The man who became expatriate at the tender age of nineteen and who cried like an orphan in the streets of London and Paris becomes more attached to his motherland and cries with joy whenever he comes back to her. He is 'obsessed with Sanskrit' and 'fascinated with Malayalam.' Kannada touches his 'elemental chords.' French reaches his 'spirit' and Italian speaks of 'humanity' to him. He is moved by the English of Shakespeare, innocence of Hindi and Urdu of Galiy. After wandering into all these tongues he yields English with ease to convey his thoughts. He was influenced by the 'Ramayana, the book of books and the Mahabharata.' They have 'filled (his) imagination' and helped him 'at every crucial point of (his) life.' 'Bhishma made (him) understand India.' After these two epics he was influenced the most by the Vishnu-sahasranama which contains 'waves of bhakti' of Shankara, Valmiki, Kalidasa and even Jagannath Bhat. He discovered India through Ananda Gouravam who taught him to 'come back to upanishads and temples' even through Dante or Shakespeare, through St. Thomas Aquinas or Mirahmam realizing that wheresoever you go, you always return to faith and whatever the rivers may flow, the values are
of Gangotri.'(1) With these universal background and encyclopaedic wisdom as roots there sprout Ramayan (Kanthapura), Mahabharat (The Serpent and the Royal) and Vedanta (The Cat and Shakespeare) again in this 20th century.

1) Kanthapura

Kanthapura is the Ramayana of Raja Rao, Sandhipram of the freedom struggle, Devigurana of the Goddess Bandhuma and Vishalpurana of Kanthapura, a village in the far interior of Karnataka in south India. It is the story of the independence movement becoming a tangible reality in a tiny and remote village in south India. It is the story of a young20 year old boy, his ideals and the practical problems in practising those ideals. It is the proof of the victory of the indira forces over the evil forces. It is the reaffirmation of the ageold customs and traditions, faiths and beliefs and the declaration of the eternity that live in Indian villages. The novel has the potential flavour of an epic and it is narrated beautifully in the traditional Indian narrative mode by an old woman Akkaya. Though this was the first novel of a young writer of around thirty years of age, it has the grandeur of an epic and poignancy of a great classic. Rather it announced the arrival of a master
Craftsmen and original creative writer in the horizon of Indian literature in English.

Routhapura is an unforgettable story of the bounding impact of the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and non-cooperation on a crumbling village in south India, during the 1930's. Mahatma Gandhi is more of an illusion than reality here. So here in the novel his physical presence is revealed. Yet the towering personality of him is felt everywhere. The invisible Gandhi makes the omnipresent Gandhi of waiting for the Mahatma of K K Narayan a dwarf. The little bardic Routhapura was shaken to the core by the sweeping revolution of Gandhi's social reform and political upsurge. Politically the ideologies were not accepted by the traditional rustic minds. But the village Gandhi, Coroner House Maryly, uses the right key to unlock the rustic hearts and thus indoctrinates the Routhapurans through religious legendary discourses of Nrikathas' by cleverly intertwining the past and the present and instigating the need to face anything in future. Once the little community is convinced that Milton is the 'Hindu -water' in the tradition of religion, he knows right in everything and everywhere. Everyone plunges into the freedom struggle and finally both 'men and mosquito' are wiped out. Thus the novel becomes simultaneously Gandhi-persona
and the confluence of religious, political and social experiences which finally end in the process of rediscovering the Indian tradition and values. Therefore the message of the novel is essentially spiritual and cultural.

The story teller is an elderly widow and she amply proves that every grand-mother in India, especially in the countryside, is a gifted story-teller who acts as the link between the past and the present. We see everything through the chatty language and the vigorous memory of her. Actualities get metamorphosed into myths, facts into fiction and history into legend. Everywhere there is richness and the absence of the demarcation between facts and fiction transports the listener or the reader into a surrealistic world where everything is possible and truth alone triumphs. Thus the village Kunthapura stands for any village in the country and the narrator for any grand-mother. As she had herself participated in that historic struggle of the past, we feel the pulse and the blood in her spontaneous, vigorous, quick and feminine narration and we are able to reconstruct the whole myth.

