CHAPTER

3. THE ILLUSION AND THE REALITY:
THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE.
The above utterances in *The Tempest* signify the denial of the so-called reality of the world and life. A comparable denial is the denial of illusion, 'Maya' which finds its fuller expression in the following utterances of Rama, times without number in "The Serpent and the Rope":

(i) 'City seen in a mirror'

(ii) 'Life is a pilgrimage, I know, but ...... to where and what?'

(iii) 'reality begins, illusion ends'

The above utterances reflect 'Advaita' of Sankara and give the necessary strength and momentum to the novel and its distinctive Indian character. The title of the novel, "The Serpent and the Rope" alludes to Sri Shankara-Charya's non-dualistic philosophy and the analogies of the serpent and the rope, embodying respectively the illusion and the reality are...
derived from his famous Bhashya of the Brahma Sutras of Baddarayan in which he has elaborated his philosophy. The epigraph to the novel:

Waves are nothing but water.
So is the sea.¹

Quoted from Atma Darshan—At the Ultimate by Sri Atmananda Guru gives credence to Advaitic truth propounded by Sri Shankaracharya. The passage from the novel quoted below

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. You might go on saying all the time, "No, no, it's the rope", and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wheresoever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality, you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent—you are, the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, "Oh! It's the serpent!! You run and roll and lament, and have compassion for fear of pain, other's or your own. You
see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One—the Guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long white road, going with the statutory stars. "It's only the rope." He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent. The actual, the real has no name. The rope is no rope to itself.

is a powerful affirmation of the non-dualistic philosophy which denies the reality of the world. In his well-known Bhashya Sri Shankaracharya has emphasised that the world exists because we perceive it so with our senses but in reality it is not what it appears. He has employed the analogies of the rope and the serpent for illustrating his viewpoint that due to illusion created by darkness or some other factor we may often mistake a rope for a serpent. In such a case our knowledge of the external reality is mistaken and illusive. It may, however, be noted that Shankaracharya’s stand is different from that of the Vijnanvadī Buddhists who maintain that the world does not exist at all. According to Sri Shankaracharya the reality subsisting the illusory reality of the phenomenal world is Atman or Brahman—the pure existence, bliss and consciousness. It can be known only through direct realization or non-sensual perception of an enlightened soul, and never through senses which mislead us at every step. One has to attain to a state of spiritual enlightenment and perfect equanimity of mind, that is, 'Samadhi' and be perfectly free from the bondages of the sense, if at all one
wants to achieve the knowledge of the really real, the Brahman. In this state of consciousness as Swami Prabhavananda writes:

all perception of multiplicity ceases, there is not any sense of "mine" and "thine", the world as we ordinarily know it, has vanished.  

The world exists but we know and see it now as an illusion—a serpent created by our mind and

We are no longer deluded by the appearance—the snake-appearance vanishes into the reality of the rope, the world vanishes into Brahman. 

When this transcendental consciousness is achieved the superimposition of an illusory reality ceases and, to put it in the words of Sri Atmananda Guru:

When water is realized, wave and sea vanish, and what appeared as two is thus realized as one. 

Now it will be seen that in "The Serpent and the Rope", the quest for reality as against illusion operates at three levels:

(a) The reality of India
(b) The reality of love in its various forms, and
(c) The metaphysical reality
The novel is a highly complex one mainly because of its theme operating simultaneously at all these three levels of reality. The quest poses the problems as to where reality begins and illusion ends. The problem is not only of Ramaswamy alone but of every westerner who wants to know India and Indian thought as also of every seeker of truth who ardently desires to achieve the supreme knowledge. Therefore, in any study of "The Serpent and the Rope", a probe into the confusion of reality and the illusion — the rope and the serpent at these three levels becomes imperative.

In our discussion of the three planes of reality exposed in "The Serpent and the Rope", we first of all take up the significances of real India. Ramaswamy had taken the Albigensian heresy as a subject for research for he (his father) though India should be made more real to the European.

and that is what Raja Rao has tried to do in this novel. Least interested in the social and economic aspects of Indian life in the present, Raja Rao has very successfully tried to evoke the real picture of spiritual India

where the past and the present are forever knot into one whole experience.

and where going down the Ganges who could not imagine the compassionate one Himself.
coming down the footpath, by the Saraju,
to wash the medicant bowl?°

The novelist has repeatedly emphasised that those who take India for a country of superstition and black magic are awfully mistaken, and they have to understand that India is a land of truth where the tradition of spiritual quest and metaphysical ideals has been pretty strong all through and is still alive. The novel begins with this problem:

whether the Brahmins of Benares are like the crows asking for funeral rice-balls, saying "Caw-Caw", or like Sadhus by their fires, lost in such beautiful magnanimity, as though love were not something one gave to another, but what one gave to oneself°

It is only the apparent Benaras where we witness greedy Brahmins and coquettish concubines while the real Benaras was indeed nowhere but inside oneself°

India gave to Ramaswamy "sweetness and the desire of immortality"° and this India "began where Truth was acknowledged"°° It is obvious that Raja Rao's view of India is metaphysical and is identified with Truth, chiefly the truth of non-duality. In the words of Ramaswamy:

Truth is the only substance India can offer and that Truth is metaphysical and not moral°°
and that is why Indian morality was based on an ultimate metaphysic. This ultimate metaphysic is based on the realization of the oneness of everything, and, therefore, the statement of Ramaswamy that "Dualtity is anti-Indian; the non-dual affirms the truth*14 is a corrective to the popular notion of the average westerners about India as a country of polytheists. This real India, in words of Ramaswamy,

would never be made by our politicians
and professors of political science, but
by those isolate existences of India,
in which India is rememorated, experienced
and communicated.15

