CHAPTER III

The Serpent and the Rope: Mapping Raja Rao’s Casteist leanings

I was born a brahmin – that is, devoted to truth and all that. “Brahmin is he who knows Brahman” etc., etc.... But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalkya, my legendary and Upanishadic ancestor, have really known the Truth excepting the sage Madhava, who founded an empire or, rather, helped to build an empire and wrote some of the most profound Vedantic texts since Sri Sankara? (Rao, The Serpent I)

My investigation into the casteist bias in Raja Rao’s works, particularly The Serpent and the Rope, vis-à-vis the orthodox Hinduism and its closed caste set-up starts with the opening of the novel itself. Rao proudly claims in The Serpent and the Rope, that he was born in a traditional South Indian brahmin family in the then Mysore state. I will try to show that it is his birth as a brahmin that is central to his consciousness and it goes into the shaping of his entire work. There is no opposition or challenge to his ‘perception’ but when some interest groups try to institutionalize that ‘perception’ as ‘Indian’, that gives rise to fears relating to the perpetuation of brahmanic hegemony and marginalisation of other social groups, particularly dalits, who have faced the worst effects of the caste system. The civil, political, religious, socio-economic and cultural rights of dalits have been violated for centuries only on the basis of the caste system. This chapter tries to find out how literary representations like Rao’s, in the name of spirituality and tradition, overlook and marginalize an all important section of the Indian population. A brief survey of Rao’s life as an individual and as an author is conducted to prove that.

Raja Rao spent the early years of his childhood with his grandfather who was deeply religious. The Rao family originally belonged to Mysore but migrated...
to the then Muslim state of Hyderabad. He grew up in Hyderabad, where two languages Telugu and Urdu are spoken. Right from birth, Raja Rao had been on a prolonged exile both religiously and linguistically; he was the only Hindu student in the Muslim school, Madarasa-e-Aliya, at Hyderabad. This alienation was a continuous process in Rao’s life. He was later sent to Aligarh Muslim University in North India with the hope that the change of atmosphere would do well to his weak lungs. It did good but more on the mental plain. At Aligarh, he met Eric Dickinson who brought out the artist in him, teaching him to ‘love France’ and appreciate Michelangelo and Santayana.

Raja Rao returned to Hyderabad for his graduation. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree from Nizam College, Hyderabad, with History and English as special subjects which are typically Western, he was awarded the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad to study in France in 1929. Soon after his arrival, he married Camille Mouly, a professor of French. Apart from supplying the model for Madeleine, the heroine of his major work The Serpent and the Rope (1960), she played an important role in her husband’s development as an artist. It was on her insistence that he published a few literary pieces, articles and a long poem in Kannada and it was she who helped him to come out of his “rubbish Machiavellian English”, (Naik, 19) and to form his own style of translating Kannada into English. However after living together for ten years, their marriage was dissolved. After a long gap, in 1965, he married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. But soon, his second marriage which gave him his only son, also broke up leading to his third union with another American woman. All these personal details are important for understanding and evaluating Raja Rao as a writer, for all these details appear in his work in some form or the other. He admits that he is autobiographical; “All writers write only autobiography” (Wohl, 37).

Raja Rao’s first novel, Kanthapura, was published in 1938 when the Indian nationalist struggle was at its height under the leadership of Gandhi. It portrays the
effect of Gandhi and his political movement coupled with religious spirit on a
group of people in a South Indian village enveloped in myths and rituals. It
chronicles how those innocent peace loving villagers waged a brave struggle
against the British under the leadership of the Congress. In this novel, Raja Rao
also deals with problems like child marriage, picketing toddy shops, organizing the
peasants and anti-untouchability programmes of the Congress. However these
initial concerns limited only to Kanthapura and are completely absent in his later
work. Besides its rich theme, Kanthapura, which he calls a sthalapurana, is also a
landmark in Indian writing in English for its style. Though writing in English, Rao
was not satisfied with the Western form of the novel.

After Kanthapura, came The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories
(1947). The volume contains nine stories which were written in the 1930s, even
before Kanthapura. Some of these stories were originally written in Kannada and
later translated into English by the author. These stories have been described as
‘Vignettes of Rustic Indian life’ (Naik, 45) and many of them reveal concerns
similar to the ones we notice in Kanthapura. However decades later, he denounces
these stories and appears to have only a half-hearted enthusiasm for Kanthapura.
This happens because of the change in his personality from a young nationalist to a
complete traditional brahmin.

It was in 1960 nearly twenty two years after his first novel, that Rao
published The Serpent and the Rope, which is completely opposite in conception
and form from Kanthapura. In the mean time he visited many ashrams; he
successively visited Aurobindo at his ashram in Pondicherry, Ramana Maharishi in
Tiruvannamalai and Narayana Maharaja in Kedgaon. He lived for some time in the
ashram of Pandit Tarnath and also at Gandhi’s ashram at Sevagram where he
translated some of his Kannada stories into English which were later included in
The Cow of the Barricades. All these years, he was very restless, his restlessness
was presented in the form of Rama’s brahmin quest ‘for truth’ in The Serpent and
the Rope. Among his works, this novel is widely acclaimed as his *magnum opus* and won him the Sahitya Academy award.

*The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) came as a sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope*. The same metaphysical quest is extended into this work also. Rao describes it as a metaphysical comedy. The novel is about a Brahmin, Ramakrishna Pai and the ‘guru figure’ Govind Nair, a kind of trickster sage. The story is set against the background of the South Indian state of Kerala during World War II. However the plot is only a pretext to introduce Rao’s favourite theme of metaphysics. The ‘guru figure’, Nair, propounds the theory of ‘Mother Cat’, that of completely surrendering oneself to the supreme energizing principle of the universe like the kitten that allows itself to be carried away by the ‘mother cat’ without any doubt and apprehension. In brief, this metaphysical proposition forms the nucleus of the plot in this novel.

His next novel *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) deals with the ambiguous soul of an orthodox brahmin communist. It is the biography of Padmanaba Iyer told by the narrator Rama who is a Gandhian and Vedantic and an Indian like Rao. The novel presents the tension between the protagonist’s birth as a brahmin and his progressive ideals of communism. Through this novel Raja Rao celebrates the triumph of tradition over ‘rigid authoritarian communist philosophy’. This work also propounds the theme of Vedanta. Although, it is not a sequel to his previous works, it continues his major concerns. *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) which incorporates some of the stories of *The Cow of the Barricades* is an extension of his preoccupation with the metaphysical problems in a shorter form. *The Policeman and the Rose* probes the human condition in a multicultural encounter. Like many of his works, it also carries autobiographical details. If the ‘policeman’ represents the ego, the bondage of the self, the ‘rose’ symbolizes the liberation of the soul. It delineates the Vedantic notion that once *avidya* or ignorance which lies in the consciousness of the ego is removed, the soul is
liberated. It becomes free from the recurring cycle of time. This metaphysical thread runs into other stories of the collection as well.

Raja Rao’s novel The Chessmaster and His Moves (1988), said to be the first part of a trilogy, repeats the theme of multicultural confrontation from a brahmin’s point of view. Rao declares, “I had first called it the brahmin and the Rabbi. No one has yet dealt with the problem of the Indian and Jew. They belong to two of the most ancient civilizations” (Qtd in Pias, B-4). The novel is about a young Tamil brahmin engaged in combining Metaphysics with Mathematics and several women (European and Indian like in The Serpent and the Rope) with whom he is emotionally involved and a Jewish linguist with whom the protagonist has had long extensive philosophical discussions. The novel repeats all the preoccupations of Rao that we first perceive in The Serpent and the Rope.

Raja Rao’s recent work On the Ganga Ghat (1989), a collection of short stories, is meant to be read as a whole. As the title suggests, the book sets the tone of traditionality. ‘Home’ is ‘Ganga Ghat’, for all Hindus wish to end their journey here. The collection presents a wide range of characters from a bhang-addict Guru to wealthy businessmen to motor mechanics to pimps and concubines. All characters are viewed and presented from the perspective of the brahminical tradition.

This brief survey of Rao’s works shows us that he is an ardent follower of Vedanta and he openly declares that he is greatly influenced by Sankara. His love for metaphysics is so immense that he once told E.M.Forster “he had given up writing for metaphysics” (Rao, “By Raja Rao” 17). However he continued writing metaphysics in fiction. He further goes on to say that “the Indian novel can only be epic in form and metaphysical in nature.” (Qtd in TLS, “Why write in English” 585) Like other nationalists, Raja Rao reduces the whole complex multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-racial Indian social phenomenon into a singular identity and brands India as metaphysical. His declaration that the Indian novel is epic in form and metaphysical in content precludes the vast multiculturalism and the oral
tradition and literature that represents the life of the Indian masses. It is rather strange that this kind of statement comes from a writer who successfully experimented with orality in his first novel, *Kanthapura*.