Each listener and every listener contributes his or her version to the existing tale and thus the myth gets enriched.
gods and goddesses of tradition, heroes and heroines of epics, personas and personalities of history mix and mingle with the ordinary mortals and the time past and time present alter and affect the time future. "Shataba Gandhi in Rome, the red-foreigner or the brown inspector of police Pachabali who flourishes a lathi is only a soldier in ten-headed Devta's army of occupation and oppression. "May more : the Satyagrahi in prison is the divine Krishna himself in Ramayana's prison! Events gather significance after the passage of some years, the human becomes the unique, the trivial becomes heroic, and the hectic excitement of a day becomes a permanent communal possession. The political revolution is thus transcended and assimilated into the racial heritage as with our legend."(2)

Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar sums up the theme of Swabhumi as 'Gandhi and our Village' and claims that 'the style of writing makes the book more a Swabhumi than a piece of new fiction.'(3) Gandhi remains behind the wall and thereby functions as the incarnation of Gandhi in Swabhumi. There is constant conflict between science and imagination between the villagers and their sympathizers on one side and the scientists and their sympathizers on the other. Similarly
there is confrontation between orthodoxy and reform, exploitation and sufferance, the planter and the coolies, the corrupt official and the self-respecting villager. Most of the major events of that period such as Bandi march, Round Table conference, etc. find important place in the novel. Ranthapur becomes a microcosm of India but the flavour of the language, customs, rhythmic chains of proper names, hypnotic repetitions of refrain, picturesque landscape, the river, the hill and the Laxmi Goddess Kanchamma, etc. make the novel typically south Indian in character. Thus the novel is national and regional at the same time. Raja Rao is able to achieve the effect of regionalism by transmuting the natural speech of folk into English and by using various techniques such as tell-tale nick names: Waterfall Venkamma, Note-scratching Nanjamma, Front-house Akkamma, Temple Rangappa, Coffee-planter Ramayya, Patwari Nanjundaiah, Gold-bangle Somanna, Gardener-field Ramachandra, Corner-house Moorthy, etc.

Gandhi and Swaraj become the subject matter of Harikatha of Jayaramachar. In Harikathas and brijhas traditional mythology and contemporaneous politics get amalgamated so beautifully that the rulers fail to recognise the concealed messages
but the Satyagrahis get the core instantly. Indian mind is tuned to see God in everything and so Gandhi is Ram, Krishna and Shiva and Swaraj is three eyed like Siva:

Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim Unity, Khaddar. The reading of newspaper becomes as serious a discipline as the reverent reading of Gita and hand-spinning is elevated into a daily ritual like puja and as a whole the complete freedom struggle gets the colouring of religion and hence it stirs everybody.

In Kanthapura Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Vedas and Puranas find their place in a simplified manner in the appropriate situations. Even the science, mathematics, astronomy, etc. do not fail to reach the understanding level of the Kanthapurians. There are purposeful digressions and meaningful backward glances which gives the novel an intrinsic and puranic dignity. The theme, the style and the execution is of the standard of classic. Santha Rama Rao in her review of the novel in New York Times Book Review has rightly said, "It has all the content of an ancient Indian classic, combined with a sharp, satirical wit and a clear understanding of the present."(4)

In Kanthapura, the Devi-principle is found everywhere. This principle is reflected in the form of mother image...
the symbols like cow, Mother India, the life-giving river, human mothers and the supreme mother, the protective village goddess Kenchamma. The narrator herself is a mother lives to tell the story of the past and therefore the present generation to act for the future. Kenchamma belongs only to Kanthapura or Kenchamma is the mother of Kanthapura and Kanthapura being the only daughter. She, like the human mother who bothers about only her children, cares only for Kanthapurians. The grand-mother narrator's simple narration is: "She is the goddess of Kanthapura, not of Talassana. They ought to have stayed in Talassana and gone to Goddess Talvannamma to offer their prayers."(5) Kanthapura lies like a child on the lap of Himavathy and Kenchamma is the mother of Himavathy.

Mythical and mortal human figures mix and mingle with each other in Kanthapura. "Some of the chief characters are gods and other human beings larger in power than humanity."(5) And the goddess lives among the villagers, saves them from the demon and they, her children, go to her with their prayers and complaints. "Kenchamma is our Goddess. Great and beautiful in sin. She killed a demon ages, ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as
wives.\(^{(7)}\) Kanchamma gives them rain and protects their crop. She protects her children through famine, disease, death and despair. Thus the mother-child image is found throughout the novel. It is in nature, it is in society and in the family. Mother is respected and worshipped in all these spheres.

