

## CHAPTER-III

### Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope

It is universally acknowledged that Raja Rao is one of the most remarkable writers writing in English in the present century. He is one of 'the Big Three', the other two being Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayana. Raja Rao came to light with his first novel Kanthapura. His philosophical cast of mind is evident in this novel also though it deals with the story of Moorthy, the protagonist, in relation to Gandhiji's message and freedom struggle.

The protagonist, Moorthy in Kanthapura, to some extent resembles Raja Rao. In other words, some autobiographical elements can be noticed in this novel also. Sharma, J.P. remarks that "If not in action, Moorthy is certainly Raja Rao in mind and aspiration. In the hands of some lesser novelist, Moorthy would have become a very dashing youth; but in the hands of a truly Gandhian Raja Rao, he is the outcome of an evolution".<sup>1</sup>

His second novel, The Serpent and the Rope (1960) which won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963 is probably the most significant contribution to Indian novel in English. His third novel, The Cat and Shakespeare is a sequel to The Serpent and the Rope. This novel also deals with the metaphysical quest. It shows the next step in his quest for the Absolute Knowledge.

As we have already discussed in Chapter one, an ideal autobiographical novel should embody a spirit of verisimilitude. In other words, the ideal autobiographical novel is a literary endeavour

by which the author draws material from the events and experiences of his own life and tries to convey in a spirit of verisimilitude the meaning of that life.

On the basis of the statement made above, The Serpent and the Rope is an autobiographical novel. The protagonist, Ramaswamy is created in the image of the author. Ramaswamy's life is identical with that of the author. Both of them marry a French woman and go abroad for their higher studies. The most significant aspect of their personality is that they have a philosophical bent of mind. The names of the protagonist and the other characters have a connotative reference to the old myths. Though the protagonist bears the name of Rama, he is Krishna for Savithri who acts as his Radha in the novel.

In fact, this novel is to be studied from different angles. On one plane, the story revolves around Ramaswamy, his wife Madeleine and his spiritual lover Savithri. However, Ramaswamy's quest for Absolute Truth and the philosophical discussion regarding the Self and the Brahman become so dominant that the main story is driven into margin. In other words, his philosophy transcends the main story of Ramaswamy. That's why Dr. M.K. Naik appropriately calls The Serpent and the Rope 'a semi-autobiographical novel'.

In his meeting with Asha Kaushik, Raja Rao himself makes it clear that The Serpent and the Rope is partly an autobiographical novel. To put it in his own words: "True, I was in France for

a long time, almost for two decades. Many of the incidents you find in The Serpent and the Rope are what I actually experienced".<sup>2</sup> Further, when asked whether he has moved from the 'concrete' to the 'abstract' in The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao confesses that "In Kanthapura, the concrete was visible. It was the British. When the British were gone, I went back to what was my own-self - the philosophical".<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that The Serpent and the Rope is deeply rooted in Indian philosophy. It depicts man's quest for self-realization. For the attainment of self-realization, Rama in the beginning wishes to pursue the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankara. His references to his 'Upanishadic ancestors' like the sage Yagnavalkya and other sages who attained Truth, and his attraction for the Vedantic classics like the Brahma Sutra and the Upanishads show his interest in the Vedantic philosophy which form an integral part of Indian metaphysical tradition.

The Serpent and the Rope portrays the meeting of the East and West on the most intimate plane through the story of Rama, an Indian, and Madeleine, a French girl; both meet at a university shortly after World War II. This union is the central theme of the book. The story goes on two lines, one is the story of the protagonist Ramaswamy and the people who come in contact with him, like Savithri, Little Mother, Saroja, Catherine, Georges, Madeleine etc. and the other the discourses of vedantic philosophy which occupies much space in the novel.

Ramaswamy is the son of a Brahmin family from the South in Mysore State. Like Krishan in Seven Summers, Rama also goes to France to do research in History (Albigensian heresy) and then to England. The novel is set in three countries: France, India, and England. In France he comes across Madeleine, a lecturer in History who falls in love with him and their love culminates in marriage. After achieving his doctorate, Rama has a plan to return to India along with Madeleine. But the course of their marriage refuses to run smoothly, from the beginning. Their first child dies. Then Ramaswamy rushes to India after receiving the news of the serious illness of his father. Here, in India we find a gradual change in his attitude.

