Shankaran is a friend of Adi, who saves his life from a whirlpool. From that day onwards Shankaran sees in Adi Lord Shiva and worships him, though he very well knows it is against his father’s wish. Sadashiva Iyer, against the wishes of his brother Mahalinga Iyer and family, fights for the upliftment of the Harijans along with other Gandhians. From the agraharam he goes to the Harijan slum and starts up an ashram named as Gandhi ashram and teaches Vedas, Mantras, Sanskrit and English to the Harijan children. This causes much confusion in the family. Mahalinga Iyer unable to tolerate this leaves his village and decides to leave his son, Young Shakaran in the Shree
Madam and proceeds to Varanasi with his wife, so as to purify himself from the sins which he thinks that he had failed to stop his brother from going against the Hindu dharma. The agraharam people keep Sadashiva Iyer out of their caste and finally he moves to the Gandhi ashram once for all.

After some years, young Shankaran, who has been elevated as Acharya Swamigal visits the village and wishes to see Adi. He sends Krishnasamy to bring Adi. Now Adi is married to Swatantra Devi, the daughter of Sadashiva Iyer and has two sons and a daughter. His elder son Mahalingam walks out of the house as his ideas were totally against views of Gandhiji. Swamigal later says to Adi to search his son. Adi goes to Manavelli Illam to see Singarayar and enquire about his son, Mahalingam. Singarayar says that Mahalingam was the student of his son Satyamoorthy who is in jail and says that he can give information about his son. The concluding chapters of the novel deals with the jail life of Sathyamoorthy, and remind the readers of the Emergency days during which many leading politicians were jailed. Mahalingam, Uma and Sathyamoorthy are shown as communists and they even subscribe to anarchist ideas. Jayakanthan perhaps refers in their characters the arrival of Naxalberi movement in India. The novel takes up in its three sections, the three different ideologies of Congress Nationalism, Marxist Socialism and Extremist intervention for justice. Jayakanthan reads these changes through the life of Sadashiva Iyer, Singarayar and Sathyamoorthy. Jnani a Tamil critic, while quoting from one of Jayakanthan’s works states,
"Modern India has not yet cut down Jayakanthan’s traditional roots. He is forced to accept the modernized things. At the same time he does not fail to accept the spiritual humanistic changes in new scriptures and the mode of life prescribed in those holy books... only communism preaches like Hinduism to give human right and equality in the society."

(Sudhanthira Cinthanai 157)

Jayakanthan has strong faith in communism, which he believes is not antithetical to Marxist ideas of progress. In his work, Oru Ilakkiyavathiyin Arasiyal Anubavangal states, “I can proudly say that I can lead our country in the socialistic path in the name of our Hindu dharma”. (256). For one who believes in Hindu dharma socialism is the next best form of choice. An Indian is not a single individual. He is part and parcel of the whole society. “I am ready to prove this with our cultural facts, Epics and Vedas (257)”. Like the new social change, which took place in Russia, a Hindu’s duty is to seek a similar social change. Jayakanthan’s ideas about Hinduism differ from that of others. He is inspired by great people like Swami Vivekananda and Subramania Bharathi, in a life of unity on equality -- all are one and equal. Jayakanthan chooses to highlight the best in Hinduism. His literary career spanning over forty years has been marked by prolific output with an amazing range and depth. Fourteen novels, more than thirty short novels, over one hundred short stories, hundreds of essays, most of them charming vignettes, many thought provoking and combative prefaxes, two autobiographical works, capturing the contemporary political and cultural history of Tamil people dominated the Tamil literary field. “Writing is my very life; not a mere
means of livelihood” – this evocative declaration of sixty-seven year old Tamil writer epitomizes the core of his creative personality.

Jayakanthan’s essays are little beautiful vignettes, reminding one of Charles Lamb and William Hazlet. There are many striking features in these essays their limpid style; gentle flowering of a little dot of thought, emotion or an occurrence; a quaint sense of humour; soft touches of satire; muffled sadness: about human insensitivity and ignorance; uncovering human excellence among squalor and deprivation; touching recollections of bygone friendships; charming recalls of childhood innocence and idiosyncrasies; flashes of original perceptions; and genuine sparks of wisdom. Jayakanthan’s Prefaces have laid the foundation for a new genre of Preface Literature in Tamil language. Drawing a parallel with George Bernard Shaw’s prefaces is indeed tempting. Jayakanthan’s Prefaces are marked, among other things, by the following aspects: a combative defense of his characters against malicious assaults and ill-informed comments; a peep into some of the major forces behind his creative personality; anguished and sometimes angry impressions on the warped and sterile dogmas infecting the Tamil psyche; and occasional philosophical discourses on the core themes of some of his works (eg. individual - society conflicts; tradition - modernity interaction; and core impulsion of creative writing).

