Raja Rao is one of India’s most outstanding authors writing in English. He has enriched the field of Indian writing in English with novels and short stories. Though he is not a prolific writer, he outlines the multifarious variety and Indian sensibility in his writings. He is undoubtedly one of the most widely acclaimed Indian English novelists by virtue of his wide range of thought-philosophical, intellectual, political and social and his innovative narrative technique. “Undoubtedly with Raja Rao Indian English novel has come of age.”¹ This literary figure was born in a very old South Indian Brahmin family at Hassana, of Mysore, now known as Karnataka, on 8th November, 1908. The family consisted of scholars and philosophers. His father was a college teacher, he taught Kannada at Nizam’s College in the neighbouring Hyderabad state. Among his ancestors was Vidyanarayana

Swami, one of the greatest teachers of Advaita philosophy after Sankaracharya. Raja Rao was the son in the family of two brothers and seven sisters and he was the centre of the family. When he was only four, his mother died. This was one of the most important events in his life. The absence of the mother and the sense of being an orphan recur in his fiction. Since Raja Rao lost his mother at the very early age, he was brought up with great love and care by his father and grandfather. From the very early age, Raja Rao spent most of his time in the company of his grandfather who gave insight of spiritual orientation that had been manifested in most of his works. His quest for spirituality lent metaphysical aura to his writings.

Raja Rao studied at the Madarasa-i.Aliya, then the most famous school in Hyderabad, where the aristocracy of Hyderabad sent their children and was perhaps, the only Hindu boy in his class. He was then sent to Aligarh Muslim University in North India for higher education. His Aligarh days were a turning point for him in shaping his intellectual growth. There he met Professor Eric Dickinson, a minor poet and a visiting professor from Oxford, who inspired him to study French language and literature. Under the influence of Eric Dickinson, Rao’s literary sensibility was awakened. He met other students such as Ahmed Ali, who became a famous novelist, and Chetan Anand, who became an influential film producer. Rao also began learning French at Aligarh, which contributed to his decision to go to French a few years later. After matriculating in 1927 from Aligarh University, he returned to Hyderabad. He came back to Nizam College, Hyderabad and did his graduation from there. After graduation from Madras University, having
majored in English and History, he won the Asiatic Scholarship from the
Government of Hyderabad in 1929 to study abroad. In 1929, two important
events occurred in Raja Rao’s life. Firstly, he won the Asiatic scholarship
from the Government of Hyderabad for study abroad. This marked the
beginning of another important phase of his life. Secondly, in the same year,
Rao married Camille Mouly, who taught French at Montpellier. It would be
worthwhile to mention that the marriage with Camille was the most important
influence in Raja Rao’s life. Her inspiration worked and in 1931, Raja Rao
began to write for *Jay Karnataka*, a well-known journal of the time. He
began to write short stories, which were welcomed by the editors of Asia
(New York) and Cahiers du sud (Paris). Camille not only influenced him in
writing but also helped him financially for several years. Their marriage lasted
until 1939. Later, he depicted the breakdown of their marriage in *The Serpent
and the Rope*, the second novel of Raja Rao. Raja Rao went to France at
the age of twenty years to quench his thirst for knowledge for the French
language. He first studied at the University of Montpellier and then started
doing research work at the University of Sorbonne under the supervision
of Prof. Cazaëlian, a great scholar and literary critic. Rao did his research
work about the influence of India on Irish literature at Sorbonne. However,
in 1933, Rao abandoned research work to devote himself completely to
writing. The two universities of France, Montpellier and Sorbonne, gave Raja
Rao opportunities to study deeply Indian and Western history and philosophy.
These two subjects further shaped his creative mind. The French literary
scene overpowered him. Rao lived in France from 1928 to 1939. Although
Raja Rao lived abroad, he never ceased to be an Indian in temperament and sensibility. Raja Rao was deeply influenced with Indianness. His grandfather taught him spiritual books in his early life, which was a permanent stamp on the shaping of his life. He returned to India again and again for spiritual and cultural nourishment. He returned to India on the outbreak of World War II in 1940. Once, when he was leading an uncomfortable life in France, in 1933, he came back to India and visited Pandit Taranath’s ashram which provided spiritual relief to him. Raja Rao learnt from Taranath the spiritual genesis and function of art. In the next few years, Rao visited a number of ashrams including Gandhi’s Sevagram and talked with the religious teachers, notably Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, Narayana Maharaj of Kedgaon and Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Rao was deeply influenced by the spiritual surroundings of India. On his return to India from France in 1940, Raja Rao went to Benaras to acquire the spiritual knowledge of India. In Benaras, Raja Rao was overwhelmed by the depth and sweep of Indian philosophy. To him, Benaras is ‘an eternal city’. Even the burning pyres on the bank of Ganges at Benaras are a sort of illumination and add beauty to the surrealistic city. Raja Raja was so much interested by the religious atmosphere of Benaras that he thought of renouncing the world and becoming a sanyasi. However, Swami Atmananda, a great Vedantic scholar and a believer in Advaita philosophy persuaded him not to become a sanyasi and showed him the true path. He convinced Raja Rao by saying that a person could attain spiritual salvation by meditating on God and carrying on his duties as a son, a husband, a father and a friend. Raja Rao’s vision of life was
radically changed after meeting Swami Atmananda whom he regarded as his 'Guru'. The Guru's impact on his life had been focussed in most of his writings. After his Guru's demise, Raja Rao again went to France in 1946 and lived there till 1956. Returning to India in 1939, Raja Rao engaged himself in many social activities. He was active in the underground movement against the British. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, Sri Vidya Samiti, devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization. However, this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, (now, Mumbai) Raja Rao was associated with Chetana, a cultural society for the propagation of Indian culture and values. Raja Rao edited three books: the first two, anthologies of essays, were- Changing India: An Anthology (1939) and Whither India? (1948), coedited with Iqbal Singh; the third is Soviet Russia: Some Random Sketches and Impressions (1949) by Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1943-44, he co-edited with Ahmed Ali, a journal from Bombay called Tomorrow. He enriched the journal with the traditions and modern sensibility.

Visiting U.S.A for the first time in 1950, Raja Rao was deeply interested in the works of Ralpho Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. These people were also very much interested in Indian philosophy, particularly Vedantic philosophy. Rao relocated to the United States and was the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin from 1965 to 1983 till his retirement as Emeritus Professor. He specialized in teaching Buddhism and Vedantism. The courses that he taught at the University included Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and
Indian Philosophy: The *Upanishads*, Indian Philosophy: The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle. In 1965, Raja Rao married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. They had one son Christopher Rama. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married his third wife, Susan, whom he met when she was a student at the University of Texas in the 1970s. Married three times and divorced twice, he was survived by his third wife, Susan Raja Rao, and two sons. An emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, Raja Rao died on July 8, 2006 of heart failure, at his home in Austin, Texas at the age of 97. Raja Rao was a very active person; even at the age of ninety also, Raja Rao worked hard on his unfinished works. He continued to publish books and short stories over the years. Though he wrote fewer than a dozen novels and short story collections, he was one of the first of his countrymen to write significant works in English. Raja Rao was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1964, for his second novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. In 1969, he received the Padma Bhushan from the Indian Government. In 1988, he was awarded the 'Neustadt International Prize' for Literature from the University of Oklahoma.

Though Raja Rao spent most of his time in outside India, his soul was always in India. Whether staying in India or outside India, he always considered himself the true son of India and tried to explore the Indian philosophy, Indian tradition, values, in other words Indian culture- everything in his writings. "Rao draws inspiration theme and material from India as an idea, a vast, complex matrix of philosophies and religions, whose speculations and practices are vital to the communities and fluctuations
of her history and civilization.” Though Raja Rao narrated contemporary events, his vision and narration were grounded in timeless traditions and modeled on the Sanskrit *Puranas*, epics, folk-lore, *Vedas, Upanishads*—mixed with history, legend and philosophy.

Raja Rao was a serious reader of Western as well as Eastern authors. He used to read the important books of the writers and was happy of keeping their volumes in his personal library. He read the Sanskrit classics for inspiration. He also read Tulsidas and often recited Kalidas. Among English authors, he had a great liking for William Shakespeare. He admired Shakespeare with the core of his heart. Among American poets, his favourite poet was Walt Whitman. His *Leaves of Grass* attracted him very much.

The complexity in going through Raja Rao’s works and understanding them arised partly from multiple influences which moulded his sensibility and nourished his temperament. Since his childhood, his grandfather made him interested to study Indian mythology and religious scriptures like the *Puranas*, the *Gita*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Vedas*, etc. One of the most influencial books in his life is the *Ramayana*. Raja Rao says, The book that has filled my imagination and came to me for years at every crucial point of my life, to interpret and to help, is the *Ramayana*.”

To him *Ramayana* is a ‘book of books’ and *Mahabharata* ‘epitome of Indian

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tradition'. Raja Rao was very much influenced by Bhisma which made him understand India. In his words, "He who does not understand Bhisma, and through his words Sri Krishna himself will never know India." Raja Rao was also influenced by Brihatstotraratnakara and mostly in English and French translations of Buddhist texts with their poetry and rich humanity. Among the books of his mother-tongue Kannada, the Vachanakaras, Kanakadasa and Purandaradasa affected him profoundly in his mode of writing. His Guru Swami Atmananda, the great Vedantic scholar influenced him a lot. All these influences had a deep impact in Raja Rao's writings. A blend of metaphysical tradition and his susceptibility to Western culture made his novels philosophically complex.