Raja Rao ‘loves India’ because in his opinion, India is holy. “India... is ever, ever holy” as Rama declares in *The Serpent and the Rope* and is both ‘real and unreal’ (245). He adheres to the twofold doctrine of Sankara which enunciates two diametrically opposed discourses — one for the *Vyavahara* (physical world of social relations — which is real) and the other for *Paramartha* (a purely metaphysical conception according to which the world is unreal). The same theory also operates at another level of the ‘personal and the impersonal’ in Rao’s discourse. When it comes to the question of *Vyavahara*, for Rao India is ‘unreal’ from its vast half-starved poor millions of people, pot-bellied brahmins, politicians or professors of political science and luxury loving landlords, or even its geography. He himself proudly declares: “The India I am talking about has neither geography nor history.” (Wohl, 37) “India is not a country (*desa*), it is a perspective (*darshan*), it is not a climate but a mood (*rasa*) in the play of the Lord —...” (“Meaning of India”, 17) The same idea is echoed in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Thus, for Rama “India is not country like France or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic.... My India I carried wheresoever I went” (376). But at the same time, when he remembers his Brahmanic tradition, the *Paramartha*, India suddenly becomes a real entity for him:

But not to see the Ganges, not to dip into her again and again... No, the Ganges was an inner truth to me, as assurance, the origin and end of my Brahmanic tradition. I would go back to India, for the Ganges and for the deodhars of the Himalayas and for the deer in the forests, for the keen call of the elephant in the grave ocellate silence of the forests. I would go back to India, for India was my breath, my only sweetness, gentle and wise; she was my mother. (376)
These kinds of mutually contradictory statements abound throughout his works, as he operates within the domain of the twofold doctrine of Sankara. When asked why he writes and what he wants to convey through his works, Rao replies that he does not want to say anything. He is aware of the debate about art as propaganda and he does not like to be branded as being didactic. He wants his readers and critics to view him as ‘objective’. He makes this statement in the light of the open declaration by Marxist writers that an artist or a writer should take a position, side with the toiling masses and write for their emancipation. This position of Marxists has been dubbed as moralist and their works as didactic by the Western Capitalist critics. Being a staunch anti-Marxist himself, Rao too seems to echo the opinion of Western critics. For in his unquenchable quest for Brahmanic values, which he terms as tradition, he breaks his intention to keep silent and in the same interview reveals that Comrade Kirillov was written … to show that a communist can be very sincere but his sincerity is confused. (Niranjan, 22)

Raja Rao calls himself a Sadhaka, writing for the sheer pleasure of writing without any ideology. Writing, which he maintains is a Sadhana for him, is also actually “a mode of prayer”, a means for him to be in contact with the ultimate reality, ‘Brahman’ all of which, in the real sense, would mean nothing without the glorification of the Brahmanic tradition (Sinha, “An Interview with Raja Rao” 20). His use of conceptions like Sadhaka, Upasaka, Moksha, Artha, Kama, Dharma, ‘Self’, Brahman, ‘Truth’ as the ultimate and only means of understanding life — both metaphysical and physical — exemplify that Rao is not a ‘receiver’ but a ‘giver’ and he wants to say something like any other writer, quite contrary to his stated position. Thus, his campaign against Marxism runs into his latest novel The Chessmaster and His Moves with his spokesman Siva denouncing Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky in the same breath: “Lenin and especially Stalin and my friend Trotsky, committed more murders than all the Czars put together” (598).

Raja Rao’s life and works are inseparable and he frankly admits this fact:
In Kanthapura, I was Gandhian. In The Serpent and the Rope I was searching... The Cat and Shakespeare is the conclusion of The Serpent and the Rope (22).

As he admits, his works are “a chronicle of his personal philosophical quest” (Wohl, 37). The quest is metaphysical; it is an “Advaitin’s” search for the Brahman, the absolute Truth. His admiration for the Sankara’s Advaita is so high that it percolates into all his works. He maintains that he is opposed to the philosophy of dualism and is strongly committed to the “oneness”. Thus, in an article on “Trivandum”, he profusely praises the city for the simple reason that it has only a single road; “A city that has but one road is a city of enlightenment” (“Trivandrum” 12).

However, Rao’s zeal for ‘oneness’ does not include all spheres of life. Like Sankara, the staunch supporter of the privileged position of brahmins, he treats the problems of the poor as *Vyavahara*, as a mundane thing and refuses to pay attention to their resolution. To a question why he does not write about the problems and suffering of the common people of his country, he answers like a typical traditional brahmin:

No, my point is very simple. The ultimate aim of man is spiritual or metaphysical, I would say. In the Hindu *Dharma*, the Hindu conception of Purushartha is *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. If you follow *Dharma* rightly, *Artha* and *Kama* come together. *Moksha* is the ultimate answer. So I don’t see any need to write about the poor man because the poor man has his *Dharma*. (21)

It appears strange and contradictory that a writer who has gone to the extent of praising a “single road” should, when it comes to the question of social justice, obfuscate the issue of the dualism of the rich and the poor in obscure philosophy.
He does not do *Sadhana* (write) for the abolition of this dualism or for the achievement of ‘oneness’ among human beings. It seems likely that Rao cannot extend the philosophy of ‘oneness’ to the problem of social relations for he would be negating the privileges of the dominant sections of the society to which he himself belongs. Raja Rao’s explanation about his stay abroad is interesting:

> By force of circumstances, purely accidental and sentimental,
> I have lived abroad. My roots are in this country. I live abroad
> but I am chained to my country. (Parthasarthy, 30)

This is a typical dilemma of the people, especially brahmins, who have migrated to the West. As there are more material benefits in the West, the brahmins aspire to migrate to the West. Once they land there, they realize what they have lost. The privileged status in Indian Society for generations gets reduced and they suddenly find themselves placed as equals or sometimes even as second grade citizens which they find extremely uncomfortable to live with. They remember India and their privileged position in the Hindu society nostalgically and they long to return to India. But at the same time they cannot forego the material comforts which the West offers. In another place, Raja Rao informs us that he never wanted to come back to India for he was disgusted with India because it was corrupt. He wants a society without corruption which means a stable society for material advancement. While he says his roots are in India, he refuses to identify himself with the poor. His love for India does not induce him to raise his voice against corruption. But what does chain him to India, as in the case of migrant brahmins, is the Brahmanic tradition. If one is a creative writer like Rao, the wish fulfillment takes shape or reflects through his creative works; the material comforts of the West and the privileged position that India offers them are fused artistically in these works. Thus most of his characters, like Rama in *The Serpent and the Rope* live abroad but are nostalgic about India.
Among his works The Serpent and the Rope demonstrates all his major concerns, while the remaining works are the extensions of the concerns espoused in this novel. Thus, the study of this work is of paramount interest for understanding Raja Rao as a writer. The novel appears as a departure from Kanthapura. A careful study of Kanthapura however, suggests that Moorthy also carries some of the major concerns, if not all, of Rama of The Serpent and the Rope. Rama Krishna Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare, Padmanabha Iyer of Comrade Kirrilov and the Siva of The Chessmaster and His Moves, all continue the concerns with which Rama is obsessed. Yet, more than anything else, the spirit of tradition runs as a connecting thread throughout the corpus of his works.

The theme of The Serpent and the Rope is overwhelmingly serious — a brahmin’s quest for ‘Truth’. It is the story of Ramaswamy, ‘a Southern brahmin tubercular intellectual’ (Walsh, 5), the descendant of an Upanshadic Vedantin. He is a research scholar in France, married to Madeleine, a French intellectual who teaches history. He comes back to India to attend to his ailing father who eventually dies. Meanwhile, his first child dies of lung complication in France but the death of his own son appears to him ‘very far’. He feels at home only with his stepmother and stepsisters in India leaving his European wife to mourn the death of their son all alone. As per the customary practice, he takes his stepmother on pilgrimage to complete the last rights of his dead father. At this point he meets Savithri Rathore, a North Indian princess who is unwillingly engaged to Pratap Singh of the political services. Rama impresses her with his affirmation of Indian values but this meeting acts as a catalyst in the disintegration of his marriage as he himself gets drawn towards Savithri. Back in France, Rama and Madeleine are joined by Georges, a devout white Russian convert to Catholicism and Lezo, a Spanish refugee and a socialist who arouse Madeleine’s interest in Buddhism which her husband denounces. However, she loves her brahmin husband sincerely and wholeheartedly in spite of his being a consumptive. By the time of
Madeleine’s second pregnancy, Savithri lands up in France on her way to Cambridge ‘to know India’ from Rama who joyfully accepts the role of a Guru and eventually becomes her platonic lover. Their ritual wedding at London symbolizes the victory of India over the West represented by Madeleine. Madeleine’s interest in Buddhism and Savithri’s complete surrender to Rama finally leads up their marriage to a divorce and the story ends with Rama leaving for Tranvancore to realize his metaphysical quest at the feet of his Guru.

What I intend to show as significant in the progression of the action in this novel is that it is overwhelmingly determined by the tradition of caste. As pointed out earlier, this novel begins with the statement, “I was born a brahmin — that is devoted to truth and all that” (1). Rama, the protagonist, further defines a brahmin as the one who knows Brahman. He takes pride in being born as a brahmin but suddenly becomes skeptical about his ancestors being true brahmins except ‘excellent Yagnyavalkya’ and ‘sage Madhava’. This is not only the statement of Ramaswamy, the protagonist of The Serpent and the Rope but it is the novelist who speaks and talks about himself; Raja Rao claims that Vidyaranya Swami was his ancestor, “…the greatest teacher of Advaita Vedanta after Sankara, the mentor of Harihara Bukka, who founded the southern kingdom of Vijaynagar which was the last Hindu state to fall to the Muslim onslaught in the sixteenth century” (Naik, 17). The novel does not reject the caste system but strives to define the ‘true brahmin’ — a recurring debate that continues in all his other works. All his heroes like Moorthy in Kanthapura, Rama in The Serpent and the Rope, Rama Krishna Pai in The Cat and the Shakespeare, Padmanabha Iyer in Comrade Kirillov and Siva in The Chessmaster and His Moves are brahmins and all the plots of his works are also constructed to glorify the tradition of Brahmanism which is the glorification of the tradition of the caste.