In order to perform the obsequies of his father, he goes to Banares along with his step-mother, Little Mother. During his pilgrimage to Banares he becomes aware of his Indianness. Since then he becomes introspective. He realizes that he has to shoulder the responsibility of the family. Rama is very sensitive from the beginning of the novel as he is an orphan. So he craves for maternal love. "I was born an orphan, and have remained one. I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel-rooms and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother."<sup>4</sup>

Now his step-mother dotes on him with abundance of love. Though young, Little Mother achieves mental maturity after the death of her husband. Rama notices this sudden change in

her. When they started their journey to Benares "she had left such a helpless and broken-down woman - almost a girl - and now she returned with natural dignity. She walked as though space was not something unreal and undependable, but this was her own earth, her own home, her own back-yard".<sup>5</sup>

Rama has a fascination for Indian womanhood and Indianness. He now understands "why the Indians gave such beautiful names to their women, and told us how Malavika when she poured water made the asoka flower, or Shakunthala the Karnikar blossom. What a deep and reverential mystery womanhood is".<sup>6</sup>

Rama then meets Savithri. But she doesn't impress him in the first meeting. She is a modern and unorthodox lady who smokes cigarettes. But "beneath Savithri's militant modernism lies a spirit kindered to his own - a spirit Indian to the core".<sup>7</sup> She makes a greater impact on his life than his wife Madeleine.

After performing the obsequies of his father, he returns to France with the toe rings of his own mother which Little Mother has given him as her parting gift and her blessing to her daughter-in-law. In the Indian context toe rings are the symbol of the continuity of the family tradition. Saroja also gives him a Sari as a present to Madeleine. Now Madeleine is ready to become the wife of Rama but she refuses to be one of the members of his family. Therefore, he doesn't offer her the toe rings. Later, Madeleine takes much interest in Buddhism and Rama in Hinduism. Their separation is

completely marked when Savithri and Rama get united in a symbolic ritual marriage in London. Now Rama offers his mother's toe rings to Savithri. Being completely frustrated after the death of her second child, Madeleine takes to Buddhism. The Vedantic concept which Rama believes and Savithri understands is not for Madeleine. Total devotion of wife to her husband is the ideal of Indian wife. Madeleine doesn't understand the Indian concept of wife. She is in quest of self-identity. Therefore, the study of Buddhism becomes "all absorbing spiritual quest"<sup>8</sup> for her.

Instead of writing a separate book on Indian philosophy, Raja Rao has adopted the form of a novel because Vedantic philosophy or Advaitic philosophy is central to his consciousness and his identity. And that is why the hero of the novel and the author become indistinguishable. At the very beginning he has set the philosophical tone. "I was born a Brahmin - that is, devoted to Truth and all that. 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahma', etc. etc. ..."<sup>9</sup>

The story of The Serpent and the Rope is not a straightforward one with a single theme and a well-marked form. It is full of reflections on diverse subjects. Raja Rao himself said in a letter to M.K. Naik that the novel "is to be taken like all my writings as an attempt at a Pauranic recreation of Indian storytelling: that is to say, the story as story is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached ... many other stories, fables and philosophical disquisition, like a mala".<sup>10</sup> This statement is an emphatic assertion of the fact that the novel subserves the author's

impose of displaying the writer's proclivity to philosophical disquisition and commitment.

In the novel itself the protagonist, Rama makes it clear the intention of writing this book. "I am not telling a story here, I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle 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."<sup>11</sup> By this Raja Rao means to say that he writes not only about the European historical (background) setting of the story, but also about his personal life from a historical standpoint. As the novel is written from the first person point of view, it expresses the narrator's feeling and thoughts and his vision of the world outside him. Rama takes interest in non-dualistic philosophy. For him all phenomena are unrealities and the only real reality is the Brahman which dwells in our selves. Yet, Rama doesn't deny significance to these appearances. Though the appearances are illusory, they do bear a relationship to ultimate Truth or Reality. This seems to be Raja Rao's view of the world, and he makes his task to demonstrate this relationship. Thus The Serpent and the Rope is a journey of the soul towards self-realization in the context of East-West philosophical confrontation. The epigraph written at the very beginning of the novel speaks volumes. 'Waves are nothing but water. So is the sea'. Similarly, Rama argues that individual soul is nothing but the Brahman. The major struggle of Rama, therefore, is to get out of himself.