Raja Rao considered writing to be a form of spiritual growth and used the novel to explore profound themes, including the nature of death, immortality, illusion and reality, good and evil, karma and dharma. Writing is a 'Sadhana' or 'spiritual experience' for him. 'Sadhana' according to him, is an endeavour to come face to face with the ultimate reality. According to him, a man is a spiritual or metaphysical entity, one who has realized the absolute truth. This truth can be realized only through a Guru, who is himself a realized being. He confesses that his spiritual fulfillment comes when he found his Guru, Shri Atmananda. Raja Rao's second novel, The Serpent and the Rope which wins the Sahitya Akademi Award, is the result of the influence of that Guru. Raja Rao surrenders his body, mind and soul completely to his Guru as the kitten allows itself to be carried away by the mother cat. Though born in a

4. Lop Cit.
Vedantic family, Raja Rao could not realize the full significance of Vedanta till he met his Guru, Shri Atmananda, to whom he dedicated *The Serpent and the Rope*. This atmasamarpanam, getting pleasure in complete surrender clears his doubt and confusion from his mind and soul. In Rao’s Vedantic philosophy, knowledge of truth is the purpose of existence. On the page preceding the preface to *The Policeman and the Rose*, Raja Rao quotes the words of his Guru Atmananda.

“If one looks through the gross organ eye, gross forms alone appear. The same relation exists between other organs and their objects.

Leaving the physical organs if once looks through the subtle organ called mind, subtle forms appear.

Looking through the attribute less pure consciousness, one sees Conscious only and nothing else.”

This epigram shows the impact of his Guru in Raja Rao’s vision of life. Here, in the first stage is when the physical eye registers impressions of the physical reality in the external world. In the second stage, mental perception raises the quest to a higher level, while the third stage, that is the highest stage, viz, that of pure consciousness- is reached when the Knower and the Known become one.

Right from his birth to death, Raja Rao was in touch with spiritual surroundings. Like the Guru Atmananda, his grandfather also inspired him a lot which he described in his novels and short story. Through his art forms,

Raja Rao showed his gratitude towards his grandfather. Raja Rao represents his grandfather with the name Kittana and Rama Krishna in his ‘miniature epic’ *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Kanthapura* respectively.

Raja Rao was a man of aesthetic sense. He was a great lover of Nature. Raja Rao spent most of the time of his early life in the hills and green places because he was a patient of chest trouble and the doctors suggested him to lead his life in the natural surroundings. Raja Rao accepted the advice of the doctors and fortunately he regained a sound health. Since Raja Rao spent most his time amidst the natural beauties, it got reflection in his writings. There were the beautiful descriptions of village life in his short stories like ‘Javni’, ‘Akkayya’ and in the novel *Kanthapura*. The portrayal of the village Kanthapura is described in this way:

"High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar Coast is it, up Mangalore and Putter and many centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. Roads, narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads, wind through the forests of teak and of Jack, of sandal and sal, and hanging over bellowing gorges and leaping over elephant haunted valleys, they turn now to the left and now to the right and bring you through the Alambe and Champa and Mena and Kola passes into the great granaries of trade. There, on the blue waters, they say, our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring, and, so the countries where our rulers live."  

Raja Rao was never interested in politics for its ill treatments. He was very much influenced with the message of Ramakrishna.

Raja Rao contributed to the field of Indian literature by writing novels and short stories. Though he was not a prolific writer he showed his capability of mingling every aspect of Indian society. M.K.Naik has rightly said,

"...even with his small output, his position as perhaps the most 'Indian' of Indian English novelists, as probably the finest painter of the East-West confrontation, as symbolist, stylist and philosophical novelist, and as an original voice in modern fiction, undoubtedly remains secure."\(^7\)

While other Indian novelists like R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were concerned with social and political realities, Raja Rao was concerned with the spirit of India. C.D.Narasimhaiah says,

"He is perhaps the first Indian who brings to the business of novel writing a wide intellectual culture-Vedas, Upanishads, Buddha, Sankara and Coomaraswamy jostle with Cathars, the Holy Grail, Dante, Rilke, Paul Valery, Cezanne, Marx, Gide and Romain Rolland."\(^8\)

The three civilizations-French, English and Indian gave him the insight which he focused in his writings with sympathy. Raja Rao’s long stay

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(i) *Kanthapura*

*Kanthapura* (1938) is the manifesto of Gandhian ideology, a work in which the Gandhian struggle for independence and its impact on the Indian masses finds its best and fullest expression. This novel pictures very vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi’s leadership. It shows how the clarion-call of Gandhi turns thousands of youths into soldiers against the rule of England, shouting, clamouring and struggling for the emancipation of their mother-land from the shackles of slavery. Though Gandhi’s impact was felt everywhere in the novel, he remained invisible like God. The invisible Gandhi made the omnipresent Gandhi of *Waiting For the Mahatma* of R. K. Narayan a dwarf. Though *Kanthapura* was not the first creative work projecting Gandhi’s life and ideology, it was
perhaps one of the few which did so directly and clearly. The first lesson of Gandhism was brought to Kanthapura, the typical South Indian village on the slopes of the Western Ghats by the young radical Moorthy, who inspite of getting much resistance from the orthodox villagers, took the initiative to make free the society from the existing evils of casteism, untouchability etc. Kanthapura, the village was shaken to the core by the sweeping revolution of Gandhi’s social reform and political upsurgence though initially those ideals were not accepted by the villagers. Moorthy, the follower of Gandhi used the right key to unlock the hearts of Kanthapurians through legendary discourses of ‘Harikathas’ by cleverly intermixing the political aspects and religion. Through the Harikathas recited by Jayaramachar, the little community was made to convince that Gandhi Mahatma was Rama, the Red foreigner was Ravana, the brown inspector of police who flourished lathis among the villagers was but a soldier in ten-headed Ravana’s army, the Satyagrahi in prison was the divine Krishna himself in Kansa’s prison, the freedom struggle was a fight between the two incarnations of Good and Evil for the sake of Bharat Mata or Sita. Gandhi’s trip to England to attend the Second Round Table Conference was Rama’s exile and the Indians who participated in the process of Government were like Bharatha who worshipped Rama’s sandals in his absence. The followers of Gandhi were believed to be Hanuman and they were equally ready to carry out Gandhi’s instruction at any time. The people were made to believe that Mahatma would kill Ravana (foreign rule) and bring Sita (India) with him. Raja Rao is conscious of the fact that Indian people are highly religious and tuned to see God in everything. So by
mingling religion with politics, Raja Rao perhaps wants to make conscious the people of Kanthapura about the political scenario of India. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has rightly said,

“It is this singular fusion of poetry and politics, the perennial with the present, that makes Kanthapura a distinctive novel, almost a new species of fiction.”

Raja Rao has connected political ideas with mythological elements. It is described in the novel:

“Siva is three eyed,.............Swaraj too is three eyed : Self-purification, Hindu- Moslem unity. Khaddar.”

The mythical element is used effectively upto the end of the novel. Mythical elements are used because of the fact that even the most illiterate Indian is well acquainted with the stories in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Myths play a significant role in Indian life. In Kanthapura, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Vedas and Puranas find their place in a simplified manner in the appropriate situations. In Harikathas and bhajans traditional mythology and contemporaneous politics get amalgamated very beautifully. Raja Rao’s mythic design of Kanthapura is a unique portrayal of the freedom struggle.

Kanthapura is a vivid scenario of pre-independence in India. On the one side, the novel portrays the imperialistic nature of the British, and the other side, it denotes the love and respect of the Indian people for their motherland. The white men who captured the Skeffington Coffee Estate were a symbol of the imperialist rulers who exploited Indians in various ways. They employed paid agents like Bhatta and Swami to oppose the freedom movement, sent policemen like Bade Khan to harass the people. Their treatment of peaceful Satyagrahis was extremely inhuman. On the contrary, the villagers imbibed with Moorthy’s teachings of Gandhian ideologies of truth, non-violence, non-co-operation marched together to save the country from the clutches of the foreigners. Peasants refused to pay revenue and other taxes to the Government. The villagers led by Moorthy marched to picket the toddy plantations with shouts of ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki Joi’ and ‘inquilab Zindabad’. They did dharnas, picketings and satyagrahas. As a result, people including children and old men were injured and wounded in large numbers. Women like Ratna were beaten up and dishonoured, large numbers of people were arrested and sent to jail and suffered a lot of hardship for their motherland. When Moorthy was arrested, his place was taken by Ratna and the freedom struggle continued and intensified. M.K. Naik has perhaps made no exaggeration when he says,

"Kanthapura is in a sense, unique in Indian English fiction, perhaps the only successful attempt to probe the depths to which the nationalistic uprising penetrate, showing how, even in the remote villages,
the new patriotic upsurge fused completely with traditional religious faith, thus rediscovering the Indian soul.\footnote{M. K. Naik, “The Village that Was Wiped Out”, Ragini Ramachandra, ed. \textit{Raja Rao: An Anthology of Recent Criticism} (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000), P. 52.}

\textit{Kanthapura} is not only a fine work of art but also aims at rousing the conscience of the country and even of the world at large, at the ills and injustices which plagued Indian life in the 1930s.