The caste system plays a pivotal role in the life of Rama and he gladly accepts it since it places him in a privileged position. Though he lives in Europe
and is married to a French woman, tradition is important for him as it always
guides him in his thinking and actions. It is this tradition which brings him along
with ‘Little Mother’, Vishalakshi and his stepbrother Sridhar, to Benares, the
“eternal city”, on the eve of his father’s death. He accepts the Brahmanical
tradition of visiting Benares to offer the last rites of the dead but ridicules the
greedy brahmins which is quite expected of a Western oriented Indian. Throughout
the journey which is viewed as a pilgrimage, Rama chants Sanskrit slokas with
occasional singing by his Little Mother glorifying the Brahmanic tradition. In fact
chanting ‘slokas’ becomes a means to realize a superior status in the Hindu society
and thus the means itself becomes an end without bothering about the scriptures
from which they are quoted (Dey, 72).

Language is not only a means of communication but also a source to assert
power and the brahmins use it effectively in realizing the latter. Rama uses French
and occasionally Italian but like a typical brahmin, mostly Sanskrit to establish
himself as an intellectual, ‘a wise man’, ‘a master’, to quote his words. Whether it
is with Little Mother, Grandfather Kittanna, Saroja or Madeleine, Georges,
Catharine, Oncle Charles or Savithri, his Radha, Pratap, Raja Sahib,
Venkataraman, his father’s friend and his wife Lakshamma — his use of Sanskrit
always places him in a privileged position. It may be his reciting “Devi Sureshavri
Bhagvathi Gange” in Allahabad or “Shivoham, Shivoham” in Aix or “Nidhanam
dharmanam kimapi cha vidhanam” in London but it is always done to assert a
sense of superiority which has been bestowed on him by the Brahmanical tradition.
His act is deliberate as he himself admits that he has won Madeleine through the
demonstration of his metaphysical (Brahmanic) knowledge and by chanting slokas
with full breath like “Natovskyoma bhumir natejo navayur, / Chidananda rupah,
Shivoham, Shivoham” and “Aham nirvikalpi nirakara rupih / Chidananda rupah,
Shivoham, Shivoham” (114). The purpose is to win and satisfy his ego; therefore
“For days on end [he] went on chanting Sanskrit verses … and [he] worked very
well" (114). He strives to uphold his superior status as brahmin time and again through the use of the Sanskrit language. Thus for him, “Even the Indian trains seem to chant mantras...” (40). If his use of Sanskrit places him on a pedestal in India and abroad, his knowledge of European languages, like English and French secure a high amount of respectability among his relatives and friends in India. If he had only used Sanskrit in India, he would have been treated like any ordinary traditional brahmin and if it was a European language alone abroad, he would not have created that mystic aroma around himself. Thus language plays an important role in establishing Rama as he proudly calls himself, ‘a wise man’.

Raja Rao does talk about the dark side of the brahmins also. In The Serpent and the Rope, for example, Rama makes many statements in this regard. He declares that not only is he a brahmin who knows Brahman but he too is a brahmin who also “… loves a good banquet” (406). The brahmins “sold India through the backdoor” like Purnayya “who sold the secrets of Tippu Sultan” and caused the fall of Seringapatnam (350). The Benares brahmins can make everything holy if they are paid handsomely. A similar opinion is expressed by Rao in an interview with M.K.Naik:

I thought I would never come back to fall at the feet of pot bellyed brahmins. At the time of Sraddha (religious ceremony performed in honour of dead relatives) they are very greedy. To think that my ancestors would give food to these! When I had to perform the Sraddha I used to make fun of brahmins. (19-20)

Yet in the debate about the true brahmin the novel presents, it is Rama who triumphantly emerges as a true brahmin, who is devoted to truth and possess a proclivity towards things spiritual and hence Indian.
Ramaswamy is proud about his ancestry and his upbringing in the tradition of brahminism. The brahmin in him never allows him to be situated in the present and makes him move backward and forward in time. Significantly this movement is always in his favour — with a sage to begin his genealogical tree and a Guru to end the cycle of his birth and death. He has read *Upanishads* when he was only four, had his *upanayan* at the age of seven and knew Sanskrit grammar and the *Brahma Sutra* when just a boy. All these he could achieve during his childhood, a fact of which he is proud because of the caste system. He starts as brahmin, remains a brahmin throughout the novel and, by the time the novel ends, he claims that he has become a true brahmin devoted to realize Brahman through the Guru, projecting himself as a superior being because of his ancestry and also for his true Brahmanic qualities. This sense of being superior to all never allows him to acknowledge other parallel discourses. In fact, he completely overlooks everything between him and his ancient religion. He sees nothing about the social condition of dalits which has been deplorable since times immemorial. Even today, dalits are treated as untouchables all over India in the eyes of the elite and even of the ordinary people. It is due to the perpetuation of brahmanic hegemony that dalits find it nearly impossible to get out of the caste trauma even after three thousand years of slavery and discrimination. For Rao, all this holds no significance and one’s birth in a particular caste is most important.

Raja Rao does not directly enter into the debate whether one is a brahmin by birth or by one’s qualities. He is not in total agreement with either Gandhi whose position is that one is born into a caste (*varna*) or with Radhakrishnan who apparently maintains that one becomes a brahmin by his qualities and deeds. He does not state his position but the various metaphysical debates that he brings into the novel suggests that he is aware of the two arguments. He does accept the position that Gandhi takes but does not contradict the apparent stand of Radhakrishnan; he condemns brahmins for their greed and eulogizes the true
Brahmanya qualities as if in agreement with Radhakrishnan. But all the characters he extols, whether it is Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope, or Padmanabha Iyer of Comrade Kirillov, are born into that particular caste and remain struck to their caste identities. He calls Sir William Jones, Sir John Woodroffe and Coomaraswamy the ‘Boston brahmin’ as more brahmin than the brahmans for their glorification of brahminical India but nowhere does he reject the criteria of birth as a determining factor of caste. He selectively mentions the names of Western thinkers as brahmans for their support to brahminism and attempts to assimilate them in the Brahmanical tradition but at no place does he extend the same definition to non-brahmins of India who were more brahmin than brahmans. There is a reference to Sambuka of Ramayana who was killed by Rama for his interest in realizing Brahman, or Ekalavya, a tribal, for his unmatched devotion to his Brahmanical Guru Dronacharya in the Mahabharatha.

Rama, the narrator and protagonist, does not discuss the caste system in any elaborate manner; he does not make a sociological survey of the various castes of India, nor does he make any direct statement on the problem of untouchability like Moorthy in Kanthapura. However his constant preoccupation with the question of brahminism draws the reader’s attention to the problem of caste and throws significant light on his opinion about this particular tradition. Rama starts the narration by stating that he was born a brahmin. Though he immediately qualifies his statement with the notion of a true brahmin devoted to ‘truth’, his first declaration is as important as his quest for becoming a true brahmin. We come across innumerable pronouncements in the novel in this regard. We are told about the pot-bellied Benares brahmans with fine gold rings always trying to extract more and more money from the devotees in the form of dakshana. Rama’s relatives are all conscious about their caste: Saroja, Little Mother, Uncle Seetha Ramu, Grandfather Kittanna are all proud of their privileged position as brahmans. Lakshamma’s wish that Rama’s sister Saroja be her first daughter-in-law is not
accepted for the simple reason that the two families belong to different castes. Subsequently, Saroja’s marriage with Subramanyam, a brahmin by birth and various ceremonies and description/portraiture of the relatives who attend it speaks volumes about the presence of the caste system. But more than any of these factors, it is Little Mother’s experience in a restaurant at Calcutta that makes the reader cognizant of blatant casteism.

Like a typical brahmin, Little Mother is not averse to eating at hotels if they are brahmin hotels; in fact she had been to many brahmin hotels especially at Bangalore. During their ‘pilgrimage’ to Benares, Little Mother along with Rama chances upon eating at a restaurant in Calcutta. They choose a Hindu restaurant and buy two brahmin meals. But the experience in the hotel leaves them horrified. The reason for their horror is explained in her own words:

They started serving. I put my hand into the curry. It seemed very soft to touch but yielded with such difficulty. ‘Brinjal it must be’, I said, and looked at Rama. Rama, who’s been all over the world, he also proceeded with care. Saroja, thank God I did not put it into my mouth. You know what it was — it was fish. ‘Ayyappa!’ I said, and rose hastily. I would have thrown the whole of my stomach out.... “I could have put my hand into fire, as we do impure vessels, to get the touch of it out of my skin. Thoo!” (47-48)

This statement of Little Mother brings two issues to the forefront. Firstly the brahmins consider their vegetarian food habits as natural and divine (parma) and the food of the Sudras and untouchables (fish, meat) as impure and profane (Neechamu-neesu is the common name given to any kind of meat). This idea is constructed so vehemently that the brahmins refuse to recognize fish or meat as food. The hatred for other’s food is so intense that they burn their limbs when they accidentally touch it so as to purify themselves from the contamination of the food

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that untouchables enjoy. Secondly this hatred for the other’s food is important for brahmins because it is one of the important means for them to mark a difference with others and, thereby, continue their traditionally established privileged position. Hence, it is not only Little Mother who abhors non-vegetarian food but Rama himself despises the very idea in spite of his exposure to the Western world. It is important to note that Rama takes pride in not eating meat; he informs the readers with great enthusiasm of Madame Patensier’s remarks about his food habits: “‘Monsieur never, never eats meat’…” (57). He stops taking even the garlic which he has been enjoying for quite sometime. All this is done in spite of the fact that he is a tuberculosis patient whose body urgently needs protein food like eggs and meat. He goes to the verge of death many a time and the doctors strongly advise him to opt for non-vegetarian food. But he declines because he accepts the identity given to him and thus suffers. The suffering is borne and the hatred for other’s food habits continued for it reinforces the dominant position of the brahmins in the society in general and satisfies their ego in particular, however superstitious it may be.