David McCutcheon takes an exception to The Serpent and the Rope being called a novel in the traditional sense of the term; but we should remember that Raja Rao deals as much with philosophical matters as contingent reality. At first, Rama, the man falls in love. It means that initially his ideals are worldly enough. He marries Madeleine and hopes to have comfortable and quiet life of the university teacher. Rama says, "Once my doctorate was over, I would take Madeleine home, and she would settle with me".<sup>12</sup> But there comes a turning point in his life when he returns to India after the death of his first child. With his relationship with Savithri Rama becomes aware of his true quest. It makes "Rama fully and truly conscious of his true spiritual heritage, and his love for her becomes a stepping stone to his quest for the ultimate realization of Truth. Savithri, in this sense, becomes a Guru to him, before he sets out to seek his Guru proper in the end".<sup>13</sup>

In his interview with Asha Kaushik, Raja Rao himself explains that "The Serpent and the Rope is, primarily, a novel of 'quest for the absolute'. It could happen to anyone. It is something that is timeless. ... Indian philosophy is rich and profound. Our philosophical roots are very strong; much stronger than those of the West".<sup>14</sup>

The serpent and the rope are used as metaphors which stand for illusion and reality. Ramaswamy views the world thus: "The world is either unreal or real - the serpent and the rope ... You



look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent - you are - the rope is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, "Ayyo! Oh ! It's the serpent! "One the Guru - brings you the lantern, the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. "It's only the rope". He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent".<sup>15</sup>

What Rama does here is to discuss the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankaracharya. We mistake rope for serpent. It so happens because of our ignorance of the rope, and the rope appears to be a serpent. Similarly, according to Raja Rao, we should regard self not as the individual soul but the Brahman, the Absolute Truth.

Rama is left entirely unattached at the end of the novel. Now the quest theme which runs through the whole narrative can be seen from the ending of the novel. Rama writes in his diary: "No, not a God but a Guru is what I need. 'Oh Lord, my Guru, my Lord' - I cried. 'Lord, Lord, my Guru, come to me, tell me; give me Thy touch, vouchsafe', I cried, 'the vision of Truth. Lord, my Lord'.<sup>16</sup> Rama now needs nothing but his Guru to guide him in attaining the Supreme Reality. In this way finally "Rama decides to go to his Guru who alone can destroy his ego and make him fit for an eternal marriage with Savithri which could bind her to him with imperishable love of Radha for Krishna. True marriage is thus a mating of two souls which is only a preparation for

the ultimate union of the soul with God".<sup>17</sup>

The Serpent and the Rope, thus reveals the tragedy of the modern man who is dissatisfied with the world and is unable to seek everlasting happiness. In this context, C.D. Narasimhaiah pertinently remarks that:

*This novel shows - the essential Indian way - the predicament of all of us, regardless of the countries we belong to, East or West ... the Indian way commends the meditation of the Guru or the spiritual teacher, who alone can see us through the flux of life.*<sup>18</sup>

On the superficial level it is a tragic exploration of a failing marriage. Their marriage ends in divorce. Rama feels himself drawn towards Hinduism and Madeleine, towards Buddhism, it is so because, their cultural and spiritual preoccupations are totally different. Both Rama and Madeleine are in search of their separate identities. And thus search for identity is modern man's thematic preoccupation or even obsession. In the twentieth century man's life has become more complex than it was before. So the modern man is in search of his own identity. No wonder if it is reflected in literature. On the basis of this, Brij Bhalla states that, "The quest for identity has become a universal theme of modern literature. Modern man finds himself enmeshed in the whirlwind of rapid technological and socio-economic changes and the result is alienation and confusion of values".<sup>19</sup>

The focal point of this novel is to identify the self and

one should not mistake the rope for the serpent. Narasimhaiah rightly comments on the central theme of this novel. He says that "Man must learn not to mistake the relative for the Absolute, the moment for eternity, the particular with the universal, ... the rope for the serpent. Only that knowledge is knowledge which makes for this discrimination ... the end of all earthly endeavour is that Knowledge is the Self".<sup>20</sup>

The Serpent and the Rope presents the total vision of life. The rich heritage of the Indian consciousness is portrayed in this novel through numerous stories from Indian mythology (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata), history and folklore. Here, Raja Rao tries to connect the past and present, the primitive and the modern and creates timelessness.

As a matter of fact, the autobiographical novelist should present the truth of his life in the artistic framework of the novel. Here, in The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao portrays the life of Ramaswamy and his non-dualistic philosophy. The factual experiences of Ramaswamy and his philosophy of life are fused together. Therefore, the factual experiences are philosophized.