\textit{Kanthapura} is a microcosm of the macrocosm for what happens in Kanthapura was happening all over the country during the freedom struggle of India. Though the novel depicts the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi as the main theme, it also aims at social reform. In fact, Gandhi believed that swaraj itself could be attained after certain social reforms and social awakening. These social reforms included freedom from economic exploitation by the West by boycotting foreign goods, by spinning yarn and wearing khadi made from it, eradication of untouchability and the rigidities of caste system, removal of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. Kanthapura, though is a small village, represents the whole India. The village Kanthapura was consisted of the people of Brahmin quarter, Pariah Quarter, Potter’s Quarter, Weavers’ Quarter and Sudra Quarter. At that time, the caste division was so intense that the non-Brahmins were not allowed to enter the temple. Brahmins, going or mixing with other community people were made afraid of being excommunicated. Moorthy, inspite of being a Brahmin boy, went to other quarters and mixed up with them, which made Bhatta and Swami very furious. Learning that Moorthy would be excommunicated, Moorthy’s
mother died out of grief. The caste division was so intense upon people that once, Moorthy, the reformer also hesitated to take a cup of milk from a Pariah woman. Inspite of having caste division in Indian society, they became united at the time of necessity. Moorthy gave the lesson to the villagers to become one by saying,

“...put aside the idea of the holy brahmin and the untouchable pariah, you know brothers and sisters, we are here in a temple, and the temple is the temple of the one, and we are one with everything that is in the one ......whether brahmin or bangle-seller, pariah or priest, we are all one, one as the mustard seed in a sack of mustard seeds, equal in shape and hue and all.”

Kanthapura is a typical Indian village and it has been described minutely with great realism. Told from the point of view of a grandmother in the village, the tale is filled with colorful characters, colloquial language, rituals, legends and superstitions. English writer, E.M. Forster considered it, the best book written in English by an Indian. In this novel, the narrator is an old grandmother and the narration is exactly as one would expect from an old Indian lady narrating some events to her grandchildren. Indian themes on Western art form are exposed in his novels wherein stories are told in the Indian tradition of story telling.

In the ‘Foreword’ of the novel Kanthapura Raja Rao says,

“We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we

move quickly...And our paths are paths interminable... Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.”

Regarding this use of narration, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes in this way,

“Kanthapura is narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener...Raja Rao’s choice of this narrator serves several purposes at once. Making this old woman the narrator enables Raja Rao to mingle facts and myths and in an effective manner.”

In Kanthapura, a narrative technique based on traditional Indian methods of story-telling has been adopted. His method of narration resultantly becomes digressive and episodic like that of Puranas. The tales of freedom movement and participation of the villagers in it are described with all seriousness and sanctity like a Puranic legend. “Both the spirit and the narrative technique of Kanthapura are primarily those of the Indian Purana......, The Puranas are a blend of narration, description, philosophical reflection and religious teaching. The style is usually simple, flowing and digressive, and exaggeration is the key note of most accounts of happenings and miracles. There is much to correspond to this in Kanthapura’.

13. Ibid, P. V-V1.
Kanthapura has the Puranic strain of philosophy, a philosophy harnessed to a pre-dominantly religious world view. The incarnation of the God at the time of mystery and ignorance that is referred to in the novel, is central to the Puranas.

In Kanthapura Raja Rao makes an attempt to create a Sthala-Purana, a legendary tale of a specific locality. Every village in India has its own Sthala-Purana or legendary history and Kanthapura is no exception to this rule. It has a legend concerning the local goddess Kenchamma who protects the villagers from harm and presides over their destiny. "Kenchamma came from the Heavens- it has the sage Tripura who had made penances to bring her down – and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma hill is all red."16 The Kanthapurians believe the goddess of the River plays through the night with the goddess of the Hill. Kenchamma is the mother of Himavathy. Raja Rao has shown a close affinity between the goddess and the devotees like mother and children. Mother is respected and worshipped and Kenchamma, the mother is worshipped by giving sari, gold, trinket, by the Kanthapurians, the devotees. They earnestly request Her to save them from their misfortunes. Their intimacy is so intense that they give first rice, first fruit, saris, bodice cloth etc. to satisfy Her and they sing:

"Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous,


66
Mother of earth, blood of life,
Harvest-queen, rain-crowned,
Kenchamma, Kenchamma,
Goddess benign and bounteous.”

The people’s intimacy with the goddess Kenchamma is so deep that they abuse and accuse Her at times of failure and misfortunes as if She was their paid servant and it was their right to expect Her to be their service all the time.

“O Kenchamma, in a week we shall have ploughed and manuered and sowed. Send us rain for three days, dry weather for two days and rain again, a fine, soft rain Kenchamma.”

The novel *Kanthapura* shows the religious intensity of the people over and over again. When Moorthy was arrested and was not freed, everybody earnestly prayed to their local goddess for Moorthy’s freedom. Rangamma vowed to offer a Kanchi sari to Kenchamma. Ratna desired to perform a thousand-and-eight flames ceremony, Nanjamma wanted to give silver belt to the goddess and Pariah Rachamma desired to walk the holy fire. Besides worshipping Kenchamma, the local goddess the villagers believed in other gods also. Siva is one of them which is referred to in *Kanthapura*. Siva is ‘poison-threatened’, ‘three-eyed’. The Kanthapurians believed that three-eyed Siva would protect them. They prayed earnestly to Siva at their difficulties. They even

17. Ibid, P. 3.
18. Ibid, P. 117.
sang prayer song for the God Siva in order to get blessings from Him.

"Siva, Siva of the Meru Mount,
Siva, Siva of the Ganges-head,
Siva, Siva of the Crescent-Moon,
Siva, Siva of the Crematorium-dance,
Siva, Siva of the Unillusioned heart,
Siva, Siva Siva." 19

The Indian sensibility has been successfully portrayed by Raja Rao in a foreign medium. Though Raja Rao has used the English language to express the Indian sensibility, he raises his powerful voice against the use of Babu-English or English as is used in Oxford and Cambridge. He makes a powerful plea for the adaptation of English language to Indian needs. He says that English is not to be rejected as a foreign language, but it is to be adapted and Indianised. In his ‘Foreword’ to the novel Kanthapura, Raja Rao says about the English language,

"English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up. ...but not of our emotional make-up." 20

Emotions are expressed more naturally in one’s own mother-tongue. Raja Rao has realised this truth and has used Indian English in his novels. He has perhaps shown to other Indian writers in English how best to express in a foreign language, a sensibility which is essentially Indian. So he says,

20. Ibid, P. V.
"We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians." In order to show the Indian flavour in speech, Raja Rao has used similes and metaphors which are related to the lives of Indian people. These are also drawn from history and mythology of India. Some of the uses in *Kanthapura* are:

"The rice should be as fine as filigree, the mangoes are yellow as gold, the sky is as blue as a marriage shawl, women are as beautiful as new-opened guavas and as tender as April mangoes, the boys are bright as banana trunks."

Raja Rao sometimes uses direct, literal translations of Indian or Kannada proverbs, idioms and phrases. In *Kanthapura*, he has used these expressions: 'Waterfall Venkamma', 'Nose scratching Nanjamma', 'Front-house Akkamma', 'Temple Rangappa', 'Coffee-planter Ramayya', 'Patwari Nanjundia', 'Gold-Bangle Sommanna', 'Corner house Moorthy' etc. This technique is extended to the expressions and idioms too. 'The sinner may go to the ocean; but the water will only touch his knees', 'You forget it. But this stomach that has borne eight children cannot forget it', 'You are a traitor to your salt-givers', 'Your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village', 'Nobody will believe in such a crow and sparrow story', 'The youngest is always the holy bull' are the literal translations of Indian expressions which create an Indian atmosphere. His imagery touches upon objects and experiences that are distinctively Indian, and faithfully conveys Indian sensibility.

21. Lop Cit.
The canvas of Kanthapura is a crowded one, for the aim of the novelist is to depict a mass movement and a social milieu. By depicting a large number of characters from all sections of village society, in Kanthapura, Raja Rao has shown varied personalities, varied ideologies of human being. Raja Rao, within a simple issue of freedom struggle of India, has shown Indian religions, beliefs, traditions, rituals, customs as well as casteism, untouchability, poverty, superstition etc. very poignantly in Kanthapura.

(ii) The Serpent and the Rope

The Serpent and the Rope, the most appreciated novel of Raja Rao is a major Indian English novel. Lawrence Durrell has highly praised Raja Rao for this novel, "Hurrah for you! You not only do India great honour, but you have honoured English literature by writing it in our language...truly magnificent... packed with the real magic of poetry... a truly contemporary work- one by which an age can measure itself, its values."22. This Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, which took ten years to shape itself, is loaded with many philosophical discussions which made it a complex novel for the readers. Here Raja Rao philosophically discusses on many religions such as: Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Marxism, Nazism, Taoism, Darwinism and other ism. Though, at the superficial level, the union of Ramaswamy and Madeleine and the gradual disintegration of their marriage is the central theme of the novel, it can be variously interpreted as the spiritual autobiography of the writer, a quest for self-knowledge and self-

fulfilment, a conflict of the East and the West; a conflict between Reality and Illusion, the oriental and occidental world view, recreation and glorification of the ancient Hindu mythology, a fictional statement of the philosophy of Sankara's non-dualism, colourful symbolical implication. The novel is in the form of an autobiography of the narrator. As Raja Rao says through Ramaswamy:

I am not telling a story here, I am writing the sad and uneven chronicale of a life, my life, with no art or decoration, but with the 'objectivity' the discipline of the 'historical sciences', for by taste and tradition I am only a historian. 23

C.D. Narasimhaiah has rightly said about the nature of *The Serpent and the Rope*,

"It is not one story, but many, woven round one and often into it, one theme at different levels, a mingling of many cultures, many nationalities (chiefly Indian, French and English though there are also Russian, Spanish and Italian nationalities as well); at least three languages- English, French and Sanskrit. Add to it myth, legend, philosophy, poetry and history- all this rich material has been beautifully and most successfully organized and fused into a single theme by the symbolic imagination of the novelist. It is a novel, but novel conceived as dramatic poem." 24

The search for own's identity of the hero Ramaswamy, and his alienation leads to the novel to the philosophical and sociological direction. The special credit of Raja Rao is that on a simple marriage story, the author has successfully woven all different aspects and has made it philosophical, difficult to understand for the common readers. There is perhaps no exaggeration of the remark of K.R.S. Iyengar when he says, 'if Kanthapura is Raja Rao’s Ramayana, then The Serpent and the Rope is his Mahabharata. If Kanthapura has a recognizable epic quality, The Serpent and the Rope is more than a miniature epic—it is almost encyclopaedic in its scope.' The novel is a passionate examination of the essence of Hinduism and of the formative effect of Hindu philosophy on one’s consciousness. For Ramaswamy, India is ‘a hypostatic presence’. India is different from the other countries like England and France. India is a country of metaphysic. The marriage of Ramaswamy and Madeleine represents the congruence of two contrary world-views, two contrary epistemologies.