The probe into real India leads also to a search of the roots of various ancient world-cultures in India. Nowhere else do we find Christianity, Buddhism, Catharism and Hinduism brought so close as in "The Serpent and the Rope", and despite the obvious differences and contradictions the points of unity among them are well brought into focus. We witness here a curious assembly of the enlightened followers of the three great religions of the world as we meet staunch Christians in Father Zenobias and Georges, a learned Buddhist in Lezo and a Vedantist in Ramaswamy. Madeleine exhibits a practical synthesis of these religions by undergoing a consistent progression through her understanding of these religious beliefs. Their discussions proceed from the conviction that

.....life is so much more intelligent than
we care to understand16

and also that
Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Hitlerism, the British Commonwealth, the Republic of the United State of America, all are so many voices for some unknown principle, which we feel but cannot name. For all the rivers, as the Gita says, lead but to the Absolute. 17

That is why the novelist, through Ramaswamy, wants to build up a synthesis of truths and ideals of several religions and cultures. It is suggested that the Christian Chalice was a Budhistic emblem which came to Christendom through Persia. Madeleine was convinced that the Holy Grail was "Part of the Albigensian tradition.... so she turned her attention more and more to Buddhism."18 Similarly it is also pointed out that -

The Swastika, the emblem of Aryans, was brought from Central Asia by the Nestorians, the Bogomils and the Cathars.... 19

The novel thus gives us food for thought and strengthens our own ideas about the oneness of cultures. This is what "The Serpent and the Rope" does and does so successfully, indeed. Although this novel seems to have been loaded with ideas, in reality one feels that the novel would be much poorer without these ideas. It would be reduced to a mere skeleton; the soul would depart if these ideas were taken out of this novel.
This novel has again one more dominant idea—the idea of liberation from the bondage of love of various kinds between man and woman, woman and man. Rama Swamy's love-affairs with Lakshmi, Savithri and Madeleine are designed to illustrate how this idea of liberation from the bondage of love of various kinds is to be sought through rejection, detachment and acceptance of separation for complete self-realization. Encounters with these women of different mental make-up and intentions are aimed at depicting the fulfilment of one kind or the other they provide and also the way in which they work as impediments in the way of final deliverance if they are not surmounted. The woman, without whom a man's worldly life is incomplete and who is an impediment in the path of self-realization, can also prove to be of immense help in attaining that goal. Savithri and Madeleine both testify to this fact in their different ways—the former by marrying another man and the latter by giving her husband full freedom from the bondage of marriage through self-sought and mutually agreed-upon divorce. It is not difficult to guess how much this freedom is necessary for Ramaswamy's future career of a spiritual aspirant hinted at in the last pages of the novel. Attachment to a woman can be shattered at the mental level through detachment when one is spiritually advanced but freedom from the sacramental bond of marriage can be attained to even at this stage only through divorce. Eros has to be transformed into Agape for preparing the background for the attainment of self-realization.
Ramaswamy comes in contact with three women who fall in love with him but he, like a true Vedantist, remains detached from what they say or do as lovers. He knows it very well that

To be free is to know one is free,
beyond the body and beyond the mind.
Impurity is in action and reaction.

and he illustrated this truth through the puranic story of Durvasa and Radha. In his relationships with his beloved ones he acts but seldom reacts. His detachment is best exemplified in his much resented separation from Lakshmi. Lakshmi's love is purely sensual—

the urge of hungry body which knows no Dharma, that is, religion, other than that of the body. It is like a flood that overflows the banks of morality and destroys the embankments of social restrictions. Passion, therefore, has to be met with passion as thorn with a thorn and that is what Ramaswamy does in response to Lakshmi's amorous invitation. Knowing that a woman hates a male when he withdraws she cannot accept his defeat—his defeat is the defeat of her womanhood,"21 he gives her what she wants and leaves her, even in face of abuses hurled at him by still dissatisfied Lakshmi, quite unmoved and unconcerned as if nothing had happened. D.H. Lawrence also says that the sexual bout of a man and a woman is fight. Before a woman attains the dignity of motherhood, she has all this as a prelude to the bearing of a child. What a life! There is pleasure, maternity, death, pain, hate, love, etc. involved in sex. Such example of Eros presents
an account of love as an illusion that binds us to the reality of love.

The hero Rama is as polygamous as any other homo sapien is on earth. He is equally at home with Savithri, even as much poetic about it. Savithri's love for Ramaswamy is aesthetic and intellectual in nature for which the fulfillment of the physical passion is not so important as the gratification of the mind. Savithri is an intellectual through and through and she was made of such stuff that for her the real had to be clothed in terms of the illusory to make it concrete; truth was to be made the revelation of a puzzle, a riddle, a mathematic of wisdom.  

Savitri is metaphysically sad. Apparently she is debonair but beneath the veneer one notices the contemplative sadness about her. Madeleine tells Ramaswamy about Savithri that "she lives in a world of fantasy—a dream". Describing her character Ramaswamy says:

Thoughts intoxicated Savithri as nothing else did; men were just givers of thought. Her maidenhood had no physical basis. It existed, just as in fairy tales you cannot win a princess unless you solve a riddle.
That is why she lacks the physical passion of Lakshmi and the emotional intensity of Madeleine and loves Ramaswamy mainly because she finds an intellectual counterpart in him. Ramaswamy knows, therefore, that

To be in the arms of a beloved, Savithri must have thought, is then just to take delight in one's self, to park the car in the village, go to the top of the mountain in the mist of night, and look out for the sound of the sea.  

She falls in love with Ramaswamy, knowing that he was already married, chiefly because she finds in him an intellectual company of her choice. Madeleine sometimes wishes to run away from the high seriousness of her husband but Savithri draws more and more towards him simply for the same. In course of a discussion in his second meeting with Savithri in England, Ramaswamy candidly tells her that for her love is an abstraction. This love for an abstraction or love for the sake of love, platonic indeed as it is, stands in the way of Ramaswamy's quest for truth. Platonic love, thriving as it does on physical antipathy and spiritual sympathy, also works as a hindrance in the path of a seeker of truth and has, therefore, to be conquered through a correct understanding of its nature and working.