Jayakanthan is essentially a cerebral writer. He is ever bubbling with fresh and original ideas and insights. He has an instinctive urge to share his ideas with sahrudayas and readers, adopting as his literary duty or swadharma. And his identity with his characters is total. When these factors naturally act in unison - which occurs
often in his case - the distance between the writer and his characters shrinks; a process of ‘osmosis’ sets in. Jayakanthan has received many awards and honours. Mention may be made of the Sahitya Akademi (‘National Academy of Literature’) Award conferred on him in 1972 - one of the youngest to be so honoured and, the Rajarajan Award of the Tamilnadu Government. He is also a distinguished Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi. For Jayakanthan’s, the relationship between the reader and the author is meaningful. He says,

“What you consider a story is the testament of an age, of a life... Success in literary creativity is not your praise; not my pride. Winning you over is no victory; sometimes, it turns out to be a fall. Success of literature is transcend time. To go beyond you is my victory. To help you get past your bounds is literature’s success. It is known by another name growth.”

Raja Rao’s philosophy and Jayakanthan’s politics meet at a Hindu religious point. Both argue for realization of the meaning of life. The most important aspect of understanding life is dispelling the darkness, the removal of Maya. Raja Rao projects this by a process of journey from Avidya to Vidyā, from ignorance to knowledge. The quest internal is externalized in terms of relationships – traditional and physical, metaphysical and philosophical-achieve in spatial planes of experience. His major thrust is on the helplessness of modern man, and the dire need for a philosopher. Jayakanthan on the other hand, highlights the fact that the Hindu Dharma has the answer, and the error of not seeing it lies with the believer. One needs a total faith,
which provides true understanding of life. In the temporal plane, these are changes in life caused by transformations in societies. These are waves of the ocean, and the water below is still. One needs a radiant eye to dispel the myth of maya, the illusion. Gandhism and Maxism are political philosophies propounded for the growth of modern man. But the still center is available in Indian spirituality. Both tend to draw their essential vision of human life from Advaita Vedanta. In the following section a brief note on Advaita Vedanta is given.

India can be seen as the “mother land” of religions in that sense she has given birth to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and nurtured others like Islam, Zoroastrianism and Christianity that have come to call this land “home”. The religion we call “Hinduism” has developed from the mixing of two cultures (Aryan and Indus River Valley) and their respective religions. Adi Sankaracarya is the most important teacher of the Advaita school of Vedanta, and his commentaries to the Upanisads, the Bagavad-Gita and the Brahmasutras define the parameters of Advaita thought. However, it must be remembered that all Vedanta philosophy really goes back to the Upanisads, and Adi Sankaracarya is regarded as a pre-eminent teacher who continued the Upanisadic tradition. The name Sankaracarya has become a title for the heads of the numerous Advaita institutions in India today, because of the great respect and fame associated with it. The philosophy of Advaita, literally non-dualism, is the premier and oldest extant among the Vedanta schools of Indian philosophy. The Upanisadic quest is to understand Brahman, the source of everything, the Atman, the Self, and the
relationship between Brahman and Atman. The Upanisads explore these issues from different angles. The Advaita School teaches a complete essential identity between the Brahman and the Atman.