In his novel, Raja Rao has fully absorbed and assimilated two cultures-East and West. Though western culture is a major influence in his writings, his Eastern culture predominates over the Western. The encounter between East and West, especially, India, on the one hand, and Britain and America, on the other, is a recurring theme of most of the Indian writers in English.

Denis de Rougemont has highly praised this novel by saying,

"I know nothing in literature that confronts East and West more renderly, more rigorously."²⁶

The East-West problem that is posed in The Serpent and the Rope, has been generally portrayed by the marriage between Ramaswamy and Madeleine. Though they love each other very much, their marriage has not been successful. Through the marriage between an Indian Brahmin Hindu boy and a French girl of five years older, Raja Rao perhaps wants to show the conflict prevailing in East and West. A sociological perspective is also focused in his novel. Raja Rao has shown in the novel that the marriage was not successful not because of the feeble mingling of two different cultures or different nationalities, but because of the lack of understanding. The true marriage is possible only when the ego is dead and when the duality of life is resolved in the one. It has not much to do with the East and West. There are much philosophical aspects in the novel. In this context, K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has said,

"Raja Rao's novel is almost an olla podrida of cultural odds and ends; a conference of scholars, eccentrics and Vedantins; a non-stop philosophical senminor; a Ventriloquist's show.....sometimes the argument makes a series of quick leaps which merely dazzle and confuse."²⁷

The Indian Vedantic vision and the wisdom of age-old Indian scriptures-

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Vedas, Upanishads, The Gita etc. are woven into the very fabric of Raja Rao’s novels.

The narrator hero of the novel Ramaswami, after having some years in foreign countries for his research work, has to return to India on hearing the news of his father’s death. The story starts at this point and shows the deep longings for Indian tradition, a certain kinship with the past when he says, “I was born to India, where the past and the present are for ever knit into one whole experience…….” 28 Born into a Brahmin family, Rama had read the Upanishads at the age of four and been given the holy thread at seven, so that, he could perform the funeral rites for his mother. Rama is an Indian, so the Indianness goes deep into his heart. The eternal Varanashi and the perennial Ganges kindle the divine spirit in him and makes him experience the ecstasy. This ecstasy lifts him beyond the concept of time and place. He feels,

“Benaras is eternal. There the dead do not die nor the living live. The dead come down to play on the banks of the Ganges, and the living who move about, and even offer rice-balls to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city.”29

He was overwhelmed by the purity of Ganges. So he said,

“I dipped in the Ganges and felt so pure that I wondered anyone could die or go to war, that people could weep, or that Hindus and Muslims had

29. Ibid, P. 22
cut each other's throats and genitals. Indeed the refugees in Hardwar, innocent creatures, had seen the barbarities of an alien religion. One could expiate for the kidnapped and the forsaken, dipping and dipping in Ganges by the Himalaya. One could expiate also in the Ganges for the dead.”\(^{30}\)

Rama’s home coming makes him more conscious of India’s ageless tradition, myth, philosophy, in other words, his origins and ‘Indianness’. He comes back to West again with a new vigour of re-vitalised Indian spiritual sensibility. Though he lives in a far off place with a foreign wife, who is so different in her cultural and religious background, he reverently carries his love and adoration for Indian tradition, religion and philosophy everything in West also. For Raja Rao, India is not a place but ever present, ever flowing cultural consciousness that Ramaswamy, the hero of the novel feels everywhere- be it in India or in France. Madeleine who embraces Buddhism and confesses rather pitiably, that she has become a Buddhist only to close to India, Rama clarifies her about the nature of India, by saying.

“India is ‘impitoyable’ ......one can never be converted to Hinduism......It is contiguous with time and space, but is anywhere, everywhere......... It is in knowledge that you know a thing, not in seeing or hearing ....That is India. Jnanam is India.... India is the Guru of the world, or she is not India.......... The sages have no history, no biography ...... India has no history To integrate India into history –is like trying to marry Madeleine. It may be sincere, but it is not history. History, if anything, is

\(^{30}\) Ibid, P. 41.
the acceptance of human sincerity. But truth transcends sincerity; Truth is in sincerity and in insincerity—beyond both. And that again is India.”31

Rama as a devotee of his great country ‘India’, glorifies it, by saying,

“India, my Lord, is a vast and lost land; a beloved land of many mountains and cliffs, of cedars and deodhars, of elephants and tigers, of pigeons that sing and owls that hoot. We grow mangoes in India, Lord Buddha, and the women of my country worship trees.”32

He again says,

“India is the kingdom of God, and it is within you. India is wheresoever you see, hear, touch, taste, smell. India is where you deep into yourself, and the eighteen aggregates are dissolved.”33

Rama tries to tell Madeleine not to preach or fast to get to India, but merely open the door and walk out. Instead of renouncing the world, she should belong to the world and yet be able to transcend it. Madeleine, a staunch Buddhist, does not believe in worldly existence. She does not remain bound to any of the worldly ties, even marriage. The first major change in Rama’s relationship with Madeleine is noticed on his return from India. The confrontation between the East and the West is confined to the Vedantin India of Rama and the compassionate and calculating France of Madeleine. Both of them are highly sensitive representative of their

32. Ibid, P. 388.
33. Ibid, P. 389.
countries’ cultural and metaphysical approaches to life and it influences upon their relationship.

"I knew she would be unhappy first, then angry, knowing that Indians are so undependable. If a European says he comes by such and such a plane he will come by it; if he misses his connection he will sleep in a hotel, and come by the next. But this Indian haphazardness, like the towels in the bathroom that lay everywhere about, was exasperating to Madeleine."\textsuperscript{34}

Madeleine complains to Ramaswamy that he does not understand her. She says to him,

"You will never understand us, the French. There is piety, of course, and compassion. But Lord, there is so much calculation. I tell you, virtue is a part of French bourgeois economy."\textsuperscript{35}

The confrontation between Ramaswamy and Madeleine has been expressed in the following conversation:

"We Europeans believe in being good," she added, thoughtfully. "We Indians in being wise." "Let me remain the Marchesa," she pleaded. "And I the Brahmin, the bull."\textsuperscript{36}

Inspite of having conflict in outlook in the East and the West, the novel shows that true understanding is very essential to be a successful marriage, which is somewhat lacking in the relationship of Ramaswamy and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, P. 58.
\item Ibid, P. 86.
\item Ibid, P. 338.
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Madeleine. Madeleine, for all her profession of Buddhism, has Christian Catholicism in her blood.

"For Madeleine there is an area which is not me that she fills with Christian longings, but she will not admit it. She thinks it is betraying me to praise Saint John of the Cross."  

In their discussions on Advaita philosophy, Rama indulges in a lot of dialectics and wins intellectual victories over Madeleine. "Madeleine was won and so I felt free."  

With the arrival of Savithri on the scene Rama himself seems to undergo a transformation. Daughter of a rich Jagirdar, Savithri is an emancipated modern girl to whom, 'Life was a game, a song.' .... For her everything was gesture and symbol...... and every event a wonder' .......virtue for her was not a principle, a discipline......for her truth was not tomorrow or yesterday........ truth was wherever one is. Ramaswamy on his part, finds more spiritual affinity with Savithri and their friendship culminates in their mystical marriage in London. It is only natural for Rama to give Savithri the toe-rings at the time of their ritual mystic marriage. His own love for Madeleine was purely physical, though with Savithri, it was different. Love can have meaning only if it is grounded on a pure and spiritual basis. Sitting with Savithri in the library, it suddenly struck Rama

37. Ibid, P. 80.
38. Ibid, P. 114.
40. Ibid, P. 126.
41. Ibid, P. 128.
that something has happened to him, 'I felt the presence, the truth, the formula of Savithri. She was the source of which words were made, the Mother of sound.'

Savithri says, 'I'll come when you don't need me.'

She becomes Radha to Krishna, Ossult to Tristan and Savithri to Satyavan. Later on, she leaves for Allahabad at Rama's advice to become Pratap's wife. Thus, her body obsys the karma and her soul remains attached with Rama like Mira's to Krishna. The inner conflict and confusion are more acute in his relationship with Savithri. He can neither lead a happy life with Madeleine nor can accept Savithri. The news of Savithri's marriage to Pratap drives him to Lakshmi's bed. Madeleine wishes to give Rama his freedom, she finally withdraws not only from Ramaswamy but also from the world. Rama feels desperate to think of his rootlessness, in sheer frustration, he weeps and longs for a Guru who can guide him and show him the vision of life. He desires to go in Travancore to find his Guru. The deep intensity to meet his Guru is reflected in the following lines:

"I must go to Travancore. I have no Benaras now, no Ganga, no Jumna; Travancore is my country, Travancore my name. Lord, accept me, vouch that I be where I should. How can I ever, ever tell Georges? Will he understand? Would Madeleine, with her vajras and her charkas, understand this simple, this ever-lit Truth? Truth indeed is He, the Guru. No, He is beyond definition."