The contingent reality described by Raja Rao in the novel is so enriched with details not only of the situations and places, but also the details of ancient Indian tradition imbued with the quest philosopher and thinker. In The Serpent and the Rope Raja Rao has included Sri Sankaracharya, a renowned Indian philosopher, Yagnavalkya,

Mahatma Gandhi, Gautama Buddha and mythological figures like Lord Krishna, Durvasa, Dharamraj etc. who are well known for their views on life, tradition and culture of India. The main purpose in making use of these personalities is just to highlight the central theme - the search for the Absolute Truth.

Apart from this, Raja Rao makes use of digressions like, stories, folklores and legends to explain the central theme. The story of the princess who comes out of the pumpkin and leads the young prince to his glorious destiny; of Buddha who leaves his Kingdom for the attainment of eternal truth of life; of Ishwara Bhatta and his family; of the good man who tried to cover the whole earth with leather to protect himself from the burning heat of the sun; of the poor Brahmin of Benares carrying his own dead child on his shoulder to float in the Ganga; of Tristan and Iseult; of Radha-Krishna and Durvasa and many other stories that throw light on the central theme of the novel. In fact, "each of the stories delightful, poignant and elevating, but having a value and a significance seen against the main theme of the The Serpent and the Rope, itself a popular myth but most artistically elucidated in the course of the novel".<sup>21</sup>

The Serpent and the Rope is also a sustained piece of symbolism. In this novel symbols are used to lay stress on Love, ritual marriage between Rama and Savithri. Their union represents self-realization. The coronation of queen Elizabeth is also symbolic. It is the symbolic of the glorification of the feminine principle.

As for the spiritual marriage of Rama and Savithri is concerned, Rama stands for the individual Self and Savithri, for the power of devotion. In addition to this, the holy places like Benares, the Himalaya, the river Ganga are symbolically used. The rope in the title and the sea in the epigraph stand for the Absolute Truth; on the other hand, the serpent represents illusion and the waves in the epigraph stand for the individual soul which is the real Self. Of all, the Savithri-Satyavan symbol is significantly used in The Serpent and the Rope.

This mythicized worship of husband and wife has its parallel in an actual ritual which is still widely practised in India. M.K. Naik is perfectly right when he says that "this interpretation of the Savithri legend is in line with the symbolism with which Sri Aurobindo has invested the age-old story in his great epic Savithri. Here, Satyavan is truth, married to Savithri who represents love and the power of devotion. ..." <sup>22</sup> Thus The Serpent and the Rope is replete with rich symbols, legends, and myths. That is why Dr. M.K. Naik calls it "a kind of modern Indian Mahapurana (Major Purana) in miniature. It shows the Puranic blend of different subjects, motifs, and techniques, though naturally on a much reduced scale". <sup>23</sup>

S.C. Harrex argues that The Serpent and the Rope "explores a large number of the great themes of literature. Simply to list these themes gives some idea of the remarkable aspiration underlying the novel, metaphysical conjuncture concerning God, Truth, Immortality,

Death, Time, Eternity, Duality, Non-duality, the nature of illusion and reality ... the meaning of marriage, cultural tradition and family life, holiness, happiness, sorrow, the sainthood of natural living, the meaning of history, science, religious experience; the meaning of India, the Ganges and Benares, the meeting of east and west ... the role of the spiritual friend or guru".<sup>24</sup>

Now, H.C. Harrex compares The Serpent and the Rope with Moby Dick, a classical novel so different in kind. The protagonist of Moby Dick, Ishmael is also a wanderer like Rama. In both the novels we find the first-person narrator who assume mythological names.

In spite of some of the differences, Westbrook compares The Serpent and the Rope with two other great philosophical novels - Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg and Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, a book Raja Rao himself admired most. Westbrook argues that there are some similarities in the material and the events in Mann's and Raja Rao's novels. Westbrook states that both the protagonists Han and Ramaswamy suffer from tuberculosis; therefore both of them seem to be very sensitive. Both become involved in erotic adventures; both hold the women in high esteem. But the only difference is that Han's adoration of woman is physical while Ramaswamy's spiritual. Both have fleeting visions of a supreme bliss.<sup>25</sup>

Though The Serpent and the Rope seems to lack fictional elements like action, outer conflict of a character, suspense etc.,

it is a quite successful novel in the Indian context. To quote Westbrook:

*It must be remembered that among western readers and critics it is axiomatic that action and conflict are indispensable to fiction but that Raja Rao's philosophy denies the reality of conflict and action, which he must therefore, strive to de-emphasize - an effort in which he is quite successful.*<sup>26</sup>

Secondly Westbrook compares The Serpent and the Rope with The Brothers Karamazov. He says that both these novels are philosophical. Alyosha Karamazov - a passive character - has much in common with Ramaswamy. Like Rama, Alyosha is also proud of the traditional orthodoxy of his country. Raja Rao is greatly influenced by Dostoyevsky's essential religiousness.