Adi Shankaracharyar was born in Kaladi in Kerala in the year 805 (AD) and attained ‘Samadi’ at the age of 32 in the year 837 AD. He is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and poet of all times. He wrote many philosophical treaties establishing the concept of Advaita with commentaries on Brahma Sutra. The Bhagavad Gita and the principal Upanisads. Advaita Philosophy advocates the realization that “Ekameva Adviteeyan Brahma” – The Absolute is one alone, not two. There is the appearance of enormous multiples but oneness is the essence of all knowledge. Adi Shankara proclaimed that like some sweet juice is present inside sugarcanes, the ‘Divine’ is present in the manifold bodies. This conscious, feeling (the Bhava) is necessary to understand the truth. It is impossible to apply this as ‘Kriya Advaita’ – to carry on in one’s daily activity. There are three divine characteristics in all beings. They are Asthi, Bhathi, and Priyam (Existence, Recognizability and Utility) – Being, Awareness and Bliss – ‘Sat (waking)-chit (dreaming)-Ananda (deep sleep)’. This monoistic or non-dualistic philosophy essentially refers to the indivisibility of the self (Atman) from the whole (Brahman). The ultimate reality expressed in Trimurti is identified in Brahman while the individual soul is identified as Atman. These ideas have been explained in Upanisads such as Brihadaranyaka but Adi Shankara gave the name and importance to the spread of the idea. The swan motif is seen in many Advaita oragnisations. Swan is found in oil lamps used in temples and shrines in peoples home.
Swan stays in water, but its feather remains dry. *Advaitins* live in the world yet strive to remain unaffected by life’s ups and downs.

Shankara’s contribution to philosophy is his blending of the doctrines of *Karma* and *Maya*, which culminated in a logical exposition of the idea of non-dualism. The entire universe consisting of *Namarnupa*, names and forms, is but an appearance; *Brahman*, infinite consciousness, is the sole reality. Its attainment and the annihilation of the great illusion of the universe called *Maya*, by a process of realization, were the objects of Shankara’s quest. Shankara was born to the Nambudiri brahmana couple, Sivaguru and Aryamba, in a little village called Kaladi in Kerala. The couple had remained childless for a long time, and prayed for children at the Vadakkumnathan (Vrshacala) temple in nearby Trichur. Siva is said to have appeared to the couple in a dream and promised them a choice of one son who would be short-lived but the most brilliant philosopher of his day, or many sons who would be mediocre at best. The couple opted for a brilliant, but short-lived son, and so Shankara was born.

Shankara lost his father when quite young, and his mother performed his *upanayana* ceremonies with the help of her relatives. Shankara excelled in all branches of traditional *Vaidika* learning. A few miracles are reported about the young Shankara. As a *brahma-carin*, he went about collecting alms from families in the village. A lady who was herself extremely poor, but did not want to send away the boy empty-handed, gave him the last piece of Amla fruit she had at home. Shankara, sensing the very poverty of the lady, composed a hymn (*Kanakadhara Stavam*) to Sri, the goddess of wealth, right at her doorstep. As a result, a shower of golden Amlas rewarded the lady
for her piety. On another occasion, Shankara is said to have re-routed the course of the Purna River, so that his old mother would not have to walk a long distance to the river for her daily ablutions.

Shankara was filled with the spirit of renunciation early in his life. Getting married and settling to the life of a householder was never a part of his goal in life, though his mother was anxious to see him as a grhastha. Once when he was swimming in the river, a crocodile caught hold of his leg. Shankara sensed that he was destined to die at that moment, and decided to directly enter the fourth Ashrama of sannyasin right then. This kind of renunciation is called Apat sannyasa. The crocodile released him when he thus mentally decided to renounce the world, and Shankara decided to regularize his decision by going to an accomplished guru. To comfort his anxious mother, he promised that he would return at the moment of her death, to conduct her funeral rites, not withstanding the fact that he would be a sannyasin then.

Shankara then traveled far and wide in search of a worthy guru who would initiate him and regularize his vow of sannyasa, till he came to the banks of the river Narmada in central India. Here was the Ashrama of Govinda Bhagavatpada, the disciple of Gaudapada, the famous author of the Mandukya Karikas. Shankara was accepted as a disciple by Govinda, who initiated him into the Paramahamsa order of Sannyasa, the highest kind of renunciation. Seeing the intellectual acumen of his disciple, Govinda commanded Shankara to expound the philosophy of Vedantha through commentaries on the principle of the Upanisads, the Brahma Sutras and The Gita. Shankara wrote commentaries on Badarayana’s Brahma Sutras, the various
Upanisads and the Bhagavad-Gita. He also commented upon the Adhyatma-Patala of the Apastamba Sutras, and on Vyasa’s Bhashya to Patanjali’s Yogasutras. In addition to these commentarial texts, Shankara wrote independent treatises called Prakarana Granthas, including the Upadesasahasri, Atmabodha, etc.