42. Ibid, P. 167.
43. Ibid, P. 213.
44. Ibid, P. 405.
The quest for the Absolute alone gives him meaning to human life. The world is illusion, and to be free, one has to progress beyond body and mind. Rama realizes the truth of Yagyavalakya's saying: "The husband does not love the wife for the wife's sake, the husband loves the wife for the sake of the Self in her." The incidents that have occurred to him has made him realize that true marriage is possible when the ego is dead, when the self loses its identity and rejoices in the knowledge of the Absolute. True marriage is a step towards self-realization, as Rama discovers at the end. The main theme of the novel is thus the futility and barrenness of human existence. *The Serpent and the Rope* is impregnated with philosophy generally construed to be Vedantic. The title suggests the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankaracharya. The analogy taken from Sankaracharya, illustrates the doctrine that just as the rope is often wrongly taken to be the serpent, the limited self is often regarded as the individual soul, which is only an aspect of God. It is clarified by the Guru that the individual soul (Jiva) is one with Siva. Referring to this novel, M.K. Naik remarks,

"This Advaitic doctrine of the identity of Jiva and Siva forms, as seen earlier, the very basis of the novel."  

Ramaswamy, who desires to know the reality, seeks Brahman. Born a Brahmin, he says,

"Brahmin is he who knows Brahman."  

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45. Ibid, P. 171.  
Rama has absolute faith in the powers of women. He worships the principle of femininity, without which masculinity is nothing. He sees women as Shakti, as Mother Earth and theme of Shakti worship runs through his novels. There are a number of women characters in the novel and each of them expresses one aspect or the other of Shakti. Women to him are not only the beloved, they can at once be mother, little mother, his sister Saroja, his wife Madeleine and his beloved Savithri. They help him to distinguish between illusion and reality. Rama glorifies the womanhood in *The Serpent and the Rope*:

"Woman is the earth, air, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulations of space, the knowing in knowledge; the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of that which he is, and reminds herself through him of that which she is. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the gods, inherence; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe."

*The Serpent and the Rope* is rich in an array of meaningful symbols. This novel is loaded with many symbols. The title itself bears a symbolic outlook. In the title *The Serpent and the Rope*, the 'Serpent' represents Illusion and the 'Rope' stands for Reality. The name 'Savitri' also

carries a symbolic significance, indicating the paragon of wifely devotion. Just as in ancient Hindu legend, Savithri rescued her husband Satyavan from death, in the novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, Savithri tried to bring enlightenment to Ramaswamy and save him from dying into a purely worldly life. Rama’s union with Savithri is symbolic of the union of ‘Prakriti’ and ‘Purush’. The river or the mountain becomes a symbol of infinite, the Ultimate Reality. Truth is the Himalayas while Humanity is the Ganges. The waves represent the individual soul, which ultimately discovers that it is nothing, but the Ultimate Reality itself. The theme of the novel, the quest for the knowledge of the self, is woven around these symbols. “*The Serpent and the Rope* is a dazzling performance by any fictional standard. Its philosophical profundity and symbolic richness, its lyrical beauty and descriptive power, and its daring experimentation with form and style make it a major achievement.”

In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao has made an extensive use of myths, legends, folklores which heralds ‘Indianness’ to the novel. In this novel, the myths and legends not only substantiate and concretize the spiritual probings of the hero-narrator, Ramaswamy, but also link the contemporaneity with the antiquity. The myth of Radha, Krishna, Siva, and Parvati has been depicted in the novel very beautifully and it denotes Indian sensibility of the writer. The spiritual relationship between Rama and Savithri has been reinforced by the popular and well-known Radha Krishna myth. In a way,

it symbolizes aspiration of a seeker for the absolute. For Savithri, Ramaswamy is the symbol of Krishna and Shiva and in the same way, for Rama; Savithri is the symbol of Radha and Parvati. Savithri, one of the prototypes of wifely devotion, realizes the ultimate truth with the relationship of Ramaswamy, which she did not find in her marriage with Pratap. The myth of Prince Siddhartha and his horse Kanthaka has also been beautifully focused in the novel.

The form of The Serpent and the Rope shows a successful blending of Indian and Western modes. The autobiographical method of narration is a characteristically modern western fictional technique. The Puranic structure of the novel, blending story, philosophy and religion, interspersing of the narrative with verses as in the Sanskrit form, the pithy dialogue on philosophical questions as in the Upanishads are typical Indian elements. Leela Gandhi has said,

"The Serpent and the Rope continues his complex experiments with form and cultural translation, successfully blending elements of the European novel with those of the Indian epic."\textsuperscript{50}

Another marked feature of The Serpent and the Rope is the use of Indian idioms and phraseology and proverbs, translated or transcreated into English. These impart a flavour of Indianness to the novel, for example

\textsuperscript{50} Leela Gandhi, "Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s", Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, ed. An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English (New Delhi : Permanent Black,2003), P. 182.
'Siva's head is the Kailas', 'Moon; moon, my uncle Moon', 'the other house people', 'Moon-Month', 'You can't stitch with a gunny bag needle', 'Brides be Benaras born', 'Shivoham, Shivoham'-enhance the musical and rhythmic quality of the narrative.

The world of *The Serpent and the Rope* is more complex and full of variety in comparison to that of *Kanthapura*, his first novel. *The Serpent and the Rope* has an abundance of Raja Rao's philosophical, metaphysical and religious concerns. It includes the myths and legends and cultures, philosophies and religions of the East as well as the West. It is a cosmopolitan novel. In fact, it can be called an intellectual feast of philosophy and religion. Regarding this novel, E. M. Forster has said,

"...perhaps the best novel in English to come from India."\(^5\)

C. D. Narasimhaiah also experiences a sudden thrill while reading *The Serpent and the Rope*, as he finds the finest and fullest expression of a profound Indian sensibility in it. Raja Rao makes the entire novel as an evocation of the truth that India is an idea and not an area. This evocation becomes more meaningful especially, when the tradition of India and its vitality encounters with the West. All the wisdom of the Indian scriptures—the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*—has been summed up in this novel and presented in the form of the story.


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(iii) The Cat and Shakespeare

*The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), (an earlier version, called *The Cat*, appeared in 1959) is another attempt at philosophical fiction and the novelist has called it 'a metaphysical comedy'. It is more of a fantasy with a lot of philosophical discussions, which are not always assimilated in the main body of the story. Reverence and irreverence, fantasy and reality, mysticism and Mammonism, the past with its age old philosophy and the present of the global war— all are mixed together with the story. The author himself has called it ‘a book of prayer,’ but it is a strange prayer to a strange god, a prayer in which the solemn chants of devotion are mingled with loud guffaws of laughter. Regarding this novel, Raja Rao wrote a correspondent,

“I wanted to publish the book with about 300 blank pages at the end, to show that the real book is five hundred and odd pages, and the reader must fill in the vacant spaces.”

Raja Rao further invites the reader ‘to weep at every page not for what he sees, but for what he sees he sees. For me, it’s like a book of prayer.’ The reader has to discover a great deal between the lines, the reader’s role is significant in this book.

On the single narrative level, the novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* is based on a simple story of a cat and two clerks— Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. Ramakrishna Pai, the narrator of the novel, is a divisional

53 Lop Cit.
clerk at Trivendrum and dreams of building a big house. He left his wife and two children and developed an immoral relationship with Shantha, a school teacher. On the otherhand, his neighbour Govindan Nair is a poor clerk in the rationing office getting only Rs. 45 a month. Nair is a genial soul, a typical South Indian character, intellectual, poor and devoted to philosophical argument. His philosophy of life is that, one should surrender oneself completely to the supreme energizing principle in the universe, which he calls ‘Mother Cat.’ Govindan Nair is accused of corrupt and fraudulent practices in his office. In the meantime, his boss Bhoothalinga Iyer died of heart failure, when a cat sat on his bald head. He threw the whole blame on Boothalinga Iyer by saying that, what he did, was under order from his boss who was now dead. Nair was saved by the cat who created a diversion in the court by jumping here and there. As the judge was handling the paper, a sunbeam from the ceiling fell on the paper and under the light, Boothalinga Iyer’s signature was reaveled. The cat’s wordless evidence saved him. At the end, Nair felt happy, while Ramakrishna Pai fulfilled his ambition of building his house. The story of this novel is, apparently very funny, but has a deep philosophical meaning. Raja Rao through Govindan Nair focuses on a school of philosophy known as Vishist-Advaita. It is a method of achieving the Truth of Ultimate Reality, i.e., becoming one with Brahma.

*The Cat and Shakespeare* is an unusual narrative, a curious mixture of comic fantasy and deep metaphysics. Behind the funny story, it has a deep philosophical implication. However, this novel seems to have baffled some readers who have no knowledge of Vedanta, non-dualism and Hindu scriptures.
But it is true that *The Cat and Shakespeare* is not mere fantasy. Raja Rao is said to have remarked that the story of *The Cat and Shakespeare* is based on certain events in rural life, which he came to know during his stay in the Ashram of his Guruji. All the writings of Raja Rao are part of his sadhana or spiritual experience. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has said in this regard,

“...*Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat* should be viewed as steps- or -paths- toward self-realization. If *Kanthapura* could be described as a *Purana*, as a *Gandhi Purana* and *The Serpent and the Rope* as an epic, a mini-*Mahabharata*..., then *The Cat and Shakespeare* is more like one of the longer *Upanishads*, part narrative, part speculation, and part dialogue or discussion.”  