In fact, to a discerning reader the gradual cooling
moral planes of reality it is quite normal for one like Savithri
who is made of such stuff as also for Ramaswamy who, by dint of
his spiritual development, remains detached from this kind of love
and himself persuades Savithri to marry Pratap and rejoice in his
happiness. The problem of loving one and marrying another was
always on Savithri's mind and that is why she asks a hitting question
as to what one should do if one is tied to another even as the plane is
tied to the radar. To this Ramaswamy's reply is very candid and
precises:

The plane must accept the direction of
the radar, that there be no accident. 27

In the acceptance of the Law (Dharma) is the joy of life, and it is
joy that one can give to oneself as to another. In the joy of Savithri
Ramaswamy also gets himself liberated.

Madeleine's love for Ramaswamy is an example of complete
love, different from the purely sensual and the intellectual kind.
Her love is like the sea which never gets a diminution in its depth
and absorbs everything, even love when she becomes conscious of
its true nature. Waves are silenced and smoothed in the end and
only the sea remains calm and serene. Madeleine's love which begins
with physical attraction and intellectual appreciation and develops
into total surrender, finally becomes perfectly spiritual. In
divorcing Ramaswamy she weds her own true self which assimilates
all otherness. Love of real India and the love/truth meet at one
off of their torrid love into just friendship and finally into mutual regard is all too clear. Rama has hitched his wagon to the star of Eternity. Truth is the bride he must seek—not Savithri who believes, both the western legend of Tristan and Isolt and the Eastern legend of Savitri and Satyavan. Raja Rao's Savithri is not the Savitri of Aurobindo who becomes a willing instrument for the Divine winds to play upon her—to evolve a subtle and delicate musical harmony:

> The superconscient was her native air,
> Infinity was her movement's natural space;
> Eternity looked out from her on Time.  

The aesthetic love of an intellectual like Savithri is bound to be moral; it flows like a soft-flowing river in summers, well within its banks that stand on both the sides like guards to protect its identity and freedom. Savithri is a woman who can cherish her love for Ramaswamy at the mental plane even when she marries Pratap Singh in adherence to the conventional morality of an established social order. Ramaswamy knows that for her marriage is to wed anyone as happening. Seen from another angle, we find in Savithri's character a combination of western modernism and the traditional Indianness, even as her marriage with Pratap presents a synthesis of the two deals. What is suggested is that love should by no means be confused with marriage, for though it might sound paradoxical at the purely social and
point in Madeleine's love for Ramaswamy because in marrying him she could

Know and identify herself with a great people. 28

The deep love that binds them together needs no specific illustration. In fact, the whole novel abounds with evidences, particularly in the "Pages from my diary". About Ramaswamy's relationship with Madeleine's George says:

I have never seen a European Couple act
and behave with such innocence. 29

Similarly, Uncle Charles said to them "what a beautiful couple you make". 30 The secret of this happiness is their fullest taking and giving of sexual, emotional and aesthetic love to each other. This secret of happiness also echoes Lawrence's similar view when he writes in his letter:

"I do love, and I am loved. I have
given and I have taken—and that is
eternal.

Incidentally, it may be pointed out that on this issue, Prof. H.K. Naik's view that "conscious of the growing rift, Rama and Madeleine desperately seek, and find temporary fulfilment in sex" 32 may not seem quite acceptable. There is no depiction of a growing rift in
the novel, nor could sex be excluded from the experience of complete love. Ramaswamy's marriage with Madeleine is not doomed on account of his union with Savithri in a symbolic ritual marriage. The cause of their separation has to be sought in Madeleine's all-absorbing interest in Buddhism and Buddhistic practices of Yoga and contemplation as a way of escape from her frustration. The failure of marriage is liberating rather than tragic; it is the breaking of a bond which is needed for a greater union—a greater fulfilment of both in an undescribed future. It is not due to an unbridgeable gulf between two kinds of cultural ethos; rather it is due to the triumph of one over the other: The West can be conquered by India only at the spiritual level and not at the physical and the material levels. They are conscious of this fact and that is why in answer to Madeleine's deliberate question as to what has separated them, of course, physically, Ramaswamy tells her it is nothing but India which has in turn brought them closer spiritually. Madeleine, however, may be described as spiritually selfish, as she, though having risen above self, strives to seek her salvation independently and not through identification with Rama as a true Indian wife is supposed to do but considered from the metaphysical point of view, the divorce is an expression of the highest love in which love becomes impersonal. In this state of love, as Ramaswamy tells Savithri what he once
told Madeleine that

where we love there is no taking,
you can but take yourself. 34

To accept one as a husband or wife is a pious act of
acceptance with discrimination - an act of discriminating
one from the rest of humanity. Once the state of non-
duality of the self is attained, discriminations and distin-
ctions vanish and what remains is merely the all embracing
and indivisible self. Madeleine has reached the state of
consciousness in which she alone remains, neither a wife nor
a beloved but only she herself. It is in this way India is
wedded to Europe. It is obvious, then, that the image of
real India and the meaning of true love are both related
to the metaphysical truth of 'Advaita' and it is on that
plane of the absorption of all into one that their true
meaning are defined. Asserting the significance of self-
realization through 'Advaita' as the highest aim of life
Ramaswamy says quite in the beginning that

seeing oneself is what we always seek;
the world, as the great sage Sankara
said, is like a city in a mirror. 35

This knowledge of the self is reached by looking inward and
as Ramaswamy says;

the deeper you go, the more you know
yourself. 36
Thus the realization of truth is the knowledge of knowledge through knowledge, for,

Maya, on seeing the truth born from herself - that is, man is seeing his own true nature as truth - sees that illusion has never existed, will never exist. 37

The Advaitic idea that illusion is the concealment of reality by illusion itself even as the non-self is the ignorance of the self is repeatedly enunciated in "The Serpent and the Rope" in order to link up ideas and action on the one hand and on the other to coordinate the ideas of one philosophical system to those of the other. The non-dualistic philosophy is the most fundamental truth India has evolved in its quest of truth. It is not with a view to holding the Advaita Vendanta superior to other systems of thought as much as for affirming the path of knowledge of the 'self' as the surest means of deliverance. Ramaswamy is, firm and clear in the end in his attitude towards any form of dualism and remains a staunch non-dualistic even as he asserts:

The perfect civilization, then is where the world is not, but where there is nothing but the "I", 38

But the affirmation of this truth takes place mainly on the plane of intellectual understanding. It is so because it cannot be done otherwise in a novel, and secondly at the
spiritual level too reality cannot be affirmed till we are in illusion. As Ramaswamy knows,

Sweetness begins when sweetness is recognized,

and

The sensation must finish its function before knowledge dawns.