Apart from the customs of marriage and occupation, eating habits are central to the continuation and reinforcement of the caste tradition. As a result of various historical reasons and, most importantly, due to the influence of Buddhism (Sudharsana Sutta, I, 150) the once meat-eating brahmins (Manusmriti, 5.35; 3.267 – 273) have become vegetarians and that practice has been transmitted for many generations as a holy one. This practice, which has been given the status of a tradition by caste brahmins, has come to be accepted as synonymous with brahminism. The vegetarianism which started as a movement to save cattle has become an end in itself. It has been used as a determining factor to mark the difference between the brahmins and the non-brahmins.

The argument about brahminism based on vegetarianism itself is artificial and false. For a south Indian brahmin, vegetarian food means the food derived
from vegetables; but for his counterpart in Bengal, fish is also an integral part of vegetarian food. Thus, it is served to Rama and Little Mother at a Calcutta restaurant. Similarly, the delicious goat meat becomes a part of vegetarian food for Kashmir brahmins. This shows that the definition of vegetarianism is artificial and if one lives by these categories one is bound to suffer like Rama does in his life. However, the significant point in this discussion is not the question of eating habits but the hegemony of brahmins over other castes.

Coming to Rama’s position on this tradition, we occasionally find him supporting the idea of one becoming a brahmin by one’s deeds. In the beginning of the novel itself, mentioning the name of Yagnavalkya and Madava, he expresses his doubt about his ancestors being true brahmins. He states, “... the true brahminhood commences when you recognize yourself in eternity” (214). Vedanta is his ideal. From the beginning of the novel, he tells us that he is interested in the ‘self’ and is sincere enough to admit that he does not love the ‘self’ in Madeleine — his wife. He has great veneration for Sankara’s philosophy of non-dualism: “Duality is anti-Indian; the non-dual affirms the Truth” (41). In fact, the very title of the novel is taken from Sankara’s propositions. Thus, its central theme becomes:

The world is either unreal or real — the serpent or the rope.
There is no in-between-the-two — and all that’s in-between is poetry, is sainthood. (335)

The novel is replete with such brahminical notions. Ramaswamy constantly brings the Vedantic discussion in his conversations. He cites the story of Rama, the story of budemekaya and refers to the ever Brahmachari Krishna and the eternal upavasi Duruvasa and Satyavrata who uttered that ‘profound vedantic truth’: “He who sees cannot say and he who says has not seen” (349). There are also innumerable quotations recited by Rama from the hymns of Bharathihari, Jagannatha Bhatta, Sankara and Meerabai and from such Sanskrit classics as Uttar Rama Charitra, Raghuvansh and Megadoota. There are also quotations from the poems of
Baudelaire, Paul Valery and Dante and from the works of many other writers. He uses all these to emphasize his metaphysical (Brahmanical) propositions. He dwells on overwhelmingly serious issues like religion and existence. He makes serious observations on Catholicism, Catharism, Buddhism and Vedanta. However the most striking and catalytic point in this debate is the conflict between Vedanta and Communism.

Rama makes very interesting and unusual statements about communism. He declares that “Communism is a positive movement. It is a spiritual movement. It moves in the direction of life” (188). He wonders at the Americans who are greatly agitated at the success of communism, for according to his logical calculations, communism “dies”. And what remains is the “Truth”, which is Vedanta. The whole debate appears abstract and metaphysical and as a contention between Marxism and Vedanta.

There can be only two attitudes to life. Either you believe the world exists and so — you. Or you believe that you exist — and so the world. There is no compromise possible. And the history of philosophy ... is nothing but a search for a clue to this problem: 'If I am real, than the world is me’…. But if the world is real, then you are real in terms of objects and that is a tenable proposition. The first is the Vedantin’s position — the second is the Marxist’s — and they are irreconcilable (333).

However, it is obvious to any one who is exposed to Western ideas that this proposition is not a dispute between Marxism and Vedanta as Rama emphatically claims but an age old contention in Western philosophy between Materialism (Marxism) and Idealism (headed by philosophers like Hegel) (Rao, “Materialism” 11-23). There are many differences among Vedanta and Idealism and Vedanta is not concerned with the question of what is primary — the matter or the idea — something which is central to Western thinking. For Vedanta, which Rama extols,
the world is not understood only in terms of real or unreal but is viewed as illusory— the proposition which is completely absent in the West. That is why Savithri’s English friends, like Swanston and Stephen, fail to follow Rama’s arguments. This leads us to another important question: why does the ‘enlightened’ European brahmin, Rama, substitute idealism with Vedanta in this great debate? Is he ignorant? Or is he deliberately confusing the issue? From the debates that Rama conducts with Stephen and Swanston it is quiet evident that he is aware of this classical debate. His reference to binary oppositions (like bourgeois world-view versus socialism) and the question that the brain is made up of matter amply prove his awareness. But, we must remember that during the time of action in the novel idealism as a philosophy was almost on the verge of extinction and communism was on high tides — socialist and egalitarian ideas being widely accepted all over the world. In this situation the defeat of Marxism which Rama unequivocally seeks— is the defeat of egalitarianism based on the principle of equality of human beings and its defeat at the hands of Vedanta is the victory of Idealism (supported by capitalism), the triumph of tradition. Thus what is ‘next’ after communism is ‘The King’.

The principle of man as ruler, as regulator of the kingdom; just as woman is mistress and doctor of the household. Kingship is a catalytic principle. It dissolves terrestrial contradictions, for us all to live. (189)

It is clear that what Rama wishes out of the prediction of the King’s triumph over communism is the celebration of tradition, based on dominance and oppression. The word ‘ruler’ essentially signifies hegemony and it cannot be said that it is used rather loosely. Immediately after that, what follows is the patriarchal subordination of women to the household. Rama speaks of dissolution of contradictions and not of their resolution which in reality will be the brutal suppression of the democratic aspirations of the subaltern sections of society. And “us” obviously excludes the
majority and is limited to brahmins — the caste to benefit most from this victory. His fervent aspiration for the return of the ‘king’ emanates from the fact that during the rule of the kings brahmins were greatly patronized (280). To put it briefly, they were worshipped as Gods on earth. The victory of Idealism may be the victory of Western modern capitalism (which is a bit advanced than feudalism) but victory of Vedanta is clearly the victory of brahminism. Hence, Rama’s deliberate intervention in the Western classical debate.

Rama’s emphatic declaration that the two positions — that of Marxism and Vedanta are ‘irreconcilable’ and all that in between is poetry is nothing but the outright Brahmanical condemnation of all other religions and systems of thought. He denigrates Catholicism and Buddhism as poetry and slights Christ and Buddha as poets and saints whose sainthood was identification, not realization, whereas his is the “Truth” — the Vedanta. He condemns the two religions — more strongly the latter for its materialistic approach to life and its opposition to brahminism — for both preach compassion.

To have compassion, remember, presupposes the existence of the world. You must have compassion towards some suffering thing, so suffering exists and compassion as well (333).

It is compassion that Rama negates for in its acceptance is the danger of accepting suffering and such logic ultimately boils down to the acceptance of the existence of the world which Rama stoutly denounces. His comprehension of Vedanta does accept the Buddhist proposition that ‘the world, the perception is real’, “…but that reality is myself” (334). The difference, he says, is big enough to drive the Buddhism of Gautama out of ‘our frontiers’. He defines the world as ‘myself’ — the Absolute — denying the existence of the world outside ‘human consciousness’. He disallows the existence of a world independent of consciousness for if it is approved, the logic naturally shows the way for the resolution of suffering, since
suffering has roots in the world itself. This proposition is highly dangerous to brahmins, since brahminism as a philosophy and as the caste system practices hegemony which is the cause of suffering for the millions dubbed as Sudras and lower castes and at whose expense the brahmins live in luxury and leisure which in turn facilitates them to make abstract postulates like Vedanta. Thus, anything liberal and progressive is attacked by Rama — “the brahmin, the bull”.

The triumph of brahminism is possible only when reason is annihilated. That is why brahminism always dwells on mystical things and tales denouncing logic. In the moving story of Radha and Krishna that Rama narrates, what is conveyed is not only that the world is illusory and that the “I” is the Absolute but also the praise of brutal annihilation of the reasoning power of an individual. The demand that Radha believes that her husband Krishna as brahmchari and the well fed belching Durvasa as a person ever in upavasa is to make her accept her husband in particular and the people to obey the Brahmanical tradition in general without any question. In Radha’s acceptance of her lord is the acceptance of the traditional value system based on caste by the masses. The story is also worthy of study for understanding patriarchy. Krishna and Durvasa are presented as the ‘absolute’ and ‘enlightened’ respectively, while Radha is represented as an ignorant and foolish woman needing enlightenment.

In the two stories of Rama and budemekaya, blind devotion to the ‘Absolute’ is celebrated. There is no place for human effort in these stories and the former completely negates human labour. Brahma Bhatta and his mother Bhagirathi are devoted workers but they suffer and lose their wealth when they fail to tell the story of Rama on every Saturday as they were busy at work. But his father Iswara Bhatta is rewarded and on his return, when he tells the story of Rama to his wife and son, even their lost wealth is recovered. In the story of budemekaya, things move from one event to another and all ends well but without any human intervention or effort. Both the tales abhor human labour (Phule, 138) and celebrate
blind devotion and brahminism. Blind devotion is an integral part of brahminism and without the former the latter cannot survive. It must be noted that at the end of each of the stories, nothing remains changed and the traditions and structures of the past like caste, patriarchy and kingship, get strengthened further.