He again says,

“If Raja Rao has moved from the Puranic ‘form’ to the ithihasic, and from the ithihasic to the Upanishadic, there has been a parrel movement too; from karma in *Kanthapura* to *jnama* in *The Serpent and the Rope*, and on to bhakti-prapatti in *The Cat and Shakespeare.*”

*Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* though written as separate novels in different period of time, in fact, form a meaningful coherent trilogy. In this trilogy, there is no beginning or end, but only continuity, a cyclic order. However, it can be said that the seed of metaphysical quest, sown in *Kanthapura*, grows in *The

54. Ibid, P. 409.
55. Ibid, P. 410.
Serpent and the Rope and blossoms fully in The Cat and Shakespeare. 
Moorthy of Kanthapura is the symbol of ‘Brahmacharya’, the bachelor-hood, 
Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope stands for ‘Grahastha’, the 
householderhood and Govindan Nair of The Cat and Shakespeare represents 
the sanyasa, the sainthood. Moorthy is a man of action and gets his fulfilment 
through political involvement and the self-controlled ‘Satyagrahic’ action. 
Ramaswamy obtains his self-realization through the marital life and intuitive 
understanding of the Ultimate Reality. To Govindan Nair, fulfillment comes 
through the state of ‘Atma-Samarpan’- total surrender like like kitten 
surrenders to its mother cat. Moorthy follows the shadowy Guru, Mahatma 
Gandhi. Ramaswamy constantly longs and searches for the Real Guru and 
meets him in the end, whereas, Govindan Nair realizes the Guru in himself 
and becomes a Guru.

Like The Serpent and Rope, this novel is also loaded with many 
symbols. In The Cat and Shakespeare, the cat is a symbol of the Feminine 
Principle. It stands for the Divine Mother, who protects those who submit 
to her. The relation between God and Man is compared to that between a 
cat and her kitten or to that between a monkey and her baby. The cat in 
The Cat and Shakespeare is the unifying symbol in the novel and is taken 
from Ramanujan’s philosophy of the Vedanta. Nair’s symbol of the cat is 
drawn from Ramanujacarya’s (11th century) philosophy of modified non­
dualism, according to which, man can save himself not through knowledge, 
but through self-surrender. After Ramanuja’s death, this doctrine came to be 
interpreted in two different ways: one, the ‘monkey theory’(markatanyaya)
and the other is the ‘cat-hold theory’ (maijara-nyaya).\(^{56}\) According to the first, the human spirit should actively strive to seek union with God, as the young monkey clings desperately to its mother. The second theory states that man’s surrender to the Divine is total, as he completely surrenders himself to the Divine as the young kitten is lifted by the scruff of the neck by the mother cat. As the cat safely carries its kitten, in the same way, Brahma or the Absolute preserves those who completely surrender to Him. Govindan Nair’s faith in the mother Cat or Divine Grace helps him to cross all difficulties in his life. The ‘house’ also carries another symbol in the novel. The house becomes a symbol of self-perfection where each storey corresponds to a higher qualitative level. The three stories have been likened to the three gunas or qualities: Sattva, Raja and Tama. The first is suggestive of flawless purity that helps man to achieve self-identification and urges man to real happiness and wisdom. Rajas is suggestive of cupidity and attachment. Tamas is suggestive of ignorance, error, sloth, inactivity and sleep. It is through the triumph of Sattva over Rajasic and Tamasic forces, that a man can think of realizing the Ultimate Reality. The investment of money in building the house is symbolic of human values. It is mentioned in the novel “our houses must look like us just our ancestors built temples in the shape of man.”\(^{57}\) The name of the house ‘Kamla Bhavan’ is symbolic of poetry. Kamla and Saraswati are two consorts of Lord Bishnu, preserver of the universe. The ‘sea’ is the symbol of Infinite Reality. The ‘wall’ stands for illusion and ignorance, which

\(^{56}\) M.K Naik, *Aspects of Indian Writing in English* (Madras: Macmillan India Limited, 1979), P. 171.

\(^{57}\) Raja Rao *The Cat and Shakespeare* (Orient Paperbacks, 1996), P. 8.
in the end, Pai is able to cross across. 'Ration shop' in the novel, is the world and also the stage of Shakespeare. The 'Ration shop' is microcosm of the macrocosm. It stands for daily work and routine, for bureaucracy, for dubious compromise and corruption, for arrogance, for hybrid of beliefs and allegiances, for the imprint of colonial rule, omnipresent Britain; a travesty and yet, an epitome of modern India. Moreover, it provides the proper stage for a comedy, serious and grotesque, for all men. It is going to be said, 'life is a ration-shop'. Regarding the use of symbols, M.K.Naik has said, 

"The Cat and Shakespeare rests only on a symbol drawn from the animal world and used on an abstract philosophical level."\(^{58}\)

The addition of 'Shakespeare' in the title is very significant from the view point of the theme and the general tone of the novel. 'Shakespeare' is a patent universal symbol, virtually connected with the theme of the novel. 'Shakespeare' is adapted to the spiritual needs in this novel. Not merely the world of Shakespeare is projected as it is, but possible extension of its frontiers have been ignited by Raja Rao in this novel, so as to give an encompassing view of life. The world of Shakespeare and the Indian tradition are fused to give an electrifying effect throughout the novel. Rajesh k. Pallen remarks, 

"...In The Cat and Shakespeare, the myths and symbols emerge as the creative ode of his technique to convey Advaita- Vedanta- the total

surrender and resignation to the will of God to achieve the ideal of knowledge.”

In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Raja Rao has used mythical elements which have heralded this novel to a great dignity. In a mock-heroic manner, he juxtaposes levity and gravity through his allusion to Kamdhenu, the mythic sacred cow with the power of granting all the wishes. The novelist compares her with the ration office. The ration office which gives the provision of food grains, sugar, rice, oil and other necessaries of life, becomes like a Kamdhenu for poor people. In a digressional manner, in order to shed light on the relationship of Pai and his wife Saroja, he refers to part of Shiva-Parvati myth. He, however, asserts that Saroja, his wife cannot take place of Parvati in his heart. Santha, his mistress occupies a rightful place in the heart of his temple. In the Purans, Lord Shiva and Parvati have been described as engaged in making love seating on Mount Kailash, discussing the complex questions of Hindu philosophy.

Raja Rao’s use of Indian vocabulary, similes and idioms lends local colour to the story. A few examples include: “The name on the boards of the advocates look like coconuts on a tree,” “man has a heart white as rice pod”, “let’s bark some nonsense”. In this novel, there are also some sentences which are charming for their aphoristic brevity, for example, “knowledge only knows”, “For a woman love is not development, Love is recognition”, “The unknown alone resolves the unknown”, “I am empty as a tarmind seed”.

The Cat and Shakespeare is a serious exercise in metaphysical speculation. It is a revelation of the serious through the ridiculous. It seems that the novelist, in order to sustain the interest of the reader, in view of the intense philosophical foundation of the narrative, introduces a few humorous and comic episodes. The novel is stuffed with real-life situations, metaphysics, irony, fantasy and tragic and comic situations. Like The Serpent and the Rope, the philosophical foundation of the novel is quite evident in the title and the epigraph of the novel itself. Raja Rao has made use of the philosophical analogy of cat and kitten to communicate the idea of total surrender to the will and grace of the Divine force. He has successfully and artistically woven the myths, legends, symbols in the narrative to substantiate the metaphysical content of the novel. The world of Raja Rao expands from a remote tiny village Kanthapura to India and outside in The Serpent and the Rope and to the universe of oneness of hell and heaven in The Cat and Shakespeare.

(iv) Comrade Kirillov

Comrade Kirillov is a new novel of Raja Rao, both in theme and technique. There are no chapter divisions in the novel and the plot does not follow a chronological sequence of time and place though semblance of it has been maintained. Though originally written in English, Comrade Kirillov was first published in French, in Georges Fradier’s excellent translation, in La Chatte et Shakespeare Colman Levy, Paris, in, 1965 and the English version represents the revised text. This novel forms a sequel to the early
novels of Raja Rao, viz, *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*, which deal with the quest for Indianness as their theme. Whereas, the novelist explores Indianness in *The Serpent and the Rope* on a personal level, *The Cat and Shakespeare* on a social level, *Comrade Kirillov* discusses this aspect on a political level.

*Comrade Kirillov* is a fascinating story of an Indian intellectual turned communist, who is lost in his quest. The novel *Comrade Kirillov* has only one principal or major character on whom the entire attention of the novelist has been focused. He is the only all-enveloping entity, around whom the other characters move and exist as his dependants. The novel portrays Comrade Kirillov's mind from Theosophy to Communism. He is caught in the mighty whirl of ideological contradictions of the modern world and torn between intellectual convictions and emotional pulls. The author begins the novel by stating that he first met communism in Kirillov, whose real name was Padmanabha Iyer, who was an Indian turned communist. A South Indian Brahmin, he had his early schooling and higher education in India. Then, he came under the magical spell of Theosophy which took him to California coastline, found many spiritually starved souls who pined for the vision of the Messiah. Kirillov's journey was a long one, starting from Theosophy and ending in Communism. As a voracious reader, he wanted to devour all available knowledge on Western thought. England and the Labour Party had a great charm for him. He learnt French to read Fourier and Saint Simon; German to read Karl Marx and Engels. He had great admiration for Lenin and the Russian Revolution, the most remarkable experiment of
those days. An avid reader of books and journals, Kirillov came into contact with people who were sympathetic to India and were the committed members of Labour Party. The interactation with people and reading in the newspapers about elections in England and the Labour Party made him knowledge about the racial discrimination of the Negros which overwhelmed him. He worked for publishers, did translations especially from left-wing publishers. Gradually, he found himself turning away from Theosophy and Gandhism and moving towards Marx and Communism, wherein, he could receive his heart’s desire. The British Museum seemed to have absorbed all his energy. He was almost on the verse of his death because of hard labour and at interminent starvation. In the journey of Kirillov, from India to California, and then to London, followed in the end, to Moscow and Peking, his spiritually hungry soul for searching the reality of his country and the other countries of the world, has been explicit in the novel.