It should be noted that generally critics argue that The Serpent and the Rope deals with the East and West encounter. But the fact is that Non-dualistic philosophy addresses itself to unity, harmony rather than to diversity. In this context, Westbrook makes it clear that "Ramaswamy's scholarly research is directed to establishing a unity rather than a duality as regards East and West. Hence he finds that the Cathars, on whom he is writing his dissertation, had their spiritual origins in Buddhism and Hinduism".<sup>27</sup>

Another important theme of the novel is sex relationship. Sex may be said to be the most materialistic source of happiness. In this sense Ramaswamy is very candid and convincing. In the same line P. Dayal also states that Raja Rao emphasizes the importance

of sex as a physical necessity and in attaining the self-realization. In this regard, Dayal asserts:

*The erotic motif gets prominently etched as Ramaswamy exalts sex and perceives truth in the physical union of man and woman; and the truth is realized through the acceptance of the woman who is not for one life but for all lives. He, therefore, proclaims to take his eternal companion Savithri to God as he presses her against him even more tenderly and she falls into his lap. Sex is also the source of pleasure and ecstatic bliss.*<sup>28</sup>

Dayal further contends that since Raja Rao emphasizes the sexual pleasure as a source towards self-realization, he denounces Nazism as he thinks that Nazism upholds the "He-principle". On the contrary, Rao admires the Jews and Chinese because they uphold the utility of sex in self-realization. Thus the metaphysical proposition runs parallel to the erotic motif in the novel. On the basis of Dayal's argument we can say that Rama perceives Truth in the physical union of man and woman. By citing the example of husband and wife losing their separate identity in their mutual embrace, Rao quotes Yagnavalkya in the novel. "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."<sup>29</sup>

That Rama sometimes indulges in sexual pleasure, particularly with Lakshmi seems convincing when we take him as man. Then he recalls the story of Gautama renouncing the pleasure of





world in order to seek salvation. No doubt, he commits follies but very honestly he confesses his guilt; therefore it seems to be authentic.

As far as characterization in The Serpent and the Rope is concerned Niven Alastair and P.P. Mehta are of the opinion that the characters portrayed in this novel are unrealistic as they seem to be engaged in intellectual discussion. Mehta argues that:

*All characters run in the same groove, think on the lines of Raja Rao and have the very accent of his voice. They are highly unrealistic. ... The women characters all argue the same way, take the same interest in Rama's philosophical discussions and are hence cast in the same mould.*<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the characters in The Serpent and the Rope are well developed. French women are portrayed more concretely than their Indian counterpart. The characterization of Little Mother, Madeleine, Tante Zoubie, Catherine seem to be authentic. Raja Rao's character's participate in an Indian mythology. This mingling of legendary, religious heroine of the past with real and fictional figures of the present is fruitful only if one's concept of the relationship of individual characters to plot and structure in the novel is clear.

Little Mother is a significant creation of Raja Rao in The Serpent and the Rope. She exemplifies the mother principle. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly comments, "Little Mother's strength lies in her unconscious and unquestioning identification with a set of ancient values".<sup>31</sup> Little mother's deep and firm belief in ancient religion

and spiritual heritage offers her inner strength and moral courage to overcome the misfortunes and miseries. Rama compares her inner harmony with mother Ganges. In spite of her own plight and sorrow, she takes care of Rama, though he happens to be her step-son. Though minor, the character of Little Mother is remarkably portrayed. It is in fact, to use Narasimhaiah's phrase 'a triumph of the creation of character'.

Savithri's character has a symbolic significance. Savithri symbolizes as Radha who vows to follow her Lord Krishna, here Ramaswamy from birth to birth. Rama weds with her symbolically in London. She worships Rama ritualistically washing his feet with 'Kumkum' and offering him 'Arathi' with camphor censer, placing her head on his feet. This suggests a mystical marriage of them.

In this regard, M.K. Naik points out the objection raised by the critics. "A far more serious objection is that The Serpent and the Rope is a sentimental book. The episode in which Savithri actually does puja to Rama when they meet in London has, in particular, struck some Indian critics as smacking of a cheap film trick."<sup>32</sup> To this Raja Rao replies in the interview with Asha Kaushik, "Even in London she (Savithri) remains an Indian. It is an emotional situation. When she meets Rama, she becomes herself. ... It is perfectly natural. I have experienced that. It is very authentic".<sup>33</sup> Here, we have to take into account a warning given by Avrom Fleishman that the author should resist the temptations to 'self-magnification' and 'extravagant self-denigration'. We can say that Raja Rao has created in Savithri

a heroine full of complex intellectual and emotional layers.