A real seeker of truth must seek not purity of mind and body but to be purity itself

and that is why Ramaswamy decides to renounce the world of impurity and be purity itself, for which a total surrender to the Guru is needed.

It is no gainsaying that based on illusion the relationship of a man with a woman or a wife with a husband is bound to rattle down like a house of cards. Both man and woman, wife and husband are, in one sense, strangers to each other, yet they emanate from one root. The theme of love and marriage in "The Serpent and the Rope" proves to be the swan-song resulting in the sundering of relations between Madeleine and her husband, Rama. This abrupt ending of "The Serpent and the Rope" in divorce between two great lovers who happen to be the chief protagonists of the novel presents a riddle that demands a convincing solution. The problem
is made all the more puzzling by the fact that the divorce, which is so amicably arranged, does not occur as a consequence of strained relations between the ever-reconciled husband and wife. We wonder why Madeleine, the sweet-heart of her husband, seeks the fulfilment of her love finally in separation from him. In this context what C.D. Narasimhaiah says may seem valid.

The failure (of Madeleine's marriage) is not due to any one cause exclusively, such as Raja Rao's understanding and sympathy. It is not due to the difference of nationalities, ("What fools we are to think the Rhone divided mankind" for the Rhone is sister to Ganga and flowed into her) not due to difference of outlooks and ideas wholly — though all these have contributed but primarily because true marriage is possible only when the ego is dead and when the duality of life is resolved in the one.42

What is worth noting is that only through a proper understanding of the nature of love and the possibility of its growth in the highest form which Madeleine finally attains the thematic purpose of the divorce can be rightly comprehended. Though a highly metaphysical novel trying to depict the essence of Indian culture in terms of Advaita philosophy, "The Serpent and the Rope" is at a dramatic level a unique tale of love which binds together two devout lovers of altogether different upbringing and culture background. It is through the dynamism of Madeleine's love for
Ramaswamy that the meaning of the Advaita is unfolded and the 'Rope' of love is distinguished from the 'Serpent'.

The life presented in "The Serpent and the Rope" is the inner life of human consciousness which reflects itself in our cultural rites and religious faith as much as in intellectual convictions and spiritual life as a whole. It is essentially a metaphysical novel as Professor William Walsh has also asserted, and it is in this respect that it differs from and shows an advance upon Kanthapura which largely deals with the external plane of life - the socio-economic and the political. As this inner life also manifests itself in the ideals and levels of love, the novelist employs the theme of love along with those of cultural rites and spiritual faith for presenting the growth of consciousness, particularly in Madeleine the central figure of the novel. The love between Ramaswamy and Madeleine pure and real as it is, has attained fructification in their marriage even before the novel begins, and it is through the recollection of the hero's past - the technique of flashback that - we come to know about the deep devotion that Madeleine cherished for her Indian god. Although belonging to different culture and racial background, Madeleine and Ramaswamy make a beautiful couple, enviable for all. George, a minor character in the novel, once remarked about Ramaswamy's love that

Above all, and for a Christian what is fascinating, is your relationship with Madeleine.
Truly, their love, in spite of the innocence in their relationship, was in the beginning, full of all sensuous charms and physical attraction without which love between man and woman is incomplete. Nature pilots women towards a male with a curious behaviour. How Madeleine sexually appears to Ramaswamy is manifested in the following words:

...her limbs became fervent, and in her pain she thrust her breast against my face, a vocable of God. 45

Ramaswamy observes that he loves Madeleine in bits and parts and all, like an antelope does its dove, the elephant does with the ichor dripping from his brows. 46.

Ramaswamy's confessions in the chapter entitled 'Pages from My Diary' give further details of her sensual charming body:

I love the curved nape of her neck, so gentle, so like marble for me, almost saffron-coloured under the light of the moon or I call her to myself in the day, and take her in my arms, her throat smells of some known musk. 47

In the case of his wife Rama feels the sex-inducing smell. The sex in the conjugal life is fearless, guiltless.
natural and therefore does not have the jerk of life. Yet Rama knows it well that Madeleine's love for him is not of the ordinary kind. He knows that she wants him to be big and true so that "she may pour her love on me..." This kind of love is a practical dedication, a form of worship in which one can become oneself by becoming another. That is why since the moment Madeleine came to know about Rama's gods, Nandi - Lord Shiva's beloved Bull at her door and the Shiva Linga, she never passed by the door of the garden without either touching the huge lump of the bull, or caressing him and saying, "Here, Bull, here is your feed today." She also began pouring water on the head of the Shiva Linga. Obviously, this is the first stage of spiritual transformation that takes place in Madeleine on account of her dedication to Rama. Her love at this stage is essentially emotional as she begins to love all that is Indian. She now loves and venerates everything that is holy to Ramaswamy, and it is through this emotional identification between them as lovers that the theme of East-West confrontation is developed.