The epigraph to the novel, the treatment of the theme and the portrayal of the protagonist, undoubtedly have revealed the author’s fascination for Dostoevsky in choosing the title and the theme. The protagonist Kirillov shares the traits of Dostoevskyean character. The name of the protagonist as well as the epigraph of the novel, has been taken from Dostoevsky’s famous novel ‘The Possessed’ which deals with the theme of communism and its degradation.

*Comrade Kirillov* reveals Raja Rao’s continuous experiment in narrative technique. In this novel, the first and the main witness narrator is
‘R’ (Raja Rao himself), who is a true Vedantist and a Gandhian. He has a close relation with the principal character Padmanabha Iyer, who later becomes a communist and acquires the name of Kirillov. There seems to be a close resemblance between the protagonist Comrade Kirillov and the novelist in his spiritual quest of Truth. It appears that the novelist through the story of Comrade Kirillov, tells almost his own story, with modifications, and includes as much as possible, his own life, in telling the whole truth. It is not merely the events of life that the narrator recounts, but he tries to find the truth that lies behind them. So the narrator, instead of a straightforward narration of events in their chronological order, narrates through the introspective and analyses innermost thoughts and feelings and the relations of the characters. A.N.Gupta has rightly said,

"Comrade Kirillov, and the novelist in his spiritual quest of Truth, which eventually approximates to an unfolding of a Vedanta- based vision of India and deals with the magnitude, mystery, complexity, philosophy and metaphysics of India along with that of the West from the point of view of one who seeks Brahman and whose sensibility and values are uncompromisingly Indian." 60

It can be said that like The Serpent and the Rope, Comrade Kirillov is also a spiritual autobiography. The second witness narrator of this novel is Irene, the wife of Kirillov. She has recorded events and her impression of her husband, son, Mr. ‘S’ in her diary which falls in the hands of ‘R’,

the principal narrator, that is, Raja Rao himself. As Irene’s diary is incorporated in ‘R’s narration, the two narratives become one and help the reader to comprehend the meaning of Comrade Kirillov’s life and ambitions. This novel, though it is a ‘novelette’, and not a novel proper, has hardly one hundred and thirty one pages. Irene’s diary is introduced on page 94. It dates from July 4, 1944 to January 4, 1949. This diary is significant, as it reveals the character and personality of Comrade Kirillov as she sees it and at the same time, it causes a second demarcation of construction of the plot in the novel. It will be worthwhile to say that there are no chapter divisions in the novel, except only one mark of division on page fifty, just near about half way in the novel. Both the narrators have focused Kirillov’s character. The novel begins with R’s description of Kirillov’s personal appearance. His face is “ancient and enigmatic” and his coat “flapping a little too fatherly on his small, rounded muscles of seating” and his tie has “a praterplus-parenthetical curve, as though much philosophy had gone into its making”. Ambivalence is the keynote of Kirillov’s character. His complexities of mind and thinking have been made apparent by the description of the narrator who calls him a bundle of opposites. Moreover, ‘R’ finds Kirillov, child-like in certain ways. Kirillov is a person who is torn between his intellectual persuits and emotional pulls. Though he rejects Gandhi and makes some unfavourable comments against him, he cannot tolerate even a single word said against Gandhi by others. He adores all that is good and noble in Indian thought and rejects unhesitatingly all that is obsolete and irrelevant in it. Still, Kirillov adores India and feels proud of his heritage. Though he leaves for Moscow
and then Peking, he sends his son to India to know his rich cultural and spiritual heritage, so that his love for India may live through Kamal.

Raja Rao’s work reveals throughout a continuous strain of experiment and a deep knowledge of Indian tradition. Comrade Kirillov is also no exception. Being an ardent lover and reader of books and an expatriate like Raja Rao, Kirillov has a great reverence for Indian tradition, philosophy and literature. His love for his motherland is very intense inspite of living in foreign countries. Like Raja Rao, he has been influenced by both Eastern and Western thoughts, though his sensibility has remained Indian to the core.

Comrade Kirillov deals with a metaphysical, abstruse theme which demands a highly intellectual, well-read reader for its full appreciation. Though this novel has been neglected by most of the western scholars because of the lot of philosophical treatise or lack of understanding the Indian complexion, the fact remains that Comrade Kirillov deserves much more serious recognition as one of the most controversial novels of recent years. A.N. Gupta says in this regard,

“This novel has been instrumental in imparting a much more professional outlook towards literary criticism to the Indian audience; it has also lent a feeling and consciousness that outstanding Indian writers need not imitate the West and Western writers must also realize that an Indian writing in English can greatly expand and perhaps revitalize the traditional tools of the craft of the novelist.”

61. Ibid., P. 179.
Comrade Kirilyv, like other novels of Raja Rao, is also colourful in expressing the mythical technique. The narration of the novel is loaded with myths, legends which help the readers to understand the various characters. The myth of Shiva and Parvati is introduced in the novel as a story told by the narrator to Kamal. References to other myths in this novel relate to Rama and Krishna, Lakshmi, Sita, Kanya-kumari, Ravana, Hanuman and so on. All these references, though digressional, constitute a part of the story and add to its charm. While making a remark about “real man” and “real woman”, Irene gives references to the mythical story of Rama and Sita saying that Rama made the banishment of Sita on the complaint of a washerman about her chastity, despite the proof of purity through crucible of fire. For Rama, his ideals and abstractions were not important part of life and as a king of Ayodhya, he through his action, wanted to present an ideal. Irene feels herself fortunate to have Kirilyv as her husband since like Rama’s, Kirillov’s ideals are also related to the welfare of the people. Sita, though banished by her husband, remained faithful to Rama, likewise, Irene also remains faithful to Kirillov, her husband. Irene also refers to Helen whose shifting loyalties are well-known as her heavenly beauty. In Irene’s diary dated Jan. 3, a reference has been made to the Prince Uttara in the Mahabharata. Prince Uttara, the son of Virata enthusiastically went to rescue the cows, which had been rounded up the Kauravas. He was struck with awe and confusion when he saw a well-equipped army with Bhisma, Drona, Kripa, Karna and Duryodhan there. He shut his eyes with both of his hands and trembled at the very thought of fighting single-handedly with
such a mighty force. This myth has been inter-woven with Satyagrahis saying that the Satyagrahis may shout slogans, but they will not be able to face the mighty British force. The myths of Kanya-kumari, Parvati and Shiva are integral parts of the central theme of the novel. Parvati, charmed by the splendid beauty of the place ‘Kanya-kumari’, decided to make it her permanent abode. She asked her father Himalaya to solemnize her marriage in Kanya-kumari and Shiva also agreed to this proposal. But, Shiva, being lost in meditation, failed to turn up in time which made Parvati very angry and she threw her flowers, fruits, jewels everything to the ocean. Unmarried Parvati ever waits for the marriage with Lord Shiva. Kamal, the son of Kirillov is taken to the pilgrimage of the South of India and at last to Kanya-kumari, through which, the religious and mythical heritage of India is acquainted to Kamal. The myth of Siddhartha has been employed in this novel basically to trace the confused state of Kirillov. Siddhartha’s inner turmoil became so intense that he left his wife Yashodhara and son Rahul, to go forth along, on a quest of truth. Likewise, Comrade Kirillov became restless to know the truth and left his wife Irene (already dead) and his son Kamal. He left not to Bo-tree, but to Moscow for his self-realization through the communist creed. The narrator R, with his heart full of Vedantism, visualizes himself as ‘Kanthaka’, the horse of Gautam, when he left his home to become the Buddha. The narrator is convinced that one day Kirillov’s essential Indianness will certainly shatter his communism, he will not stick to dogma, and he will then truly discover himself like Siddhartha.

In *Comrade Kirillov*, Raja Rao continues his process of
experimentation with language and style. The narrator, in describing *Comrade Kirillov*, rambles incessantly in the Puranic style. There are Socratic questions and answers which are cloaked in tautologies. Rao takes recourse to the device of repetition which lends credit to his Indian proclivity. The repetition of Benaras, Himalayas, the Ganges, Siva and Parvati occur so often in the novel, that they carry more meaning and enhance significance to the novel. Some sentences in the novel have a nice alliterative lilt and mantric quality. There is a glossary and a few scattered footnotes in the novel. This technique provides the readers with elementary knowledge of the Indian terms which prohibits the readers from misinterpretation. "Symbol, myth, poetry and philosophy are so carefully harmonized in *Comrade Kirillov* that it is wrought into a perfect art."\(^{62}\) The special credit of Raja Rao is that he can use myths, legends, symbols, rituals etc. as part of a technical device.

(v) The Chessmaster and his moves

*The Chessmaster and his moves*, another significant novel of Raja Rao was published in 1988. The publication of this novel has won Raja Rao international fame as an outstanding novelist. This novel has won him Neustadt International Prize for literature from University of Oklahoma, U.S.A. In April 1986, two excerpts from the novel were produced in *The Indian Literary Review*. This novel has 708 pages, accompanied by 25 pages of translations and Glossary. It encompasses deep philosophical aspects. Regarding this novel, Edwin Thumboo says,

\(^{62}\) Ibid, P. 183.
"The Chessmaster offers perhaps the broadest, deepest internationalism we have in fiction and, in a sense, enables fiction to catch up with life."\(^{63}\)

*The Chessmaster and his moves* has three parts, viz., Book I "The Turk and the Tiger Hunt", Book II "The Goblets of Shiraz" and Book III "The Brahmin and the Rabbi". The novel presents a vast mosaic of narration, reminiscences, confessions, allusions. This novel deals with the serious thoughts on politics, history, religion, love, death, God and non-duality etc. very deeply. The novelist has used here first person narrative technique and employs retrospective flashbacks, which help in the authentic growth of the protagonist's mind. This device makes protagonist's recollections of his deep relationship with Suzanne, Mireille and Jayalakshmi. He meets Jayalakshmi first, in Calcutta, then Suzanne in Paris, then Mireille, as his circle of friends widens. The novel has an abrupt opening with an interior monologue of Siva, lost in the thought of Jayalakshmi, the most significant woman in his life.