One of the important tools of Brahmanism in reinforcing its dominance is the idealization of the past. It is always presented as what Hertzler calls the “sacred model” (338). The story of Satyavrata is used to this end. His pronouncement, “He who sees cannot say and he who says has not seen” is exalted to great heights as profound Vedantic truth. According to Rama and the Brahmanical tradition, the question involved here is saving the life of an innocent deer. Satyavrata and the brahmins fail to see another important point — the hunger of the hunter’s family. They fail to understand the predicament of the hunter, for their tradition allows them to sympathize with animals but not with low men like the hunter. The hunter is also presented in a racist manner: he is portrayed as cruel, making strange noises and imprecations against the learned Lord, the ascetic Satyavarta. It is strange that Rama and his likes who continuously affirm that ‘one cannot be many but many can be one’ appreciate this statement which splits one’s personality into two as profound Vedantism. This happens because Rama as the follower of the tradition merely receives this without interrogation.

“The brahmin is never contemporary” and being one, Rama never tries to live contemporarily, nor does he seek any positive change in human conditions in future (125). He relapses time and again into the past. He strives to seek strength for his ‘Self’ from the past. The ‘Self’, he claims has neither form nor taste; it is above sages, poets, saints, Gods and religion. It is “Truth, which always is and is therefore never born and can never manifest itself in any way, cannot have a mother or a father (110)”. He summarily rejects all religions and systems of thoughts, like Marxism, as representations of ‘dualism’ and thus unreal. But strangely his search for the ‘Self’, the Absolute ends in Sri Krishna, the Hindu God.
who ‘fought against Bhismā by giving Bhismā courage’. On the other hand, Gandhi emerges a ‘Hindu martyr’ for an Indian cause, fighting against the Muslims by fighting for them: ‘He died for Truth’ (102). Though he keeps on telling that the ‘Self’ is formless and beyond any religion and makes an occasional statement that all roads lead “but to the Absolute” (90), his ‘Absolute’ is deeply rooted in Hinduism and Brahmanism – ‘Vedanta’. ‘Truth is the Himalaya and Ganges Humanity’ and Sankara, the monk who led Hinduism’s attack on Buddhism, becomes the ‘Truth’ giver (35). He uses Hindu images like Vishnu, Shiva, Parvathi, Kailasa, Brindavan, Krishna, Radha, Benares to denote the ‘Self’. His conviction in Hinduism is so strong that his one-time acceptance of Christianity – “… to wed a woman you must wed her God” – drives him into great anguish and his ‘ego’ rests only after Madeleine – ‘the Unreal’ is defeated (84). His contempt for Islam manifests in his use of words like ‘Turks’ and the comparison of Lezo’s promiscuousness to that of the ‘Arab tradition’ (76). All these details make one point clear, that Rama is not an objective historian, as he claims to be a brahmin with a quest to glorify the tradition that Krishna represents and the path that Sankara ordains.

Brahmanism operates as caste at the empirical level but strives hard to present itself as the ‘highest ideal, the Brahman’ at the theoretical level. This ideal is best-exemplified in Krishna’s The Gita. In this scripture, Krishna categorically informs us that he is the creator of the Chaturvarna system and orders that one should follow one’s occupation, irrespective of any contingencies. He promulgates that the educated should encourage the uneducated and the dull-minded people to adhere to the occupation of their varnas and whenever this religion of duties and occupations declines, he would punish those who are responsible for its downfall and restore it. It is pertinent to note that Rama idealizes Krishna – the Proponent of Chathurvarna – for in an age which has witnessed the burning of Manu Smrithi and which has produced a great thinker like Ambedkar among ‘untouchables’ who
headed the committee that drafted the constitution of the India that Ambedkar glorifies — in that age he cannot afford to eulogize Manu. But as discussed earlier, to quote Ambedkar again, "The Gita is Manu Smrithi in a nutshell" (Writings and Speeches, Vol 3 81). The Gita is much more effective in reinforcing the caste system than the latter because it does not indulge in crude declarations but supports the essence of the caste system — the Chathurvarna at a philosophical level with great sophistication. We must note that the majority of the people, the Sudras and the women of all varnas have no place in this metaphysical debate and they cannot undertake the search for the ‘Absolute’, since it goes against the dharma of their occupations. Needless to say, their strict adherence to their dharma, among others, benefits the brahmins most.

Rama extols Sankara to great heights because Sankara provides the most sophisticated philosophical legitimization of the caste system by a wholesale debunking of the world as ‘unreal’. Sankara virulently attacks Buddhism which negated the tradition of varna and the supremacy of the brahmins (Theertha, 61-70). It is he, perhaps the only sage in the religion of Hinduism, who restricted the right to liberation — the freedom from the cycle of birth and death — only to the brahmins which was hitherto enjoyed by Kshthriyas and Vaisyas. He sees to it that Sudras are barred from studying the Vedas — the highest knowledge — by shrewdly supporting the pre-condition of wearing the sacred thread for such an exercise, knowing fully well that Sudras have no access to the sacrament of the sacred thread. It may be argued that Rama is not concerned with these questions at all and that he only extols the philosophy of Vedanta. However, we must note that Rama’s metaphysical quest for Brahman and his ‘realization’ that the earth is a mere ‘fact’, ‘the negation’ and is made for ‘dissolution’ never obstructs him from knowing himself as a brahmin by birth i.e. caste — an earthly reality. This ‘European brahmin’ and ‘French Vendiantin’ is never averse to the ‘unreal’
worldly things. One of the reasons he states for embarking on his first ‘pilgrimage’ to India on the eve of his father’s illness is:

Madeleine would continue to teach and I would settle my affairs at home. Mother’s property had been badly handled by the estate agent Sundarayya, the rents not paid, the papers not in order: and I thought I would go and see the University authorities too, for a job was being kept vacant for me. The Government had so far been very kind — and my scholarship continued (15).

This is not the only instance in the novel where he has evinced an interest in earthly things, neither is it an exception. It goes well with his thinking for apart from the property, job and scholarship, Rama exhibits great interest in many other ‘unreal’ (worldly) things. He is very proud of his birth not only as brahmin but also as the first son to his parents. He takes pride in his mother’s prediction that in one of his previous births, he was a prince. He shows great admiration towards his Grand father Kittana’s virility as exemplified in the case of concubine Chandrama and he himself willingly slips into the arms of Laxmi Sham Sunder. These mutually contradictory aspects— the “metaphysical” against the “banal” — happen in Rama’s life; this is so because Rama functions within the domain of Sankara’s twofold theory of Paramartha and Vyavahara (Artha) — idealizing the brahmin and debunking the world as “unreal” at one level and yet leading a comfortable worldly life as a brahmin at another. Paradoxically, Ramaswamy who praises Rama of Ramayana as “the river of life, the movement towards self-liberation” himself acts like Ravana (whom he vehemently denounces as evil), for like Ravana and the British, he too ‘possesses’ and “holds the earth in bondage” (182). He condemns the British, who exploited the Indians, as the ‘possessors’ of the earth, yet he ‘holds’ the lands of his mother and of his father without tilling them and staying in France thousands of miles away from the India that he worships.
The paradox of Ramaswamy — his negation of earth as ‘unreal’ and yet holding on to it makes his position clear that his pre-occupation with ‘Brahman’ is only to legitimize his ‘hold’ on the earth and earthly things. He uses many theoretical propositions in this endeavour and one such proposition is dharma.

*Dharma* is the most important of all concepts employed in support of the caste system. Ramaswamy introduces this concept while in an argument with Swanston to defeat communism as a philosophy. Continuing the deliberation about Rama and Ravana — the latter who abducted the former’s wife Sita — he states:

> And so Rama has to fight his battle. He goes about in the forest and the animals of the wild and the birds of the air join him, for the cause of Sri Rama is dharmic, it’s the righteous turning of the Wheel of the Law. For right and wrong are questions of a personal perspective but *dharma* is adherence to the impersonal (183).

In the opinion of the narrator, Lord Rama wages a battle with Ravana, not out of his love for his wife Sita and not because it is right and Ravana is wrong — but because of *dharma*, the ‘impersonal’. In the same breath, bowing to the pressure of the gossip that Sita could not have kept her integrity while being a prisoner of Ravana, Rama abandons his pregnant wife and sends her to the forest, ‘… for the *dharma* of Rama, the *dharma* of a king, demanded it’ (184). In the *dharma* that Rama abides by, there is no place for ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, for they are mere questions of ‘personal perspective’. He does not act according to his reason and he never evaluates anything on his own — this trait of Rama is what inspires the imagination of the likes of Ramaswamy. Rama simply follows what exists. He does not take anything from the past but the past is given to him. *Dharma* comes to him and he simply follows it. And this *dharma*, the *dharma* of the king, is *kshtriya dharma*. In the true sense, what Rama upholds and sustains in the name of
dharma is nothing but the Varanashrama dharma that Krishna eloquently extols in the Gita. This Varanashrama dharma becomes, for Ramaswamy, the ‘Truth’ — “the metaphysical basis of the world” (183). Thus, what Ramaswamy describes as ‘Brahman’ the ‘Absolute’, ‘the impersonal’ or ‘the Truth’ is nothing but a means of legitimizing varna. The bewildering metaphysical debates on ‘Brahman’ ultimately serve the cause of the glorification of the caste system. In an age where there is no varna, the glorification of varna simply means the glorification of the caste system.