Madeleine's character is dynamic as her love is ever-growing. She has finally to realise in herself the Advaitic ideal of human perfection which Ramaswamy instills in her. Madeleine can realise it in her inner being - in her character, particularly in her love. She cannot achieve the perfection of self unless her love, which was personal and emotional in the beginning, develops into an intellectual force and finally attains to spiritual
perfection. Obviously, it is for the sake of her deep love for her husband that she becomes a staunch Buddhist. She reveals it to him in all sincerity when he says:

Beloved, it is you who have brought me all this... I am a Sadhaka now.50

And Madeleine is Sadhaka in the sense that throughout she tries her best for the annihilation of her ego. Thus, the love between Ramaswamy and Madeleine is of the spiritual kind which transcends the bounds of the body and the mind. Madeleine's spiritual love for Ramaswamy is brought into relief by a sharp contrast with Lakshmi's purely physical passion as well as Savithri's intellectual and platonic love for him. Curiously enough, he is the common object of love for all these three women, and they are all equally enamoured of him. Ramaswamy remains detached in all conditions. Lakshmi's love, which is presented as a short sensual interlude in this drama of love, is just a chance meeting of the lovers which consummates itself in the physical gratification of their urge. Encouraged by Lakshmi's hearty welcome and loving entertainment, Rama one night "slipped slowly and deliberately into Lakshmi's bed."51 Both of them were sexually starved, and their hunger had to be gratified whenever circumstances favoured it. As her husband Captain Sham Sunder had other interests and after his return from Europe he preferred white skin to brown, Lakshmi simply burnt for the company of a man. That is why she was so hospitable to Rama and yielded to his amorous invitations within a day or two; and the two passionate
lovers had a good time for a few days. Lakshmi became so much attached to Rama that she could never think of a separation from him. Consequently when she came to learn about his plan of flight to Europe she was so highly upset and infuriated that she irresistibly burst into abuse for the idol she had begun worshipping and called him "eunuch" and "lecherous coward". This is the natural reaction of a purely physical passion in face of any obstruction, because it comes like a high tidal wave and knows no withdrawal until it breaks itself into tiny waves and drops while embracing the shore. Savithri, on the other hand, is charmed more by Ramaswamy's intellect than anything else. Although her love is not devoid of emotional intensity, it is inspired more by an intellectual understanding and admiration which takes the form of infatuation in due course. She is so much impressed by Rama's ability to discover values and metaphysical truths from the analysis of the vast canvas of world history that she accepts him as her guru. As a result, her love remains of such an abstract and rational nature that it does not allow the development of the emotion into a passionate urge. She loves the very idea of love and her love has clearly a platonic touch about it, so much so that she worships him knowing that he is already married to Madeleine. This kind of love is, no doubt, prone to develop into a spiritual one, and can attain perfection provided the self is altogether annihilated as it happens in the case of Madeleine. This point is made graphic and clear in a conversation between Savithri and Rama:
No, you can love another. But love can never be a movement, a feeling, an act. All that acts can only be of the body, or the mind, or the ego. Only the selfish can love.

at this Savithri asked—'And the loveless?' Rama then answered—'They become love.' Savithri establishes the most intimate and emotional rapport with Rama and is compared with Isolt of Ireland and with Isolt which dates back to the 12th century. T.S. Eliot, too, while trying to project the decay of love in modern times, quotes the following lines from Wagner’s libretto (opera) of Tristan and Isolde just as Rama Rao banks on the French version of the same poem:

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu.
Mein irisch kind,
Wo weilest du? 53

(The wind blows fresh to the homeland, My Irish Girl, where are you lingering?)

Isolt of the White Hands like Madeleine herself lacks the warmth of love which Rama has experienced with Savithri in London and at Cambridge. Thus mentally at least, Rama becomes traitor to his wife. His thoughts revert to Savithri even when he is with Madeleine, just as Tristan's...
are with Isolt of Ireland even when he goes to bed with Isolt of the White Hands on his wedding night. Savithri too does not come out of this love encounter unscathed. Why, a girl who is a liberated Bohemian, smokes like a chimney, undergoes a 'mock' marriage ceremony with Rama—with coconut, Kumkum, betel-nut and the inevitable family enters into such abstruse philosophical discussions of him on the nature/Woman, of love, of Death—nay becomes a 'plane' to his 'radar' nay a 'Radha' to her Krishna—should allow herself to be wasted on Pratap (even though an I.C.S.) with such disastrous consequences? Is she a sacrificial goat to be offered to a pagan god or goddess? Does it sound realistic? It may or may not sound realistic, but this much is true that Savithri exhibits the power to rise from the level of the body to that of the mind and to go even higher, but she cannot become love as she cannot free herself completely from the idea of personal love as Madeleine could ultimately do. She is incapable of annihilating her ego and that is why she has to marry Pratap if she cannot marry Rama. Her aesthetic sense of possession attracts her to Rama and it is her self-consciousness that stands between herself and Ramaswamy, who knows it well:

But we were not one silence, we were two solitudes. What stood between Savithri and me was not Pratap, but Savithri herself.

Unlike Lakshmi, Savithri could successfully detach
herself from the claims of the body, but mentally she is so profoun-
attached to Rama that she is content to accept him even as a
spiritual husband before she goes to marry Pratap. Her love, no
doubt, shows a progression but it rises only to that level of
spirituality where physical marriage with one and spiritual love for
the other can go together without violating the claim of either.
Although she attains a very high order of impersonality in love
in so far as she can detach herself from the sense of physical
possession of Rama even after her secret marriage with him. She
is yet unable to free herself from the claims of the environment
in which she is placed. In this respect she is many a step below
Madeleine on the ladder of selfless love which enables the latter
to ordain a self-willed divorce from her most beloved husband
simply for attaining perfection in her spiritual development.
Whereas Savithri simply achieves spiritual development in love,
Madeleine attains self-realization through love. Once the true
self is recognised, both marriage with a person and divorce
from him lose their significance, as both these concepts are
relative and cannot exist in the realm of the absolute. What
appears as a serpent at the level of the relative becomes a mere
rope when looked upon from the angle of the absolute. Hence the
love of self-realised soul becomes impersonal and universal. When
truth is born, the person dies, and this very Advaitic truth is
told through Madeleine's spiritual progress in love.
Madeleine divorces Ramaswamy not out of hatred, animosity or jealousy but out of love. Unless this point is properly understood, the very intention of this grand metaphysical novel is lost upon the readers. In fact, Madeleine's spiritual Sadhana and her interest in Buddhism had given her a certain insight into her own nature, a protection from something smelly, foreign and other-it gave her a step, a conscious foothold in India.