"You remember, J., you said to me. Tell me you need me, and I'll come. I need you now, you know what I mean. I do not truly need you yet I need you. Would you therefore come? Would you return as parrot, betel vine or Bodhisattva. Sometimes I dream of you and call you Kadambri."\(^{64}\)

Sivaram, the central character of the novel, was a strict Brahmin, a mathematician and he tried to combine metaphysics and mathematics.

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Inspired by Ramanujan, the great mathematics, who thought that he was blessed by goddess Nammakal, Sivaram also believed that the goddess was a form of the Chessmaster. Sivaram Sastri was an enlightened person. He was quite hopeful of providing solutions to the mathematical problems, left behind by Ramanujan, unsolved.

_The Chessmaster and His Moves_, the longest of the novels of Raja Rao, presents a unified plot with Sivaram Sastri. The novel though divided in three parts, in terms of chronology, there is no organic difference. The first part of the novel entitled “The Turk and the Tiger Hunt” introduces all the major characters and contains some philosophical discussions of the protagonist-narrator with almost every character in the novel, except Siva’s sister, Uma. The second part of the novel entitled “The goblets of Shiraj” symbolizes Mireille’s physical beauty and Siva’s sexual attachment towards Mireille. The fullness of Mireille’s body, reminds Siva the fullness of Brahman as described in _Brahadaranyaka Upanishad_. The third part of the novel entitled “The Brahmin and the Rabbi” deals prominently with discussions between Michel who is learned and deeply involved in Jewish tradition and Siva Sastri, the Brahmin narrator. Uma, the sister of Siva also figures prominently in the last section of the Book.

Sivarama, the protagonist narrator of the novel, has the relationship with four women-Suzanne, Mireille, Jayalakshmi and Uma. The four women, despite of their attempt to relate with him, sexually or emotionally, only heighten Sivarama’s sense of isolation. They also contribute powerfully and
comprehensively to Sivarama's growth. Suzanna and Mireille provide relief, both sexual and emotional, from the torment of love. His attachment towards Suzanne, unlocks his heart, in an interior monologue, redolent of stream of conscious technique and says:

'She was sure, was Suzanne, that she was my wife, and only wife and no one could ever take her place, however, brilliant or beautiful- no- not even the princess...'Where did you learn all this, Suzanne?'-Why of course, in my past life, for I was your wife,' she assured me, as clearly as though she saw her self walking down an Indian country road, a brass pitcher of water on her head, tall and young, returning home from the village well, chattering away with other half- veiled Indian women.65

Sivarama's relation with Mireille, as that with Suzanne, is complicated by her growing separation from and by Michel's developing interest in her. Sivarama has always found her attractive, with a sharp, lively mind. Mireille's personality, interests, and openness, her intelligence and physical attractiveness strike Sivarama as well as the others.

The third woman in the novel after Suzanne and Mireille, is Jayalakshmi who impresses Siva most. She occupies an exalted position over him. Sivarama's self-inspection and discussions on a variety of subjects are chiefly with and for her. Sivarama's relationship with Jayalakshmi is spiritual; their ideal love is compared with the mythical characters and the bonds between Krishna and Radha, Siva and Parvati, Rama and Sita, Satyavan and

65. Ibid, P. 624.
Savithri. Jaya makes an emotional appeal to Siva, that if she dies, he (Siva) would incarnate as Siva in the temple and their marriage will then be completed. As a Hindu woman, she maintains holiness of the age-old social convention of marriage under Indian ethos. She assures him that she will come back to him in her re-birth. Sivaram finds a kind of celestial happiness in the company of Jayalakshmi

“You are Jayalakshmi, fair with blue veins, and we come to drink of your presence, for hamonoia, for Santam, sukham, nirvalam (for peace, happiness, purity) - for the celebration of mankind.”66

_The Chessmaster and His Moves_ lends an epic grandeur encompassing on one hand, three worlds-India, France and England and on the other, the mind of man. As a writer, Raja Rao’s concern is with the human condition rather than with a particular nation or their group. “It is the history of man in the twentieth century as he moves from the human to the abhuman to find deliverance from the self in the Self. It is in fact, structured as a commentary (bhasya) on Indian esoteric knowledge from the Upanisads down, often expressed in the terse, aphoristic style characteristic of that literature.”67

_The Chessmaster and His Moves_ encompasses more aspects than his other novels, though the tone and tenor of this novel has some similarity in _The Serpent and the Rope_. However, it will be worthwhile to say that _The Chessmaster and His Moves_ is more intricately encompassing than _The Serpent and the Rope_. The special credit of Raja Rao is that he can portray

66 Ibid, P. 145.
the spiritual visions and discuss the philosophical aspects in a very simple language. The house of fiction that Raja Rao has built, is founded on the metaphysical and linguistic speculations of the Indians. In the Indian tradition, the function of literature is perhaps, to enlighten, to open man’s eyes to who he really is. It is this metaphysical bias that distinguishes Indian literature from all others. *The Chessmaster and His Moves* is successful in his attempt in enlarging the account of spiritual fermentation of the Indians. It contains the statement of an explicit metaphysical position. This novel exhibits Raja Rao’s special concern of Advaita-Vedanta without making any specific claims for its preeminence, as compared to other system of thought. Advaita-Vedanta provides the focus for both understanding and assessing what happens in the novel. The concept of God in the novel corresponds to the Advaita philosophy of Sankara. He is beyond our physical senses, because He is nirguna or attributeless and thus indescribable. The spirit of Sankara broods over *The Chessmaster and His Moves*. As an exposition of Upanisadic thought, Sankara formulated his system of Advaita, non-duality.

Like other novels of Raja Rao, *The Chessmaster and His Moves* is also loaded with many symbols. The title of the novel itself bears a symbolic significance. The Chessmaster is an emblem of God and the game of chess is symbolic of the world. The moves made by the Chessmaster are symbolic of the conduct of the drama of life (Lila). The narrator says that life is chess (game or play) and all the occurrences of our life are happened by the will of the Chessmaster, that is, God, the Almighty. Sivarama asserts that the performance in the chess is the inevitable consequence of the karma and thus, the world (Lila) continues. He asks the Chessmaster,
“Would I ever be truly happy? Tell me, Chessmaster, where are you taking me?”

Everything is fixed by the will of the Chessmaster, which is God. The entire war of the Mahabharata between Pandavas and Kauravas and the defeat of the Kauravas at the hands of the Pandavas, was done by the Chessmaster Krishna and it happened according to the will of Him. The human-beings are the puppets at the hands of God or the Chessmaster. The chessboard is a symbol of the playground of Destiny where the Chessmaster plays with human-beings. The narrator, Sivaram Sastri, with Vedantic heritage, is a typical Brahmin wearing a sacred thread. For him, a Brahmin is a symbol of a person who is pure and undefiled both physically and spiritually. Brahmin, for Siva is a symbol of "illumination" because a true Brahmin aspires for salvation, the nirvan through the attainment of knowledge. In the second part of the novel entitled ‘The goblet of Shiraz’, the goblet of Shiraz is the symbol of Mireille’s physical beauty that can intoxicate any person. Though Sivaram has relationship with four women—Suzanne, Mireille, Jayalakshmi and Uma, the relationship or the affinity between Siva and Jaya is symbolic of the non-dual intellectual relationship. Sivarama’s advancement of sexual activity towards Suzanne has symbolically carried an unconscious meaning. At the unconscious level, the sexual activity attempts to erase the duality of the masculine and feminine principles. The sexual union has the implication of re-birth, and through re-birth, of Nirvana. ‘Paris’, the settings of the novel, emerges as a symbol of sage of love and ontological experience. Siva’s sister ‘Uma’ is a symbol of innocence and simplicity. Suzanne’s ill-formed child is a symbol of some spiritual maladjustment.

The mythical technique, adapted to the novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, lends a dignity and a beauty to this novel. The physical separation and the distance between Siva and Jayalakshmi is narrated with the help of the mythical story of Tristan and Iseult with whom Tristan is in love. Though she is not married to Tristan, she is spiritually inclined with him. Likewise, Sastri and Jayalakshmi, though remains unmarried, have a kind of spiritual love between them. The intensity of the love of Siva and Jaya is compared to Cakravaka birds mentioned in Kalidas' *Kumarasambhavam* (VII, 32). As the birds swim in the lake, the short distances appear so big that they cry to get a sight of each other. Like Cakravaka birds, Siva and Jaya are perpetual lovers awaiting fulfillment of love in their future lives. In the novel, the myths of Kanyakumari and Siva and Kali are also described to focus the intensity of the relationship of Siva and Jaya. Raja Rao also refers to the timeless myth of Rama, Sitā and Hanuman. Of the many Hindu myths that are loaded in the novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves*, perhaps the most potent is that of Radha and Krishna. Their relationship epitomizes the highest form of love. R. Parthasarathy in his essay 'The Chessmaster and His Moves: The Novel as Metaphysics', rightly says,

"The Radha- Krishna myth serves as a profound symbol of man's longing for the ultimate reality and functions as a subtext, throwing light on the complexity of love between Sivarama and Jayalakshmi 69.

The structural framework points to his new experiments in the presentation of his theme and philosophy in the novel.

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