"Mankind's earliest gods were female, and early societies were matriarchal.\(^{(8)}\) This is the reason why the 'Devi-principle' is so prevalent in Kathayuru. The all sing, clap their hands and sing:

\begin{verbatim}
Kanchamma, Kanchamma
Goddess benign and bounteous,
Mother of earth, blood of life,
Harvest queen, rain crowned,
Kanchamma, Kanchamma, Goddess benign and bounteous.\(^{(3)}\)
\end{verbatim}

In Kathayuru we get the intimate nature of the relationship between goddess and devotees like mother and children. She gives the village stability and reality. Their intimacy is so much that they trust and accuse her at times of failure and mistakes as if she were their paid servant and in the
their right to expect Her to be at their service all the time. She presides over birth and death, seasonal rites, disease and health. This local myth of Kenchamma fused beautifully with the all India myth of Ramayana gives the stature of an epic to this novel. Reciprocal law is shown between the mother and the children - Kenchamma and Kanthapurians, Bharat Mata and Indians. They were ready to walk into the mother earth if they were ordered by Gandhi. Such was the blind devotion prevailed in the Satyagrahis.

The under-current of the religious traditions not only adds electrifying effect on the national movement but also unfolds the sensibility of Indian villagers for whom religion is life and who are cultured to view everything through religious point of view and mythicising them. Xanthapura does not project the Indian spirit isolatively but as a living experience of continuity criss crossing time and space. The village Xanthapura is not a mere landscape - it is a mythic soil, embedding in its fertile belly the time immemorial beliefs and faiths, customs and traditions and the times past, present and future. The symbols and images of purely local colour and flavour help Raja Rao to justify his vision and philosophy.
The hill, the river, the temple, the demarcation of Brahmin quarters Sudra quarters, etc. are not mere physical projections but the spiritual phenomenon which enshrines the eternity.

Raja Rao, here, makes an attempt to create an Sthalapura, a legendary tale of a specific locality. The description of the village, language, hill, river, etc. creates a well-knitted framework and the presentation of the faiths and beliefs, customs and traditions, etc. build a superstructure over it and finally the flavour of the language and the nature of mythologising everything give the finishing touch to the edifice of the Sthalapura. "Not only the sensibility that informs Kantapura truly of the soil; its form and narrative technique also belong to a living tradition. Raja Rao has made an organised attempt to follow the traditional Indian narrative technique in Kantapura."(10) Along with the geographical and spiritual signals and symbols such as Kanchana Hill, Shnettigav Coffee Estate, Kallupurichandi Temple, Krishna river, shrines like Hoopthy, the village Balodbh, Bander, the poetical appeal and all others are rooted deep into the soil that is India.
Kanthapura and Kanthapurans are eternal symbols of true village and rustic godfearing simple folk. Gandhi and his movement, the apparently sweeping turmoil, the wiping out of men and mosquito, etc. are just ripples on the mighty ocean. That is why Kanthapura, phoenix-like, emerges out of its own ashes as Kashipura (p. 253), the eternal city and the narrator lives to tell the story to keep alive the continuity and 'Concubine Chinna still remains to lift her leg to her new customers' (p. 258) - Life continues.

Raja Rao reaches the pinnacle of perfection while portraying the idealist character Moorthy as an ordinary weakling by making him react the way he did in Parish Rachanna's house and the great villainous usurer Bhatta with a soft corner in his otherwise petty heart to give higher education to poor Ranu and in churning out the paradoxical fact "of a festival ridden poor country in which poverty has not crushed the spirit of man."(11)

The poetic and mythical style of Kanthapura compels M.H. Fauster to say "... the finest novel to come out of India in recent years."(13)
3) *The Serpent and the Rope*:

If Kanthapura is Raja Rau's Ramayana, then the Serpent and the Rope is his Mahabharata. If Kanthapura is an epic, then the Serpent and the Rope is an encyclopaedia. If Kanthapura is a Sthalapurana, then the Serpent and the Rope is a Mahapurana. If the story of Kanthapura operates on the planes of political and religious, the story of *The Serpent and the Rope* operates on social and metaphysical. If Kanthapura tries to tell the story of a remote village of Karnataka and calls as the projection of the microcosm of India, *The Serpent and the Rope* tells the story of India encompassing the whole of the world. If in Kanthapura the protagonist tries to search for the Guru, in *The Serpent and the Rope* he finds him in the end. Unlike the simple rustic story-teller, an illiterate old village woman in Kanthapura, who knew only Indian myths and legends, fables and folklores of her region, the protagonist of *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswamy is familiar with myths and legends, history and philosophy of different civilizations and he can recognise the similarities and commonness that exist in them and find a link between the past and the present. And as there is no negation in his life – all is harmonized. So for *Kanthapura*, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam,
Hitlerism" and the things like that are all different roads, "as the Gita says, lead but to the Absolute" (p. 98) the unknown principle. The Serpent and the Rope is the spiritual autobiography of Ramaswamy the protagonist and the pseudo autobiographical novel of Raja Rao, the author.