India according to the novelist is not a country but "an idea, a metaphysic". Before the divorce was conceived by Madeleine, Rama while answering Madeleine's question as to what separated them said that it was India which according to him is Contiguous with time and space, but is anywhere, everywhere.

and which is "Jnanam", India stands for the egoless state as it is Where you dip into yourself and the the eighteen aggregates are dissolved.

India also stands for true love which is not a feeling but stateless state, the whole condition of oneself. This ideal with which Madeleine has now identified herself and the new wisdom and insight
that she is endowed with enable her to realise the truth which is communicated to Rama when he was second time in India that "one cannot possibly love a body" and love should not be different from truth, which are so much Advaita as Buddhistic ideals. Ontologically Buddhism is as close as to Advaita that for a Westerner like Madeleine it was a necessary stage to be crossed before she could understand and also realise in herself the truth of the Advaita. By her fastiggs and meditations she developed not only miraculous occult powers but also looked transparent and elevated. Madeleine learnt the true meaning of love as she learnt the meaning and message of India. She could become so perfectly impersonal in love only because she had attained a level of existence where she ceased to remain a person. Explaining her indifference to the health of her body to Ramaswamy, she wrote:

I am no more a person, so why speak of it?
of the body's need let the body hear, and
of the rest nobody but oneself can tell oneself. So in fact there is nothing to say, that is why I do not ask anything of you. 59

Madeleine—after more than her share of 'Dākkha' in this world must have crossed the frontiers of this material world into a dream-world of her own. Says Mahayana:
Just as in the vast ethereal sphere, stars and darkness, light and mirage, dew, foam, lightening and clouds emerge, become visible, and vanish again, like the features of a dream, so everything endowed with an individual shape is to be regarded.

So also the characterisation of woman changes its colours like a chameleon as

The microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the earth, and the cavalcade, the curve of the cloud,

as the queen of England at the time of her Coronation with all jubilation and the fanfare that accompanied it, as Isolt of Ireland, who while sailing to meet her Fiancé, King Mark, under the effect of love-potion, gave herself to his nephew-escort Tristan, and last but not the least as Savithri (both Rama's Queen and Savitri of the Savitri-Sayyavan legend) who comes to look up Rama in a London hospital when he is recovering from an operation, change her alter-ego.

Yet we do not altogether agree with Ann Reynolds who in her paper on the place of "Woman in the Serpent and the Rope" lashes out at Rama for his male Hindu chauvinism and false romanticisation of Woman for such utterances as

Be gay, earth, be beautiful, for man must do...
Certainly Rama is no street Romeo who is on the prowl for so many Juliets. Nor is he an 'Oriental Lawrence' having a blind eye for 'the psyches of others'. Though there may appear something revolting in Rama's attitude to women in general—especially in the West, women in the East have for centuries acquiesced in this male dominance—nay cherished and loved it. Even in the West some women, as for example, Madeleine in her earlier phase of marriage, like to be tortured by men and be their slave. Rama, we think is being too frank when he stresses the 'ego'(I) in conjugal relationship.

But we do agree with the remark of Peter Doyle in the essay 'Madeleine-Rama' that Savithri's confession—

'No woman who's woman can choose her destiny. For a woman to choose is to betray her biology' is not only 'distasteful' but scandalous. And this is the woman who poses as Radha to Rama (her Krishna) and betrays her husband Pratap by getting interested in a young Muslim in London. How could such a woman, we ask, become 'the awareness behind my (Rama's) awareness, the leap of my understanding'? 64

But after all, Rama, expects too much from Woman. He expects Madeleine to worship his gods; but when she asks him whether she has failed his gods, his reply is that she has not failed him (Rama).
It is strange that while Rama is more physically involved with Madeleine, it is Savithri whose memory throws him into ecstasy of love. The contact with Madeleine leads him to a point of disgust and disillusionment; but Savithri continues to exercise her fairy charm on him till the end. One may safely say that in the presence of Madeleine, Rama's ego gets satisfied; in the presence of Savithri the same ego is touched and retouched to finer purposes— and gets sublimated into higher self.

Rama would have been more happy if he had adopted the more practical and realistic approach of the Sankhya Yoga instead of Advaita of Sankara. According to the former both the object (woman) and the mind (of the lover), that is, Chitta, are made of three gunas: Sattya, rajas and tamas apart from the 18 aggregates. A woman may appear different to a person at different times according as one of the three gunas is uppermost in the mind of the lover. Obviously, a woman qua woman does not produce standardised reaction on persons or else a woman who appears beautiful to a particular person would also appear beautiful to another. Nor can the thinking principle (Chitta) by itself be common to all persons—lead to anything else but a uniform reaction. On the other hand, if we accept this thinking principle (Chitta) to be different in different persons, different women would produce one uniform reaction—which is absurd on the very face of it.

The inevitable conclusion to which we are driven is that the thinking principle and the women—being two different entities—are still
governed by the three gunas mentioned above and the predominance of a particular guna at a particular time determines our appreciation of a woman as beautiful or ugly, pure or impure. According to Madeleine now turned a Buddhist, everything exists in the moment only so far as it is the object of immediate thought. This evidently is a false proposition inasmuch as an object is apprehended by so many persons at the same time—besides existing at all times (past, future)—not only in the present.