The caste system is central to Rama’s consciousness and provides him with a peculiar perspective about history. He looks at history like a brahmin. That is to say, his history has no morality. “In his history, there are no bourgeois or capitalists....” but brahmins (183). His history with its ‘growing meaning’ highlights ‘Brahman’. But this history has no morality and can never have morality, for it is a bhramanical history based on the twofold theory. Rama cannot accept the existence of the capitalists or bourgeois because such acceptance, he knows, is tantamount to the acceptance of the working class or the proletariat. His history can never be moral, for morality in its own way, however insignificant it may be, demands compassion on the part of the privileged — if not complete annihilation of classes. Morality is like a thorn in the flesh and cannot allow one to be complacent about the woes of other human beings. If morality is allowed, a brahmin can never be happy, for his leisure and privileges are dependent on the agony and labour of other castes. That is why Rama, time and again, negates morality as he resists compassion. It is significant that dalits who continue to live in extreme poverty, without land or opportunities, figure nowhere in his vision. He achieves his objective by wholly denouncing the world of ‘capitalists’ or ‘bourgeois’, yet safeguarding the privileged position of brahmins in the name of ‘Brahman’ — true to the spirit of the twofold theory in question.
The brahmin, as one ‘devoted to truth’, has revealed that he is in no way different from the brahmin by birth. The metaphysical terms like the ‘Self’, the ‘Absolute’, ‘Truth’, or ‘Brahman’ not only eulogize Brahmanism but provide a philosophical justification of the caste tradition. The stories of budemekaya, Rama, Krishna, Radha, Durvasa and Satyavrata cleverly reinforce the caste system. Any deliberation that Ramaswamy conducts, be it with Madeleine, Savithri, Swanston, Little Mother, the doctor who treated him, Georges, Lezo, for that matter anybody and any subject — be it France, the Crowning of the Queen, or Nazism, Buddhism, Catholicism or Communism — all these are evaluated from the point of view of a brahmin. He uses these philosophical debates to support and strengthen Varnashramadharma (Rama cleverly calls it Dharma) which is based on heredity. He, thinking and acting like a typical caste Brahmin, is in total conformity with Gandhi who firmly says that one is born into a caste (varna). In the same spirit, Rama also dallies with the idea of a brahmin based on brahmanic qualities but does not negate the criteria of birth as a determining factor of one’s caste. Birth remains the only yardstick for him to judge one’s caste irrespective of his dalliances with brahmanic qualities.

First of all, according to his own admission, Rama is born into a brahmin family which means that he acquires the status of a brahmin by virtue of his birth in a brahmin family. He himself expresses doubt about his ancestors being true brahmins — that are devoted to ‘Truth’. All his present relatives are brahmins, not because of their deeds but because of their birth into that particular caste. It is interesting that he never raises any doubts about the true brahminhood of these living relatives — Saroja, Sukumari or Uncle Seetharamu or Subramanyam, who marries Saroja. This is so because he wants to protect the privileged status that he and other brahmins enjoy today by providing a theoretical justification to brahminism, raising issues like true brahminhood. He is aware that once ‘brahmanism’ is accepted as the ideal philosophy, the beneficiaries are none other
than the brahmins, for at the “...root of the Hindu social system lies Dharma as prescribed in the Manusmrithi” (Keer, Dr Ambedkar 259).

Ramaswamy starts off as if he realizes ‘the Truth’ on his own. This ‘Truth’ comes to him, as caste comes to him. It is given to him along with the caste. He is not a Sudra or Kshatriya or Catholic like his wife Madeleine; he does not become a brahmin by his deeds and ‘quest’ for the ‘Absolute Truth’ but is simply born into that caste. He does not become a brahmin and thus he constantly negates this becoming — the ability of man to act; “He alone acts who is a stranger to himself” (135). Rama praises anything that is ancient, that is given and followed. He exalts dharma — the Varanashrama dharma — that is given to him. He fears that if man is allowed to choose his own destiny, there is a danger that he might reject his caste and class. This act would definitely destabilize the hegemony of brahmins which is not acceptable to Rama. That is why he goes on praising whatever that he has received from the past including the coronation of the British Queen. He finds greater protection for Brahmanism in tradition and it is through the propagation of the concept of tradition that he works hard to reinforce the caste system.

As said earlier, all the relationships that Rama develops with people are influenced and guided by the caste system. He suffers from the ego of his “superior birth” (his caste) and in a way is the unwitting victim of his own caste that he tries to uphold. He proudly informs us that his marriage with Madeleine was possible because of his Brahmanical sense of “touch”. George, Lezo, Catherine, Oncle Charles and others respect him in France because he is a brahmin. It is not simply that he demands respect from others for such an identity. At many places he takes the name of his caste with great pride. He addresses himself as a “brahmin husband”, feels elated when Tante Zoubie calls him a “brahmin boy”. When Madeleine praises Savithri as an epitome of “three thousand years of civilization”, he is quick to add that his civilization was five thousand years old claiming Yagnyavalkya as his Upanishadic ancestor. To a remark from
his wife that he is too clever for her, he proudly affirms that “brahmins are like race horses” (334). He purchases a first class ticket to Paris because he does not like the ‘smell’, the rubbing against one another; after all, as he says with great pride, his “Olfactory organs... are made of brahmin substance” (339). Even with regard to his relationships with Indians — be it Saroja, Sukumari, Little Mother, Grandfather Kittanna, Uncle Seetharamu, or his father’s friends, or Savithri and her family, it is his caste and the Brahmanic postulations that he makes, that places him on a high pedestal. He eats brahmin food and acts like a typical brahmin. He is a victim of his caste in the sense that though he commands respect from all, his is a given identity and not an earned one — and is limited to the stereotyped model of a brahmin operating within the domain of the caste system.

It must be admitted that Rama does not make any crude declarations in favour of his caste or condemn the Sudras and untouchables like Manu. There is no such necessity for him. His expostulation is like a king’s request. A king’s request is tantamount to order and no king would menacingly shout his orders. Rama is like a prince from birth itself; his authority is always respected and it is not at all necessary for him to assert himself time and again. Thus, we do not find him making direct insinuations against the lower castes in the novel. But his casual behaviour, his encounter with others and the Brahmanical (what he calls metaphysical) debates he conducts speak volumes of his strong attachment to the caste system.

Ramaswamy, unlike Moorthy in Kanthapura, does not say anything on the problem of untouchability, nor does he voice other problems that India was facing then. He simply glorifies India: “… India is Freedom”, “the Truth” (88). But he does nothing for the India and its poor Indians. On his return to France after his first “pilgrimage to India”, he goes on praising India in his own natural way: “We are sentimental people ... we weep for everything” (62). To a question from Madeleine if he had hated the Europeans while in India, he tells her that even the
Englishman is more loved in India now. Celebrating the broad-mindedness of Indians, he says: “We forget evil easily. Naturally we love the good” (62). But these views are at a very abstract level and he never seems to exercise this. Continuing the discussion, when she poses two concrete problems, the problem of untouchability and the Indian patriarchy, in her words, “So that the pariah may have his separate well and the woman slave for men” — he is bewildered and hurt (62). In her remark he finds ‘an unexpected … new bitterness’ (63). She finds him greatly hurt and is forced to change the discussion over to Georges. What is important in their discussion is that Rama does not contradict her. He does not show the idealism for the eradication of untouchability that Moorthy exhibits in *Kanthapura*. Instead he is hurt from such a remark. He is hurt because he thinks and acts like a caste brahmin. Therefore, in the entire novel, we do not find any action or even a suggestion from him for the ‘annihilation’ of untouchability or the caste system — which is ‘dualism’ and hence ‘anti-Indian’. Rama only professes ‘Brahman’. What he wants from Madeleine is a silent ear for his one-sided abstract praise of India.

Rama upholds the caste system throughout the novel. During the marriage ceremony of Saroja, when Little Mother expresses her anger over Saroja’s in-laws, calling them ‘low untouchables’ and to Uncle Seetharamu’s dubbing them as “cadaver – eating pariahs”, Rama maintains complete silence. The ‘Brahman’, ‘the knowledge of the self’, ‘The Truth’ in Rama does not take objection to such demeaning of ‘the Self’ in other human beings, neither does he find his relatives going against the *dharma*, ‘the impersonal’. He does not comment or dissuade them from using such language because the ‘brahmin’ — the caste in him approves the abuses. Thus, earlier too, he has not appreciated his sister Sukumari’s interest in Marx and found her enthusiasm for the eradication of caste and class strange and objectionable. His attachment to caste is so intense that it not only influences his relationships with others, like with his fiancée Savithri but is also solely responsible for the break-up of his marriage with Madeleine.
Madeleine is a lovely young French woman and Rama feels that she “...was like the unearthed marble with which we built our winter palaces” (13). “Madeleine was like the palace of Amber seen in moonlight” (14). She is extremely happy with her marriage with Ramaswamy and tries very hard to keep it going. She is in fond love with ‘India’ where her husband comes from: For her “... ‘India is paradise’” and is delighted at the prospect of dying in India by virtue of her marriage to an Indian (88). She has great veneration for her brahmin husband and immensely respects his sentiments. In short, she is a devoted wife. In the words of Rama, her husband:

There was nothing I needed which she did not know before hand and bring to me: my medicine after lunch, my handkerchief when I started on a walk, my pencil, duly sharpened and laid on my notebook .... (77).

Her love for Rama is so intense that as Annu Celly rightly points out, it is she “...who makes all the necessary adjustments and compromises” (26) in their married life. She takes immense pride in bearing children for him and hangs his mother’s photograph in their room with great love and respect. When her husband’s friend, Savithri, comes to stay with them, she wholeheartedly welcomes her and is humble enough to say that she being a European is less civilized. Though she is a non-vegetarian by birth, she becomes a strict vegetarian after her marriage and her austerity makes her husband comment that she is more brahmanic than he himself.