The story moves around the expatriate Indian, Ramaswamy, who goes to France and England for pursuing his research in Albigensian heresy. For this research he has to positive links between Vedanta and Sather philosophy. He is born into an orthodox brahmin family in Mandal. He feels proud of his ancestral root of the excellent Yoganvalya of Upanishadic age and later of Madura. He knows by heart from the very early childood Sanskrit grammar, the Brahman culture and the upanishads. This makes him stand apart and above the ordinary fleeting life. He marries a French woman, Madeleine, who teaches history in a college. She loves the philosophical tradition of India. And that is why she marries Ramaswamy.

Rama comes to India then his father dies with his little mother and young Siddhara he proceeds to Benares for the obsequies. During this trip his love for all that stands for ancient Indian spiritual tradition gets rejuvenated.
The eternal Varanasi and the perennial Ganges kindle the divine spirit in him and makes him experience the ecstasy. This ecstasy lifts him beyond the concept of time and place. The poet in him springs out. He feels: "Varanasi is eternal. There the dead do not die nor the living live. The dead come to play on the banks of the Ganges, and the living who move about and even after rice hills to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city."(13) 'In Varanasi, death is illusory as the video in the morning; Varanasi is a 'surreal city.' Yet at times, the dead and the living are one.'"Varanasi was indeed at heart but inside myself," 'all before he

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He came back to visit again with a new figure of a divided Indian spiritual sensibility. Though he lives in a far-off place with a foreign wife who is so different in her cultural and religious background, yet he consistently expresses his love and affection for Indian philosophy, religion and tradition even while loving all that is significant for him in the west. Meanwhile Madame drifts away from her husband and embraces Brahman. Eventually on his part finds more spiritual affinity with an Indian princess Savithri and their friendship culminates in their mystical union in London. She becomes Radha to Krishna, Consuelo to Tristan and Savithri to Satyavan. Later she leaves for Allahabad at Rama's advice to become Bute's wife. Thus her lady obeys the Rama and her soul remains attached with Rama like Kira's to Krishna.

Rama comes to India for the second time to perform his sister's marriage. He visits his ancestral village Kaca- hurupura and he could feel the pull of the soil. He returns to France after a brief personal encounter with a friend's wife. He finds a great change in France. She refuses to come to India with Rama and finally their relationship ends.
In their legal separation, he utters quietly as 'the law is the death of truth.' (p.385) He returns to India to find his Guru. As Raja Rao finds his Guru, Shri Ramana, and solves all his problems, Ramanay meets his Guru who is able to guide him to recognize the serpent and the rope individually. He is able to see India not as a country, but as an 'idea, metaphysical' (p.376). He says: "...India is the Guru of the world, or she is not India. The sages have no history, no biography..." (p.333) "India has no history, for truth can not have history." (p.102)

This simple tale of The Serpent and the Rope springs from the soul of Ramanay in the form of nostalgia, encompassing the past, present and future; covering the whole of oriental and occidental cultures and traditions, indices and beliefs, thoughts and ideas; lavishly sprinkling in a cross-cross way, the wisdom of Vedanta, Bhakti, yoga, stories, fables, folk tales, history, philosophy and the way of the life; presenting everything through the eyes of consciousness and so ends as a treasure house of metaphysics teaching and learning, challenging and quelling and finally attracting and obtaining the intellects of the whole literary world. C.S. Venkataraman interprets this book as "The entire novel is an exposition of this truth,"
the tradition of India and its vitality especially in its encounters with the west - India seen as an idea, not as an area on the map. (14) But what is this India expressed as an 'idea in the novel?' The answer lies in Narasimhaiah's observation again: "... what is summoned here to our imagination is neither place nor time but something that transcends both - it is what has made the great Indian tradition and sustained it through the vicissitudes of history: the Vedas, the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, the Gita, the great teachers and their lineage..." (15)

C.D. Narasimhaiah experiences a sudden thrill while reading The Serpent and the Rope as he finds the finest and fullest expression of a profound Indian sensibility in it. (16) Raja Rao makes the entire novel as an evocation of the truth that India is an idea and not an area. This evocation becomes more meaningful especially when the tradition of India and its vitality encounters with the west. 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahman.' (p.5) That is, the elivation is not determined by birth alone. One has to strive to achieve the height. Ramaswamy the protagonist brings the immemorial tradition quite up-to-date, to the present, to himself and
he feels them in himself. The tradition thus pulsates in everyone and anyone can feel it if he or she has the sense of belongingness to this great culture. The novelist does not portray a slice of a particular individual's life but presents the continuity and the timelessness of the living tradition in its totality.