Rama shares with Birkin in Lawrence's 'Women in Love' a sense of pride in his loneliness, in his singleness—his singleness following his experience of different women at different times. He also, to a certain extent, shares with Paul in Lawrence's Sons and Lovers a sort of 'mother-fixation' in his Little Mother (Saroja his sister not excluded), though it may not be termed Oedipus Complex. Like Paul, too, Rama is a sickly child. The movement of Paul as also of his creator is from Christianity to a primitive type of paganism; but the movement of Rama as of his creator is from a life of senses to a life of the spirit—call it Advaita. Intellect seems to guide Rama at all places but the blood, the flesh speaks through every sentence of Birkin and Paul. Hence we would be on a very slippery ground indeed if we carry Paul—Rama and Lawrence—Rao comparison too far. But Madeleine is on more sure ground than Rama so far as mechanics and the goal of salvation are concerned. The salvation sought by the Advaitist is individual but the salvation desired by the Buddhist is collective (Nirvan).
Thus Madeleine had entered a realm of existence which corresponds to a reality outside the sensual and the mental domain; and therefore, by taking a divorce from her husband she was not denying the social and moral values of marriage but transcending them for total liberation of the self from the bondages of the self. She might not have attained perfection, but she was on the way to it all right. Her knowledge of Buddhism and the wisdom she gained from Ramaswamy prepared her to comprehend the truth which is neither social nor moral but only metaphysical.

Apart from the analytical and critical review of Madeleine's role as a woman in the novel, what remains to be studied is the role of the Little Mother and Saroja as they are related to the woman theme directly in terms of the issue of marriage.

Little Mother is synonymous with motherhood so much that she is not given a separate name. She like Aunt Lakshamma or Akkapaya is mother to everybody in the joint family. When she married Rama's father and entered his household as his third wife, she knew what she was getting into. Within gamut of her personality she has been delineated with an approximinity of perfection. With the death of her husband, the Little Mother as a Young widow is frustrated. She presents the typical life of a Hindu widow, an object of pity and often derision. The austerity of her life in the denial of sex has been pointed in the light of the compensatory piety and religion. Beneath the
veneer of her surface life there is a net work of frustration. This psychological fact has been drawn in an aura of forced holiness. The step-son is naturally drawn towards her but he behaves differently with her because of the social taboo:

I could not think of a home without her bright smile and the song that shown like the copper vessels in the house. 65

Rama is not even the Lawrencian son, for a Lawrencian son in 'Sons and Lovers' expresses in the style of one possessed with the oedipus complex. Here the oedipus complex remains covered with the social dust throughout. Raja Rao has woven a forbidden web in the light of which the character reveals itself. Like any other female character she is sad and this she tries to hide behind the religious rituals and the knowledge of philosopher like Sankara. The compensatory mechanism is there which compels her to annul her sexual presence. She goes to listen to parayanams in a private temple, goes to Annapurna temple for worship. She recites "Annapurna Sadapurni" in the temple. Her "inward sound" has been compared with the inward sound of the Ganges. The novelist has not tried to bring out this inwardness in a way he does in the case of Savithri wherein he out-excel even the great writers or atleast he may be at par with them. The novelist describes her:
"Little Mother slept. Her hands on the head of Sridhara, pressed gently against her breast, Little Mother slept. She slept as though the waters of the Ganges were made of sleep and each one of us a wave". 66

Like a beloved she shows great concern for the bad lungs of hero. Madeleine and Saroja are concerned with them. The hero as a male organism rejects in a sexual way but in a different way with Madeleine like a husband describing her mind and body with Savithri describing her on the lines of high metaphysics with Saroja describing her on the lines of natural youth and regard and with little master with suggestions weaving a latent web of sex, both too much concealed. However, little Mother is sensitive to Sanskrit hymns; her study of Shastras, the vedic scriptures had prepared her for her role in life. In the words of Manu, the Law giver:

"To be mothers were women created and to be fathers men. 67.

Since there is no room for self deception, there is no cause for disappointment either. To be a wife a mother like Sita in the Ramayan is the aim. Little Mother does not seek to express her individuality or to get into the troubled
waters of ego assertion. Rao wants to show the modern woman, Western and Eastern Madeleine or Saroja is troubled, for she cannot identify herself with a set of traditional values without questioning, without inward doubting. The type of unconscious implicit faith in tradition and religion that Little Mother has, cannot in any case be expected in a person who is exposed to cross-cultural patterns and conflicts. Savithri and Saroja try to abide by the ideals of the Hindu cultural misfits, milieu they were borne into and feel they are misfits.

The mother-son relationship is a close and intricately interwoven one. We see it in the life of the pious orthodox mother of Moorthy in Kanthapura. The intensity with which Hindu Communal mores are felt and practised is visible in the ex-communication of the Gandhian Moorthy. His mother torn between her love for her son and the pressure of orthodox communal mores comes to lonely and desolate end.

Despite the incongruity of age, Little Mother is mother to Rama in more ways than one and like the typical mother in Manushastra, looks up to him as head of the family, now that his father is no more. Despite her apparent simple ways, she has an innate sense of the wisdom of her ancestors and a quiet dignity that inspires affection and respect not only from youngsters but also from elders in the family like Uncle Seetharamu.
Steeped in Indian tradition, Raja Rao's approach is that of a Vedantin. Motherhood is a specialised role in itself and like marriage, like life, like everything else, it too is based on the impersonal principle. What matters is not the individual but the role allotted to her in life. Madeleine states in her letter to Rama:

I bore him, your son, with such love, for he was a child of love, but you were more interested in his sonship than in his being my son. The feminine to the Indian must always be accessory, a side issue.

Thus, it is not Rama as such that counts but his role as a husband, as a brother. Similarly to Little Mother, happiness consists in fulfilling her vocation as a mother. Marriage is a payment of a debt to society. Ultimately if life and death are non-events in a magic philosophy, so is marriage. Raja Rao says:

All you see is seeming otherness. Ultimately nothing has happened or will happen and therefore, life is just a like a play.

Little Mother too is impersonal—we do not know her name. She is mother to every body in the joint family. Her entire life is based on the sole expectation that society demands be fulfilled and specification as a mother leaves her little time for ought else. The influence of the mother like Kaikeyi and
Kausalya in the Ramayana and Kunti in the Mahabharata is pervasive in Raja Rao's fiction. The mother's role as the inheritor and preserver of culture and racial stability is affirmed again and again. Rama aptly compares her to the Ganges:

The Ganges alone seemed to carry a meaning and I could not understand what she said. She seemed like Little Mother, so grave and full of inward sound. 70.