This is only one aspect of her personality. Apart from being a devoted wife, she is also a strong individual both physically and intellectually. She loves long walks and it is she who carries the suitcases of her tuberculosis husband and is always willing to work outside the home as well as at home. We never hear her complaining about the work. She is intelligent and well read enough to hold discussions on difficult topics like religion and philosophy with Lezo, Georges and
Rama and is also frank and strong enough in refuting Lezo’s advances. If she appears to Rama as a ‘running brook’, Georges feels as if, “To be near her... is to feel intelligent” (151). She is not happy with her given identity as a European woman, nor is she satisfied with her Christian God. In the beginning of the novel we find her calling herself ‘a pagan’ and her search to know ‘Truth’ and from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’ continues till she finds solace in Buddhism. Her statement “Let me follow my own Gods” reveals her strong resoluteness to realize the meaning of life on her own (326). Pointing out this aspect in Madeleine, Krishna Swamy says, “she does not need a mediator to reach her god nor does she feel she ought to be a medium to enable her husband to reach Moksha” (39). As Shirwadkar points out, “she would rather have a god of her own” (66).

This second aspect of Madeleine’s personality seems to bring about a strong undercurrent of resentment in Rama and hence he tries to defeat and annihilate her ‘ego’ throughout the novel. Their conflict has attracted the attention of many critics and we have many interesting comments in this regard. S. Nagarajan points out that the conflict emanates from “two contrary world views, two contrary epistemologies” (513) and Meenakshi Mukerjee considers their contradictions in terms of ‘national and cultural differences.’ (90) In a similar vine G.S.Amur attributes the failure of their marriage to their “divergent world views” (5). On the one hand, critics see problems in Rama who wants Madeleine to be his companion “… intercessor, guide, conductive to the absolute…” (Gorlier, 606) and make him “… realize his goal and through serving him fulfill herself.” (Narayan, 42) On the other hand, Madeleine is seen as the source of all the troubles because she is a typical Westerner with her individualism and propensity towards possessing Rama completely. On the contrary for Rama, Punim Juneja argues, marriage “… involves family ties and loyalties” (182). But what is striking in these arguments is that all of them point to the differences at the level of worldviews, nations and cultures but fail to nail down the source of such conflicting worldviews. Rama himself answers this question: “Had I been less of a
brahmin, I might have known more of love” (400). In simple words, it is the caste system which is the real source of their conflict.

Right from the beginning of their relationship, Madeleine is aware of the caste difference between them and her initial reaction to the caste system is that of utmost veneration. She equates Brahmanism with India and feels proud of her brahmin husband.

Look at this pale skin beside your golden one. Oh, to be born in a country where tradition is so alive… even the skin of her men is like some royal satin, softened and given a new shine through the rubbing of ages (19).

However, she fails to understand that the same caste which her husband and she herself so fervently admire would become the cause for the disintegration of their marriage. But soon after her husband’s first ‘pilgrimage to India’, she finds the seeds of their conflict in Rama’s caste. Her casual statement that she has bought a dozen towels so that his “brahmanism, renewed and affirmed, can wash itself as often as it likes” reveals her apprehensions about the future and the role brahmanism is going to play in her life (60). She silently accepts his one-sided praise of brahmanism in the name of India. Her love for her husband allows him to be brutal with her. Rama makes her suffer intensely by attacking her belief in compassion and egalitarianism, in the name of ‘Self, the Absolute, the Truth’, a concept that Rama has time and again used to celebrate the triumph of brahmanism over all religions including Buddhism and other systems of thought, such as Marxism. Her personality is never respected and her husband never tries to disintegrate his ego in hers, as he claims because of his strong attachment to the caste system.

Rama was married to Madeleine when he was twenty-one and Madeleine twenty-six and as a consequence is constantly troubled with their age difference.
He does not tolerate Madeleine’s being elder to him and that is why she advises Rama to get married to an Indian woman who is younger to him. In the brahmanic tradition, the woman should be younger than her husband, be inferior to him in all respects and willingly annihilate her personality for the benefit of her husband’s *moksha*. Hence, peeved at the age difference between them, he relentlessly tries to subdue Madeleine and annihilate her ‘ego’. In any discussion they have with each other, or in the company of others, he always tries to exercise dominance over her and presents her as a confused woman with hardly any talents. His motto: “But I am a Brahmin and for me touch and knowledge go with the holiness of surrender, of woman not taking me there but I revealing to her that” (66). He refuses to respect her personality, ‘the Truth, the Absolute’ in her. He vehemently ridicules Christ and Buddha as mere ‘poets’, knowing fully well that the latter has greatly inspired his wife Madeleine. These acts and his entire thinking are a result of his unequivocal attachment to his caste. The reason for the break-up of his marriage lies in the roots of his caste. When Madeleine, greatly disturbed at the tensions in their married life, wants to know the reasons for the unwarranted turmoil from her “wise” husband, his reaction is typically that of a brahmin. Their dialogue reveals his ‘true’ personality.

“What is it separated us, Rama?”

“India”

“India? But I am Buddhist.”

“That is why Buddhism left India. India is *impitoyable*.”

“But one can become a Buddhist?”

“Yes, and a Christian and a Muslim as well.”

“Then?”

“One can never be converted to Hinduism”

“You mean one can only be born a brahmin?”

“That is — an Indian”, I added, as an explanation of India. (331)
He points out that India is the reason for their separation. But his India is a Hindu-India, devoid of all religions except Hinduism. Like a typical Hindu nationalist, he ascribes to a monolithic, Hindu upper-caste identity and denies the Sudras as well as other religions any place in it. When Madeleine tells him that she is a Buddhist, he denies that it is Indian. This reaction stems from brahmanism’s antagonism towards Buddhism which waged a consistent ideological battle against Hinduism and the caste system. His urge to ‘become’ a ‘brahmin’ however strongly refutes Madeleine’s becoming a Buddhist, not only because Buddhism negated Hinduism but also because his brahmanism negates any form of ‘becoming’, especially a non-brahmin’s wish to become a brahmin. His statement that one can become a Christian or Muslim but one can never be converted into Hinduism is an historical factual error. Many different tribes and races have been amalgamated into Hinduism and the classic example is the Rajput community whose ancestors are from Turkey (Mukhia, 37). What he, in fact, means by this statement is that the caste system is based only on heredity. He categorically tells us that “one can only be born as brahmin”. He refuses to accept Hindu/India only “in time and space”, as Madeleine points out because the caste system which he is eulogizing in the name of India, is “contiguous with time and space” and “is anywhere, everywhere”, including France (331). Thus, the cause of the break-up of their marriage too is the caste system.

Commenting on the dissolution of their marriage in an interview with Shiva Niranjan, the novelist, Raja Rao makes interesting observations:

But you see, the point is that in trying to become a Buddhist, she was unfair to her own Dharma which was Catholicism. If she has been a good Catholic she might have been alright with Ramaswamy. (24)

He further states that he believes in ‘authenticity’ and opines that it is possible only when one sticks to one’s religious faith, whatever it may be — be it the
Hinduism of Mahatma Gandhi or the Islam of Maulana Azad. His firm conviction is that one must adhere to the faith in which one is born and since Madeleine moved from her dharma of Catholicism, there is no escape for her from suffering and the divorce. In the first place the marriage between Rama and Madeleine was possible precisely because both had moved away from their dharmas. Rama’s initial attraction towards Madeleine is like any other Western migrated Indian; being perhaps infatuated by her physical beauty — her golden hair and fair skin - he marries her. In fact he frankly admits on his first ‘pilgrimage’ to India, that he never loved ‘the Self’ in Madeleine; “I knew I did not. I knew I could not love: that I did not even love Pierre [his son]” (24). Once the physical attraction is over, he remembers his brahmanic antecedents and is remorseful of the marriage, for such a union is negated by his caste dharma. Time and again, he imagines how wonderful his marriage would have been if he had chosen a woman from his own caste — Rukmini or Kamudini or Subamma or Venkatalakshmamma, who would have served him with hot coffee when he woke up and press his limbs. Thus, what Raja Rao actually means by authenticity is the caste tradition.

Rao’s declaration that had Madeleine remained a Catholic, their marriage would have survived is far from true; it could not have survived because Rama, time and again, strives to defeat Madeleine’s convictions by brahmanism. Much before she became a Buddhist, he admits that he did not and could not love her. This is because brahmanism is not only an ultimate ideal for him to achieve, the ‘Truth’ but also a concrete caste tradition based on heredity. Rama denies her the right to choose a religion because it is compatible with the thinking of the novelist. Rao strongly denies Madeleine the right to choose and ‘become’, for such a right would go against the caste system which has placed him on the top of the hierarchy, granting him all the privileges possible on the earth.

The most idealized character in the novel is Savithri Rathore. She is eloquently praised because her attitude to life goes well with Little Mother’s
precept: "A woman has to marry, whether she be blind, deaf, mute or tuberculosis. Her womb is her life and we cannot choose our men" (258-59). Though she is a princess and by caste, Rajput and has lived in the West for quite some time, though she smokes, drinks and dances, she, like Little Mother, accepts the traditional views held by Rama, especially those about women: “Men make her destiny. For a woman to choose is to betray her biology” (291-92). She believes in the Meerabai tradition of complete devotion to her man and whole-heartedly accepts Rama’s domination. She does not have any objection to Rama’s declaration that “Eternity is only for men... women will die at the opportune time” (139). On the contrary, she goes further and calls all women — ‘the disease’; “We are the fakers, the makers. We make the falsehood that is life, the trinkets. That is why man has such contempt for us” (360). Thus, we find Rama, the proponent of tradition, appreciating her constantly in so many words: “To be a woman, she knew, was to be absorbed by a man” (187) and if with Madeleine everything was mere explanation, “With Savithri it was recognition” (340). He praises her because her spirit is kindred to his own - “… a spirit Indian to the core” (Naik, 274).