India is the Absolute Truth which vindicates the relevance of time and place. Man is made to recognise this 'Absolute' truth and not to mistake the relative for the Absolute, the instant for Eternity, the particular for the universal, the shadow for the substance, the illusion for reality and the rope for the serpent 'waves are nothing but water. So is the sea.'(17) This self realisation that enables him to identify the oneness of water in waves as well as in sea and enriches him to know the differences of the serpent and the rope makes him respect both the idealies and differences.

Hinduism preaches both the ways of 'Nivriti Marga' the renunciation and 'Pray%iti Marga' the life of activity to reach the final goal of 'Mukti' the salvation. Rameswamy takes the active way of life. Wherever he goes he carries his tradition as Ganga is within him and Kasi is he himself
Antaraganga, Kasikshetram Sariram Tribhuvana Janani (The Ganga is within us, Kasi is within us).(p.50) Such convictions are not for pompous display but are strictly functional and evocative. This evocation implies a shared tradition.

He feels a sense of belonging at Cambridge as though it were his Mlanda or Taxila. To him, 'Mother Rhone is sister Ganga,' Paris is not a city, it is an area in oneself (p.51) and London was no longer a city for me, it was myself.' And with this attitude deeply imbibed in him he is no stranger anywhere, at anytime or with anyone. This cosmopolitanism and catholicism of him is the essence of Hinduism. It absorbs and assimilates and thereby gets enriched. This is the secret of its timelessness and vitality. Ramaswamy tries to prove in his thesis the existence of some connection between Albigensian heresy and vedanta. Thus universe is found in vedanta or vedanta is universalised.

His father worships Euler, the Swiss mathematician.(p.16)

His grandfather asks him to leave the ritualism to the 'old fogies' like him. Rama marries with Madeleine, a French
woman five years older than him. Later he allows her to 
leave christianity and embrace Buddhism. He adores his 
little Mother with immense reverence for her love and 
status of the mother relation though she is younger to him. 
The orthodox stepmother blesses his foreign wife and child 
by laying flowers on 'the book of books' (Ramayana). In 
Savitri, he sees, the finest embodiment of his own 
tradition despite her western mode of life. His 
grandfather compares his mother's Veena like voice with 
Concubine Chandramma. (p.6) He portrays the ugly and mean 
'belching' brahmins who make money by commercialising the 
rituals alongwith the prostitutes searching for the 
customers on the banks of Ganges at Benares. He also 
captures the pathetic and touching scene of the poor 
brahmin who witnesses 'circles of flowers' 'without a tear 
in his eyes' when he immerses his dead child into the 
Ganges. (pp.233-4) He shows how Ishwara Bhatta realises 
that Benares is within oneself. (p.255) Thus Raja Rao 
through his fictional self, Ramaswamy demonstrates the 
supreme truth of continuity of Hinduism - accommodating 
the vulgar and sublime, assimilating the essence of all 
the religions, embracing every culture and enriching each 
other. It is not a lump but a living tradition.
Apart from diluting and presenting the great metaphysical truths of Appearance and Reality, self and non-self, possession and liberation and their meaning and meaninglessness Raja Rao shows a metaphysical solution to the metaphysical quest in a 'do all and end all' practical way - finding a Guru, a right spiritual guide, who can show with the help of the lantern, the rope as only the rope. Ramaswamy finds his Guru as the author Raja Rao has Shri Atmananda Guru.

Raja Rao uses numerous stories from Indian mythology, history and folklore to illustrate the central theme of illusion and reality - serpent and rope. This is the gift of the collective consciousness from time immemorial. This gift sustains everyone with the spiritual sustenance. That is why Little Mother though becomes a widow at the tender age lives the life in a dignified commanding way. Like Mahabharat there are stories within the central story of The Serpent and the Rope from all over the world. Raja Rao got the thought and the analogy of the rope from the non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Shankara, the great Indian Saint and Philosopher of 8th century A.D. Shankara says: "Just as owing to one's ignorance of the rope, the rope appears to be a Serpent, the self is regarded as the individual soul, owing to the absence of the true knowledge
of the self. At the world of a reliable person (Guru), the illusion disappears and what seemed to be a serpent is now seen as a rope...(18)

India is often branded as the land of sadhus and sanyasis as if Indians were of the opinion that marriage is a sin and one can attain salvation only through renunciation. Ramaswamy says 'To marry is to belong to the earth' and 'Man must wed to know this earth.' The novel celebrates so many marriages and sings the praise of married life throughout. Ramaswamy marries Madeleine and bridges the west and east. He is the son of his father's first wife, Saroja is the daughter of his father's second wife and Sridhara is the son of Little Mother, the third wife of his father. Savithri weds Ramaswamy through a mythical ritual like Mira weds Krishna and later marries Pratap to perform her dharma duties. And thus the novel is the proclamation of the 'Pravriti Marga,' the life of activity and fertility as advocated by the sage like Tiruvalluvar.