Like Rama, Savithri and Saroja also face the identity crisis. Both are educated. In this connection, Brij Bhalla says:

*Both (Savithri and Saroja) refuse to accept the traditional roles assigned to Indian women. In the end both accept the traditional destiny. But in the case of Saroja the conflict is resolved by traditional authority, and her revolt fails for lack of conviction and courage. But Savithri's quest assumes the symbolic and mythical proportion of an epic character.*<sup>34</sup>

The character of Madeleine is fully realized. She is interested in Cathars as a research subject because she hopes to trace the origin of the Holy Grail. Touch is always distasteful to her. She likes the untouching Cathars. The course of the marriage of Rama and Madeleine doesn't run on smooth line. Being aware of their different cultural, national identity, they attempt to synthesise the value and traditions and try to give a double identity, national and cultural, to their son Pierre-Krishna. She tries to know and understand India, Rama and his philosophy. She wonders that Indians are sentimental about the invisible while Europeans about the visible. She loves Rama but is confused. "Whether anyone could love a thing so abstract as Rama".<sup>35</sup> All she knows about India and Benares is the bits of floating human flesh and the pyres of the dead.

Madeleine is attracted towards Buddhism. And this is

the central theme of the novel. The major difference between Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta is that according to Sankara there are no selves but only Self, and the world which is apparently perceived is an illusion. But Buddhists hold that the world is real. Therefore, "the marriage fails not because Europeans and Indians can never understand each other but because the two parties stand for different metaphysical system."<sup>36</sup>

The divorce episode is artistically portrayed. Generally divorce takes place because of tension between a husband and a wife. But in this novel, there are no scenes of marriage conflict, no harsh words. On the other hand, Rama is on good terms with Madeleine. Yet their nuptial relationship comes to an end without a conflict.

Madeleine is a typical emancipated westerner. She craves for disinterested devotion to any cause. She is capable enough to choose her own course of life. Raja Rao displays great perception in delineating Madeleine's character with such deep sympathy and understanding. Contrasted with Little Mother and Savithri, Madeleine emerges as truly emancipated and independent intelligent woman.

In fact, Rama is related with all women characters in different situations. The women Rama loves and befriends, help him to keep the novel on human plane, though he naturally intellectualizes all his experiences with them.

In The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao, as is his attitude towards women, glorifies and idealizes the feminine principle. Rao's glorification of the feminine principle as P. Dayal asserts, is more in line with tantric philosophy. For Rama womanhood is sacred, 'a deep and reverential mystery'. Rama worships women in the form of Little Mother, Saroja - his sister, Savithri - his intellectual companion, and Madeleine - his wife.

Finally, the novel ends with Rama's search for a Guru who will guide him. Therefore, he goes to Travancore to meet his Guru. "Rama's journey", says G.S. Amur, "doesn't end with Savithri. ... The end, which is in a very real sense a new beginning, is reached when Rama discovers his Guru. Appropriately enough the terms in which the discovery is presented suggest that it was for Rama an experience outside time and space."<sup>37</sup>

Mulk Raj Anand, being a social realist would not be happy with such a novel as The Serpent and the Rope, and calls Raja Rao 'an anti-novel-novelist'.<sup>38</sup> However, P.C. Bhattacharya defends Raja Rao by stating that The Serpent and the Rope "is a novel in the western tradition in so far as it has a recognisable story, well-rounded authentic characters, and depiction of social settings. But because of its very nature it is not a social criticism or a psychological analysis".<sup>39</sup>

M.K. Naik and C.D. Narsimhaiah also accord a distinctive

place for this novel in Indo-Anglian Fiction. Narsimhaiah, for instance, considers The Serpent and the Rope a major fictional work by any standard and shows how it stands apart with its wider and higher ranges, even from some of the best western classics. He rightly remarks that "here at last was the finest and fullest expression of a profound Indian Sensibility".<sup>40</sup>

To sum up, The Serpent and the Rope is a very fine example of the autobiographical novel. In it, we find a real blending of the autobiographical elements and fictional impulses. In other words, Raja Rao's hero is almost a photographic replica of his creator, and his preoccupations are identical with those of the author's, as we know him. In this sense, The Serpent and the Rope may be said to be the finest example of this genre.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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