In addition to writing his own commentaries, Shankara sought out leaders of other schools, in order to engage them in debate. As per the accepted philosophical tradition in India, such debates helped to establish a new philosopher, and also to win disciples and converts from other schools. It was also traditional for the loser in the debate to become a disciple of the winner. Thus, Shankara debated with Buddhist philosophers, with followers of Samkhya and with Purva Mimamsakas, the followers of Vedic ritualism, and proved more than capable in defeating all his opponents in debate. Shankara’s debate with Visvarupa was unique. The referee at the debate was Visvarupa’s wife, Bharati, who was herself very well learned, and regarded as an incarnation of Goddess Sarasvati. At stake was a whole way of life. The agreement was that if Visvarupa won, Shankara would consent to marry and take the life of a family man, whereas if Shankara won, Visvarupa would renounce all his wealth and possessions and become a Samnyasin disciple of Shankara. The debate is said to have lasted for whole weeks, till in the end, Visvarupa had to concede defeat and become a samnyasin. Bharati was a fair judge, but before declaring Shankara as the winner, she challenged Shankara with questions about Kamasatra, which he knew nothing about. Shankara therefore requested some time, during which, using the subtle yogic process called Parakaya-Pravesa, he entered the body of a dying king and experienced the art
of love with the queens. Returning to Visvarupa’s home, he answered all of Bharati’s questions, after which Visvarupa was ordained as a *sanyasin* by the name of Suresvara. He was to become the most celebrated disciple of Shankara, writing *Varttikas* to Shankara’s *Bhashyas* on the *Yajurveda Upanisads*, in addition to his own independent texts on various subjects.

*Advaita Vedanta* is the most significant and influential Hindu philosophy fully expressed by saint Adi Shankara in the ninth century. The Sanskrit term *Advaita* means “non-dual”. In contrast to Samkhya, *Advaita* is monistic in holding that *Brahman* is all, and is in everywhere. It emphasis the fact, that there is only one ultimate essence behind everything. This world, everything, is really *Brahman* but we think it is other than *Brahman*. The appearance of the universe and the things in it are termed as *Maya*, illusion. We are living under *Avidya* (ignorance) so long as we take this world to be what it appears to be rather than for what it really is: *Brahman*. The classic example used by Shankara is that of a rope, which we mistakenly take to be a snake. So, too, this world, the self (*Atman*) and even the gods are not what we think they are: In ignorance we identify ourselves with our physical being rather than with our spiritual essence. Illusion and ignorance reinforce each other and it becomes a vicious repeating cycle, which blinds us to the awareness of our true nature as one with *Brahman*. In reality, all is *Brahman*. To come to this realization is to achieve enlightenment and thus release (*Moksha*) from the illusion of *Samsara*, which is as a game, the play of the gods - *Lila* (game, play).
“Hinduism” is a made up category for a vast variety of philosophical thought patterns and practices found in India and lumped under one broad heading created by western scholars. Perhaps in India these different patterns of faith are viewed as more distinct from each other than Westerners make them out to be (in the same way that many Christians erroneously see their different denominations as “different religions”).

It is hard to say just when Hinduism began:

- It was not started by any one particular person.
- Its roots go back before recorded history and
- It involve a combination of elements from several cultures and traditions which made a gradual transition over time giving birth to several non-Hindu religions (Buddhism, Jainism) in the process.

[4]

The methodology of the thesis is basically comparative. Comparative Literature scholars study the similarities and differences in the context of space and time. As K. Chellappan states,

“Comparative Literature as a study of Literature independent of ethnic. Linguistic and geographical boundaries has been a liberating and humanising force on literature itself by breaking the boundaries and focusing on the unity of human creativeness underlying the diversity of literary events . . . It has provided a wider perspective by making mutual illumination of literature possible”. (K. Chellappan 1)
In contemporary literary theory the emphasis is given on inter-textuality, which enhances the importance of comparative literature. The French school of comparative literature saw the relationship between literatures as one of contacts between genetically or casually connected works of art. The American school as propounded by Remak accommodates studies of parallels in texts, which are separate by meanings of selective affinities in theme, problem, genre, style and simultaneousness. The present comparison aims to trace the basic philosophical positions of the two writers as they present the protagonists’ lives in contemporary space and time. Hence the study is essentially thematic and textual. The characters and their actions in the given situations are studied so as to figure out the conflicts and problems in their lives. The findings of this study are presented here in five chapters.