We do not find Savithri directly deliberating on the caste system. But her preference for the role assigned to women by ‘tradition’ reveals her position on the caste system to some extent. She is a perfect Indian woman — “gentle, simple and very silent” (124). Rama appreciates this very silence, though he finds the root cause for such silence — the sorrow:

She bore such sorrow, it seemed at moments, that she sang just to cover it up, or she would dramatize herself smoking or sit self-consciously as though to hide some unnamable disease that others could see and smell but she could not know (122).

He rightly identifies the cause of her sorrow in the attitude of ‘total resignation of Hindu woman’ but strangely this is what brings them together. She completely
accepts tradition. She admits that Ramaswamy is a brahmin (that too a South Indian one) and superior to her with respect to caste and gender, though gender is predominant in their relationship. She smokes, dances and ‘flirts’ with men but that is only an appearance a part of her effort to be ‘modern’. In essence, she is very traditional and accepts all forms of tradition including patriarchy and caste. She moves with Muslims and communists but never tries to assimilate the ideas of her friends. She is so attached to tradition that though she is deeply in love with Rama and gets married to him secretly, she also goes on to marry Pratap formally and pompously for, as a woman, ‘who is a real woman’, she cannot choose — because such an act would betray her ‘biology’. Her dharma makes her abandon her Krishna, her Shiva and marry the distasteful ‘Turk’, Pratap — a civil servant in the Government of India. We never find her speaking against the caste system and finally her marriage with Pratap from her own caste suggests her conformity to the caste system. As a staunch believer in tradition it can be expected that she would definitely uphold even the caste system, though there are no instances available in the novel wherein she directly exhibits her casteism. However, what is interesting is that it is caste which brings Rama and Savithri together and it is again caste which parts them.

Raja Rao celebrates tradition. Things connected with the past — be it from any region and religion. But, his idea of tradition is based on selection and excludes many ancient traditional views. Being a firm believer in the caste system which he justifies in the name of tradition, he cannot afford to negate the traditions prevalent in other nations. Thus, he not only celebrates the imperiality of the river Thames but goes on to glorify the coronation of the Queen of England, quite contrary to the position he has taken on the British in his earlier novel Kanthapura. This is a major shift in his thinking. He praises the Queen because it is in monarchy that he sees the ‘Truth’, the ‘Self’ and the ‘Absolute’ (sic).
The city of Bombay (sic) does not appeal to the brahmin in Rama; in his ‘India’, this ‘barbaric’ city has no place. “Bombay had no right to exist” (44). Rama, however, expresses a different opinion about another industrial city, Marseille, and gives reasons for such a different opinion:

Marseille is certainly horrible, with its wide dark windows and its singsong tramways, its underground world of ruffians, *Quemandeurs*, *bicots* and its sheer smelly natural vulgarity; but at least it has the old port and the beauty of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde (44).

He appreciates Marseille for its Old Port and the beauty of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde which is also old. What makes the difference between the two cities is not the people or their aspirations but the two old structures. His love for ‘India’ does not provoke him to look into the reasons of ‘vulgarity’ of Bombay and he goes on simply eulogizing a city which is not a part of India, for the simple reason that it has things of the past.

For Rama, “… the past is necessary to understand the present” (199). He understands the present from the point of ‘the past’ for in his view, the past is the ‘Absolute’, the ‘Truth’. It is beyond modification and change and one cannot improve on the things of the past. In the same breath that he accepts the past as absolute, he states with enormous appreciation that France is the country of Roman consuls, bishops, crusaders and princes; it is the country “…where Saint Louis trod… where Henry IV rode… where the great Mistral walked” … (124). He bestows similar praise on the River Cam. But what is missing is that nowhere does he mention either the people or France’s contemporary ideas influenced by the French Revolution which gave mankind the very important slogan of democracy — “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”. He does not talk about these contemporary French ideas because, as Ambedkar points out, Hinduism negates the very idea of such humane values, (Vol III, 3-92) and Rama cannot think of
Liberty, Equality and Fraternity — as these principles jeopardise his hegemonic place in Indian society.

This being his stand, he does not see reason in any of the arguments he is making but simply goes on showering appreciation on the things of the past. He applies the yardstick of judging things from the past and his attempt to appear objective seems to be only a pretence. He praises Sankara’s Vedanta while, bestowing at the same time, a similar appreciation on the Queen of England and the monarchy unmindful of the fact that colonialism and casteism were responsible for the poverty of India. He not only advises Savithri to obey tradition and get married to Pratap but also strongly suggests that his beloved sister Saroja should get married in the same tradition, in spite of the fact that she detests her bridegroom — the “ugly, big-lieutenant looking” Subramanya. True to the spirit of Advaitic tradition accessible to brahmins only, he demands that one should completely surrender oneself to one’s ‘guru’. Rao further explicates this idea in The Cat and the Shakespeare where he gives the analogy for such total submission of the kitten being carried away by its mother in its mouth to suggest total submission to the guru. Rama’s reverence for ancient things is so absolute that he goes to any extent to uphold the tradition; thus we find him praising even the practice of primitive peoples “… who took the first blood of menstruation for better harvesting of their fields” (50). However, what is strikingly important in his argument is that he seeks justification of brahmanism based on the “past and tradition”. In this context, he cannot afford to glorify brahminism alone and thus he goes on glorifying things of the past, irrespective of religions and regions, including the British.

In this discussion on tradition what emerges is that the past for, Rao, is ‘authentic and absolute and that the present entails its mere continuation. Any deviation from the established tradition or an individual’s will to choose to be different, is viewed with suspicion. These are two important issues which pervade the novel. Raja Rao celebrates India because it “…still has the most ancient
civilization on earth” (189). India is ‘different’, far above all other nations because of its antiquity. However, the debate does not end there. He presents this antiquity as Vedanta, or to be more precise — as Sankara’s Vedanta. He dwells at length the past but does not include the contending schools of thought of the past in his discourse of tradition. Nowhere in the novel do we find any mention about other religions, or other schools of thoughts even within Hinduism. He does not make any mention about important schools of thought like Nyaya Vaisesika, Sankya or Charuvakas that denounce the existence of God. He does mention Buddha but his appreciation is limited by its level of abstractness — perhaps it is like brahmins accepting Buddha as one among Dashavthars but totally denouncing his egalitarian philosophy. Rao presents Muslims from a very communal point of view, as ‘Turks at the door’ and the Sudras and untouchables remain in his paradigm as ‘Baligas, Rangis’ and at best as Linge Gowdas ‘but with folded hands and all’. The people, who constitute ninety percent within the Hinduism that he is talking about, are mentioned with least respect. Even with regard to Vedanta, his exposition is full of shortcomings and one-sided. He takes the names of Yagnyavalkya and Sankara but does not make mention of the ideological contradictions within Vedanta — the basic philosophical differences between Uttara Mimmsa and Purva Mimmsa. The only issue he is interested in is brahminism.

Raja Rao presents Ramaswamy as the true representative of India: “My thoughts were, as you see, very Indian...” (36). We find Catherine defining him as “…not a man – man. He is an Indian...” (343). Rama defines himself as Indian many times in the novel and his friends and the relatives of his wife in France praise him because he is from India. He presents all his ideas as Indian, as if all Indians approve of his opinions and carry the same sentiments and prejudices. He does mention his caste but it is always kept at an abstract level while the concrete caste system remains camouflaged in his philosophical adventures. He presents his castiest understanding as the glorious Indian way of looking at life. In fact
whatever he highlights about India is nothing more than a reflection of his Brahmanic caste moorings. To put it simply, he seeks justification of his caste in the name of India and tradition.

Raja Rao’s entire thesis about tradition is based on the premise of antiquity. He demands that tradition *per se* must be followed for it is ancient and handed down to the present through the generations. Like a typical revivalist, he presents India as spiritual since times immemorial. But Chitra Sankaran argues that Rama, the epitome of Indianess, is a typical ‘post colonial’ Hindu and his brahmanism or spiritualism is not the unsullied tradition of yore (100). Rao simply accepts the colonial discourse of the artificial divide between the West and the East in terms of material/spiritual. He does not take into consideration the fact that during ancient times itself there were many atheistic schools of thought, such as Charuvakas, Sankya and Buddhism which negated spiritualism and the very existence of God. Rao also accepts the colonialist denunciation that India has no history. Hence, we find Rama reiterating that “India has no history...” (102). “To integrate India into history — is like trying to marry Madeleine” (332). He further elaborates that “… Truth cannot have history” taking the colonial discourses about India for granted (102).

Thus Raja Rao is very selective in his definition of tradition, randomly excluding its many major traditions. What Rao states in the name of spirituality — the Brahman — is not all about expound an ‘Indian’ way of life but his constant reference to the distant past is an effort to safeguard the privileged status of brahmins. Rao’s whole endeavour, it may be suggested, is to celebrate the hegemony of brahmins in the name of India and tradition. Thus, Ramaswamy starts as a born-brahmin, leads his life as a brahmin and by the time the novel ends (even until the last page) he still remains a brahmin — celebrating brahminism. His stance about orthodox brahminism amounts to perpetuating the dehumanizing caste system.