The marriage between Ramaswamy and Madeleine fails not because they don't love each other or they are separated by the language, Superstitions, customs, traditions, etc. but because of their difference in understanding the illusion and reality.
To Madeleine Benares 'only means bits of human flesh and the pyres of the dead,' but to Ramaswamy not only Benares is an eternal city (p.22) but Paris is like Benares, an area in oneself.(p.51) Even 'the sorrow of the Paris prostitute gives meaning to all sorrow.' He imbibes the intellectual tradition of France and makes it part of his deeper responses whereas Madeleine moves from rituals of Christianity to Buddhism - rituals and illusions are realities. To Ramaswamy either it is the serpent or the rope and not both at the same time but for her such clarity does not exist. The mother-principle is a permanent and unsatisfied hunger in him. His view of Madeleine as woman, as the creatrix, the cause of creation, the mother. But the mother-power is 'only momentary'(19) in her and that is why she does not grow into abundance of love and shouldering the responsibility but retreats into a sterile and senile kind of living by shrinking both physically and emotionally. It seems, Raja Rao intentionally, in order to show the supremacy of the east over the west, sacrificed the character of Madeleine at the altar of the philosophy of non-dualism, which accepts the vulgar and sublime with equal composture and dignity. "It is a cruel handling of character, and a cruel avenging of the east over the west."(20)

Raja Rao not only shows a glimpse of real India to the west but also to many Indians who in the mad rat race ape the west
forgetting their own roots, it is truly a magnificent novel by an expatriate who feels more nearness - so far yet so near!

C) The Cat and Shakespeare:

Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare though written as separate novels in different period of time by "the most brilliant and certainly the most interesting writer of modern India,"(21) in fact form a meaningful coherent trilogy covering three stages in the career of the same protagonist and stand as the exposition of three philosophies of this great traditional land. The hapless orphan who lost his mother in Kanthapura is found helplessly sobbing in The Serpent and the Rope thinking of his dead mother, and matures enough to laugh away care in The Cat and Shakespeare taking life as 'lila' (play) and the loss and gain, death and birth as the two poles of life. The seed of metaphysical quest sown in Kanthapura grows in The Serpent and the Rope and blooms fully in The Cat and Shakespeare. In this trilogy there is no beginning or end but only continuity, a cyclic order - who can tell what has come first - the seed or the tree? Raja Rao's metaphysical quest seems to have come a full circle.

Northy of Kanthapura is the symbol of 'Brahmacharya' the bachelorhood, Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope stands for 'Grahestha' the householderhood and Govindan Nair of The
Cat and Shakespeare represents the Sanyasa the sainthood. Moorthy performs his 'Karma' duty in Kanthapura, Ramaswamy acquires 'Jnayana' (knowledge) in The Serpent and the Rope and Govindan Nair distributes the 'Bhakti' (wisdom). Thus Kanthapura is the hymn on non-attached duty (Karmayoga) of Lord Krishna, the Serpent and the Rope is the essay on the philosophy of non-dualism (Jnayayoga) of Adi Sankara and The Cat and the Shakespeare is the illustration of the theism (Bhaktiyoga) of Ramanuja. To interpret these three philosophies and to describe the three stages of the same protagonist Raja Rao adopts the narrative techniques of 'puranic', 'Ithihasic', and 'upanishadic' discourses respectively.

Life is a divine comedy - a lila. At every stage there is fulfilment and contentment. Moorthy is a man of action and gets his fulfilment through political involvement and the self-controlled 'Satyagrahic' action. Ramaswamy obtains his self-realization through the marital life and intuitive understanding of the ultimate reality. To Govindan Nair fulfilment comes through the state of 'Atma Samarpan' - total surrender like a kitten surrenders to its mother cat. Moorthy follows the shadowy Guru, Mahatma Gandhiji. Ramaswamy constantly longs and searches for the real Guru and meets...
him in the end. Whereas Govindan Nair realizes the Guru in himself and becomes a Guru.