Chapter – 1. Introduction
Chapter – 2. Religion – Being and Becoming a Brahmin
Chapter – 3. Relationship – Breaking and Bonding
Chapter – 4. Realization - Displacement and self Realization
Chapter – 5. Summation

The chapter two of the novel is entitled “Religion - Being and Becoming a Brahmin”, in which the basic concept of non-dualism as one that facilitates the attainment of Brahman is explained. The researcher attempts to highlight the crisis in the life of Ramaswamy and his efforts to resolve his orbit, follows this. For Ramasamy, a born Brahmin, who had been exposed to new knowledge and other religions of the world, a crisis of being Brahmin disrupts his life and he attempts to
realign himself to the realities around by a process of transformation into a Brahmin. Being a Brahmin by birth does not ensure the Brahmin consciousness in him, as he understands 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 its practice and Hindu experience in the subjective knowledge of the characters concerned. Through the life of Ramasamy 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 Adi Shankara’s philosophy, the unity that would facilitate the process of becoming a Brahmin by anyone including a Dalit.

The third chapter entitled “Relationship - Breaking and Bonding” highlights the significance of subjective experience. Any individual has to undergo the process of experience in life, which alone provides an illuminated knowledge, the one, which is different from the knowledge handed out in terms of books, scriptures and other religious text. The story of Ramasamy and Adi is studied so as to find out how their experiences have mattered much in disciplining their visions and ideas, as well as their journey in search of Absolute realization. The chapter details the web of relationships that includes bonding and breaking-each one providing an appropriate experience. In the case of Adi, his transcendence from the dalit outcaste feeling to a kind of Guru is
narrated in the context of his relationship with Swatantra Devi, Shankara (who turns as Acharya Swamigal later) and Singarayar. He understands the meaning of life not by education but by intuition insight and experience. These three elements are available to any human being in this world. Hence it becomes possible, according to Jayakanthan, to argue that a Dalit could become a Brahmin and hence in Adi’s life Adi Shankara’s philosophy is redefined.

While chapter three is devoted to the sphere of human experience in the context of human relationships in terms of family and friendship, chapter four entitled “Realization: Displacement and Self-realization”, is a study in the light of spatial mobility which facilitates experience and knowledge of the Brahman. Hindu religious texts as well as the religions of India have recommended not stationary life but a life of mobility and travel, like Aryanavas or Vanavas and Yathra, which results in “Satsanga”. Raja Rao stresses the fact that only through the process of displacements or travel, the meeting of various people is possible – the “Satsanga” which leads to Sadhana thereby guide one to reach the Absolute truth. Both the narratives further gives a detail concept of guru and his role in guiding human beings in their problematic situations. These gurus from their holy dwellings – ‘ashram’ show man his true path towards attaining the Absolute truth. Jayakanthan’s narrative stresses the fact that any one who has the consciousness of the Brahman can become a guru and any place of noble and holy deeds and thoughts could be an ashram or madam, where in one can get the Supreme Bliss. Raja Rao’s Ramasamy also undertakes this experience and feels the Brahman in the context of nature and its vast space. Jayakanthan’s characters are put in
the sphere of time rather than space so that they understand human life better. Adi is placed in three different types of times in Indian society -- political as well as social. The three parts of Jayakanthan’s novel provide probings and findings reveal that Indian society is not basically contradictory but there is a kind of unity whatever may be the ideational attitudes of the people attached to Gandhian, Marxian and Anarchist ways of life. This unity seems to proclaim the truth of Adi Sanakara’s philosophy of non-dualism.

The Chapter Five is intended as a “Summation”, a synoptic restatement and discussion of the findings provided in the various chapters so as to affirm the basic premise of this researcher. Both Jayakanthan’s Jaya Jaya Shankara and Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope address apparently faith and quest of individuals and yet provide an insight and a contemporary meaning which facilitate an understanding of modern life, thereby justifying the fact that these two master pieces are not novels of time but narratives that transcend and anticipate the time ahead.
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Raja Durai, *Jayakanthan and Ghrangreen as Humanists*