It is true the social order is placed before the happiness of the man or the woman in marriage. The formula is predetermined; since both the husband and wife have fixed roles to perform, chances of friction are minimised. Minimization of friction in marriage is possible only when marriage is not palmed off upon any one of the partners much against his or her will, otherwise the result will be the flotsam and jetsam of the wrecked cargo. The same situation is with Saroja. The father dead and the brother away, Uncle Seetharamu and Little Mother arrange a marriage between Saroja and Subramanya, a civil servant. Little Mother's opinion about the bridegroom is not reassuring:

He is just the man to keep under yoke a betwixt left and right girl like Saroja. 71
What a promise to start a married life on? Saroja dislikes her betrothed, not because he is inept or ugly but because they are not at all on the same wave length. What harmony could one expect in a marriage of two totally unsuited partners? She bewails in a letter to Rama:

He is just not made for me.72

What she seeks is a higher vibrant consciousness which he can never aspire to. She feels trapped, isolated and fearful of her future. She tells her brother about their mutual incompatibility:

It is as though if I talked Kannarese he would talk Nepali or if he played golf, I would play chess.73

It is by the letters she writes to Rama that we sense her existential loneliness.

Rama, in the typical Indian male tradition, chooses to stay until the die is cast and then seeks shelter behind tradition. He tells us: "she wished she had been a European Women: it would have given her so much freedom, so much brightness:

"What freedom? "I exclaimed" The freedom of foolishness. In what way, Saroja, do you think Catherine or Madeleine is better off than you?"
"They know how to love"

"And you?"

"And we know how to bear children, we are just like a motor car on a bank account. Or better still, we are like a comfortable salary paid by a benign and eternal British Government. Our joy is a treasury receipt." Later she adds with bitterness "Like cotton, we women must have grown on trees......".

Rama finds no answer to give, on the eve of the wedding the young bride is full of panic, however, unceasingly she tries to steel herself. She cries out: oh Brother, I want to run away, run away anywhere. I can not marry him, I must not marry him. It is selfish of me to marry a man whom I detest, I look down upon."

All that he could offer her by way of help was a discourse on the transitory nature of life and the fact that "we make our own happiness". Saroja did not answer. "I had betrayed her," says Rama. Stoically the poor girl goes through the wedding rituals, which she likens to a funeral. She spends the night before the ceremony tending her sick brother and reading Thomas Mann's "Magic Mountain: The whole show marches inexorably onwards. The wedding hymn is sung: "Saroja was gone from our household." Then Rama adds: "Happiness is in a husband, a home, children. After all, where would Saroja go?" There is a poignant scene wherein she seeks her brother's blessing before she goes away.
She bravely states: "Brother, I shall bring but a fair name to the household. Do not worry." She, like scores of her fellow country girls, has been taught not to besmirch the honour of her family. What matters is not love, happiness, life. The paramount duty of the Brahmin girl is the correct fulfilment of her duty in life, the abiding by the laws of Dharma. She writes to her brother from her in laws' house:

For me life has come to an end. By life I mean hope, work fulfilment, I expect nothing, except I long for you. Brother, come back soon.

Later at Naval's end, we hear of Saroja at Allahabad with Little Mother. Rama writes in his diary:

I think of Saroja: she is not happy but she is settled.

What matters is not her happiness but her role fulfilment as the wife of Subramanya. The conflict between self-fulfilment and marriage leads to a separation in Madelsine's life and to resignation in Saroja's. Given her intelligence and vitality, it is a bleak existence. One wonders what might have she done with her life under the Western system of marriage.

Coomaraswamy tells us about the risks involved in a western type of marriage. Granted, there are risks involved, yet Saroja would have preferred to have held the freedom of choice, what her brother calls the freedom of foolishness.
This is denied her totally. Uncle Seetharamu pontifically asserts:

A woman is a woman and she must obey even if she has got a first class university degree.

The day after the wedding she leaves her home and starts on a new journey metamorphosed overnight from a bright sprightly young girl into a responsible mature woman. How can she express herself in life? What opportunities does she have ahead of her? The traditional responses that Rama and the others around her give, offer very little consolation. They advise her just to be, to belong, to accept. She should realise that the opportunity given her to be a wife, and a mother is lifetime vocation and no other specialised interests are necessary.
REFERENCES

1. Atmanand Guru: Atma Darshan - At the ultimate, p. 196.
4. Ibid, p. 34.
5. Ibid, p. 89.
8. Ibid, p. 76.
10. Ibid, p. 50.
11. Ibid, p. 15.
12. Ibid, p. 35.
19. Ibid, p. 76.
22. Ibid, P. 126.
24. Ibid, PP. 185-86.
29. Ibid, P. 82
30. Ibid, P. 107
33. Ibid, P. 83.
36. Ibid, P. 14
37. Ibid, P. 110.
38. Ibid, P. 334.
39. Ibid, P. 112.
40. Ibid, P.
41. Ibid, P. 111.
45. Ibid, P. 149.
46. Ibid, P. 158.
47. Ibid, P. 158.
49. Ibid, P. 55.
50. Ibid, P. 316.
51. Ibid, P. 295.
52. Ibid, P. 177.
55. Ibid, P. 244.
56. Ibid, P. 332.
57. Ibid, P. 388.

60. H. Zimmer: *Philosophies of India, Chapter IV (Buddhism)*, P. 486.


69. S.V.V. "Raja Rao: Face to Face", in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Jan. 1969), P. 45.

71. Ibid, P. 259.
72. Ibid, P. 127.
73. Ibid, P. 253.
74. Ibid, P. 257.
75. Ibid, P. 259.
76. Ibid, P. 262.
77. Ibid, P. 260.
78. Ibid, P. 263.
80. Ibid, P. 271.
81. Ibid, P. 369.
82. Ibid, P. 262.
83. Ibid, P. 269.