C.D. Narasimhaiah wonders at the compactness of the novel: "Nowhere in English or American fiction that I know of has so much been said in so short a compass of less than 120 pages - and yet 'said' is hardly the right word, for what remains unsaid seems to be more important, its significance being crucial to the novelist's total view of life. It teases and tantalizes the reader so continually that he can hardly turn over a page without his having had to ponder on some metaphysical truth."(22) Raja Rao could achieve this compactness by using innumerable literary and philosophical hints, allusions, quotations, analogies, cannotations, etc., as functional devices rather than ornamental additions. Each object in the novel is a striking symbol and each character is a purposeful representative of an idea, philosophy. That's why this book 'teases and tantalizes' challenges and absorbs everyone like T.S. Eliot's 'The wasteland'. Raja Rao successfully draws his inspiration from the resources of Indian myth and legend, episode and anecdote, beautifully blends it with that of western philosophy and that of Shakespeare and his classics, and creates an ethos of his own which has its validity for the whole Indian civilization.
Though the metaphysical truth, Shakespeare parallel or contrast situation and the allegoric execution of that truth entice the reader and make him bewilder, he can not miss the message of the novel, the spiritual joy and the ecstasy. Govindan Nair's positive thinking and affirmative acceptance of life merges with the robust optimism of Robert Browning: "God is in His heaven, all's well with the World." Destiny works its way mysteriously and the perplexities of life are overcome and the metaphysical ambiguities are resolved. "Destiny brings to us little slips of paper as the office peon does from some visitor or the boss. What does a name really mean?"(p.24)

Name is not important. Someone may die of malaria or filaria, the doctor may diagnose it onething and he may die of another(p.15), but one thing is sure - death is inevitable. It does not mean Raja Rao calls human beings 'flies to wanton boys' and that he subscribes to the pessimistic and fatalistic view of life and universe. No blind surrender or meek acceptance of fate is demonstrated here. Life is a lila (play) and we are the players who play and derive from it pure joy.

Ravkiran Rai, narrator of the story hankers after the temporal pleasures of life. He talks about his friend and neighbour Govindan Nair who has extraordinary commonsense and gusto. This is the gentle and humorous story of these two friends whose own lives have the simplicity of joy and
the unaffected universality of Shakespeare, whom India has wisely made her own. They are poles apart in nature yet they are close friends. And that is the beauty of it. Ramakrishna Pai is a 'Bhogi' (the pleasure seeker of temporal nature of this world) and Govindan Nair is a 'Yogi' (giver of pure spiritual joy of the other world). Pai's involvement in the materialistic hedonism is a contrast to Nair's vision of abandoned gay of spiritualism. Nair's philosophical outlook of down-to-earth practicalism, his ability of tackling metaphysical problems as well as problems of routine living and his refreshing and unorthodox conclusions on everything continually panic Pai.

Pai, man of this world, lacks the spiritual strength but longs to come out of the grip of the mundane life. Nair possesses immense ascetic strength and at the same time does not religate the material needs of life. He can involve in life and yet remain detached. The presence of this 'Bhog and Yog' elements (material and metaphysical) in everyone brings out the great Indian truth which encompasses everything and regards 'life as a necessary step' in the process of one's spiritual fulfilment. That is why Pai in the end almost becomes an other Nair. That is, he achieves the spiritual goal of knowing the self through Shantha who gives him love, a child and a house and through his friend Nair who guide and philosopher. He acquires the 'seeing eyes'(p.115) and kills the self binding ego.
Now he is free to live with Shanta and receive the gifts of her love. (p. 116) This change or evolution illustrates the Indian ethics, 'which regards life cyclic, and the beginning and the end are the same.'

Govindan Nair though a non-brahmin, is the actual Brahmin here in the sense 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahman'. And so he can 'explain Brahman to the Brahmin'. (p. 38) Birth is not the deciding factor of Brahminism. Even Lord Krishna by birth was only a cowherd.

Govindan Nair wants to build a house for the cat and he asks her not to go far north: "Don't go far north, my lady. I want to build you a house. Where do you come from?" (p. 76) And Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope says: "North is finished." (23) Raja Rao, it seems, wants to say that the real Sanskrit culture exists in its pure and concentrated form only in the South and in North it is totally corrupted and diluted due to the invasions of various cultures from time immemorial.

Raja Rao was born in a very old Brahmin family. And he is very orthodox indeed. But he never fails to call a spade a spade. For instance, here he elevates the non-Brahmin Govindan Nair to the status of a Guru and nowhere he fails to disapprove
the deterioration that has engulfed the brahmins. He juxtaposes ideal Moorthy and usurer Bhatta in Kanthapura, pious Ishwara Bhatta and callous belching brahmins of Benares in The Serpent and the Rope and Guru Govindan Nair and Boothalinga Iyer, the poor superstitious brahmin and leaves the judgement to the world. For Boothalinga Iyer a cat is a pariah animal - a 'Marjaram', harsh in sound and nature because it is not the vehicle of any god or goddesses that he knows. Whereas for Govindan Nair it is a 'Poochi': 'Ah, Poochi-Poochi'' (p.76), soft in sound and in act. The 'meow-meow' voice almost echoes the 'ohm-ohm', the 'pranava mantra'(eternal sound) of Hinduism.

To Raja Rao there is no absolute good or absolute bad. In everything both good and bad exist side by side. That is why there is no villain in our epics and legends as the villains of the west (stand for the absolute bad). Ravana in Ramayana, Duryodhana in Mahabharata are embodiment of virtues and intelligence. They act out their 'Karma' and thereby balance the destined play on the earth. Sin is hated and not the sinner. Raja Rao expounds, this Indian philosophy through Govindan Nair. To him an object is there because it is there and because eyes could perceive it. Good and evil to him are not absolute, but relative. It becomes good or bad depending on what one makes of it. 'Everything has got beauty not everyone sees it', says so the great Chinese philosopher Confucius. Raja Rao makes the 'unclean and ominous' 'pariah Marjara (p.74) as the symbol of supreme mother the protectress. He makes
a smoking, dancing, flirting Cambridge Undergraduate Savitri
the symbol of Vedas and Mahabharata Savithri. Goodness is
not the appearance but recognition: "you are bad because
I am. You are good because I am. The sun is because I see.
You do not suffer because you are the British bubo. Ah, brother,
you too be British."(pp.26-27) For Govindan Nair even the so-
called enemies, Britishers are the friends.

To Ramakrishna Pai Govindan Nair is like Bhim and Hanuman
is his half-brother(p.36). In that way everybody is possessed
by half-brother all over the world. Raja Rao's vision of ideal-
ness is the unification of duality. The duality in appearance
and actuality, illusion and reality, good and bad lay side
by side, and it should be taken into the account of unified
identity as Savithri, Cat, etc. Govindan Nair is a typical
example of unified identity vision of Raja Rao. He wants "to
devour the whole world with fire" and 'sending a child to
sleep'(p.112) - the dual aspect of the ideal man - the sphinx
image of W.B. Yeates' 'The Second Coming.' C. D. Narasimhaiah
sees Vishwamitra and Vasishtha in him.(24)

The cat, the wall, the ration shop, the scales, the rates,
the accounts, the bubos are all symbols. The symbol cat is
almost a character in the novel. It is the symbol of Mother
Supremo, protector, divine love and wisdom. It also represents
a Guru who guides everyone. Govindan Nair sometimes jumps across the wall like this cat. The cat watches the kittens, holds them by the scruff of the neck and carries them to safety. This is the philosophic tradition of India, the 'marjara nyaya'. Man, if he learns this philosophy, he can experience the peace and ecstacy.

Ration shop in the novel is the world and also the stage of Shakespeare where the poor player struts and frets his hour and heard no more. The wall stands for illusion and ignorance which in the end Pai is able to cross across. The building process of three stories rises from earth to sky symbolically crossing three attributes of Bhagavat Gita (Thomas: Illusion, Ignorance; Rajas: Passion; Sattva: Light, Truth) to reach heaven from earth. The bridge which Rama wants to build is completed here as three storied house.

Shakespeare is adopted to the spiritual needs in this novel. Not merely the world of Shakespeare is projected as it is but possible extension of its frontiers have been ignited by Raja Rao in this novel so as to give an encompassing view of life. The world of Shakespeare and the Indian tradition are fused to give an electrifying effect throughout the novel. For example: "Shakespeare knew every mystery of the ration shop. Here however we have n't to murder a brother to marry
his wife. Here we marry whom we like. The ration card marries. You are married even when there is no wife. You are married without looking at the horoscopes. The dead are not buried in ration shops. There will be no grave scene. Ophelia will die but she will have no skull left for Hamlet..."(p.83)

The world of Raja Rao thus expands from a remote tiny village Kanthapura to India and outside in The Serpent and the Rope and to the universe of oneness of hell and heaven in The Cat and Shakespeare. The process of chewing the cud of theological ideas which starts in Kanthapura has to leave out certain undigestable philosophies and metaphysics in The Serpent and the Rope but assimilates all the abstractions as concrete equivalents symbolising profound vision of life in The Cat and Shakespeare.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p.307.


5. Ibid., p.9


15. Ibid., p.164.