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THE SEARCH FOR THE GURU IN RAJA RAO'S  
THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE

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**Abstract**

The research deals with Raja Rao's novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, and the attempt of its protagonist, Ramaswamy, to find a resolution to his insistent questioning about the reality of existence. His search for his identity comes out of experiencing the inner struggle between two forces : the tradition of his orthodox Brahmin family, and the new values of the post-independence society. Living the act of questioning the rituals creates in him a craving towards establishing a positive philosophy of life. The state of restlessness leads him to Europe to study history. He comes back to his native country as a university professor to live a peaceful life with his French wife. But his contact with the European culture originates in him the quest for truth through looking for a spiritual guide. The struggle he experiences as a consequence of living the contradictions between the European tradition and the Indian tradition reflects itself clearly on his personal life particularly his marriage. It initiates in him a feeling of loss after his separation from his wife and it subjects him to a mood of philosophical contemplation. Going in an illusionary world he realizes that knowledge is the only way to truth which he can attain with the guidance of the spiritual guru.

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is based on its protagonist's reminiscences of his life-journey from India to Europe and back to India. It has got a circular structure. Its first section comes chronologically after its final one. In the first section Ramaswamy, the protagonist, shows an obsession with mystery, religious orthodoxies and rituals asking serious questions concerning the reality of existence: "was I really called Ramaswamy, or was Madeline called Madeline?"<sup>1</sup> In the early stages of his life he reveals a distrust in the social and religious rituals of his Brahmin tradition of marriage and death:

Whenever I stand in a river I remember how when young, on the day the monster at the moon and the day fell into an eclipse, I used with tile and kusha grass to offer the manes my filial devotion...because my mother was dead and I had to perform her funeral ceremonies, year after year-my father having married again-so with wet cloth and an empty stomach, with devotion, and sandal paste on my forehead, I fell before the rice-balls of my mother and I sobbed. (p.7)

Ramaswamy descended from a Brahmin family that witnessed the fall of the Hindu power when the Hindu empire was defeated by the Muslims. The fall is indicated in the novel by the difference between the grandfather who is presented as a spiritual authority of Hindu wisdom, and Ramaswamy's father who shows tolerance in performing the tradition rituals, especially concerning the arrangements of the funeral of Ramaswamy's mother: "Why give importance to unimportant things? God is not hidden in a formula, nor is affection confined to funeral ceremonies. But what you are. I like the way you go about thinking on the more serious things of Vedanta." (p.19) Ramaswamy's father is, in Paul Sharrad's words, "the child of an age of transition."<sup>2</sup> The knowledge he has got through his study in Europe never helps to free him from clinging to ritual performance and he never benefits from it to enjoy the festival of life. Being a Brahmin descending from a Northern Indian dynasty with Southern register, Ramaswamy comes out with a sort of an attitude similar to those of the Anglo-Indian in their colonial milieu. His pride of the

culture of North world infuses him with a view of looking down upon Southern tradition. Yet he admires the world of Dravidia with all its religious and social heritage. He transcends the pride he has for both worlds into a spiritual model of Hindu culture, a model in which various constituents of Indian philosophy are blended together as Shyamala A. Narayan describes his approach of the feminine principle when he says:"For Rama the Feminine is not only the Maya of Advaita; it is also the Sakti of Tantric Advaita, the Prakriti of Samkhya... ." <sup>3</sup> Ramaswamy's concept of the duality of the Indian philosophy is based on Sankaracharya's illusion to Maya which he considers neither real nor unreal(neither a serpent nor a rope). He attempts to attain a unified orthodox tradition through blending the contradictory aspects of the cultural framework. It is an illusion he chooses to be an escape from emotional distress.

Ramaswamy is torn between two forces, the one of his Hindu tradition of his orthodox Brahmin family who encourage him to identify himself with the provincial culture , the other represented by the post-independence society which entangle him with its perplexities. India as it comes on the tongue of one of the French characters, "has the wisdom of the ages."(p.232) Ganges, elephant, and bull are taken to be mystic symbols in the novel. Mysticism is of an appeal in India and it is the believers in these symbols who carry the vitality and not the stone that composes them. <sup>4</sup> At the same time , India's tradition and morality are looked at by the hero as to be engulfed with meanness and ugliness. He sees in the marriage of Saroja, his sister, an example of the squalidness of the tradition and the sordidness of the morality of the feudal system.

But India is the country of contradictions. The hero says:"We give holy names to our cows and we starve them."(p.318)India is in the grip of metaphysical continuity whereas modernization is penetrating to its core. Ramaswamy rejects the present India believing in the future one: "I hated this moral India. True, Indian morality was based on an ultimate physic. Non-violence, said Gandhiji, is active, heroic. We must always conquer some land , some country. Ignorance, pusillanimity, ostrich-virtue is the land we should liberate."(p.354)

The process of questioning the attitudes of the ritualistic life at home originates an awareness towards finding a positive philosophy of life: 'There must be a way out , Lord, a way out of this circle of life, rain, sunshine, autumn, snow, heat and the rain once more, in gentle flower-like ripples on the Ganges.'"(p.234) As an intellectual, Ramaswamy expresses a state of restlessness which leads to his travel to Europe to study history. His stay in Europe, interrupted by his visits to India, is considered " a stage in his spiritual evolution, an objectification of his restless intellect."<sup>5</sup> He alternates between India and Aix-en Province recurrently visiting Paris, London, Cambridge, Oxford and other European places. Though very Hindu in blood as Brahmin, he transcends all the cultural barriers of his native country absorbing the cultures of the European countries he visits. He marries Madeline, the French scholar of history, whom he may unconsciously take as "a bridge between the East and the West."<sup>6</sup>

Ramaswamy's conflict is somewhat alleviated by being overwhelmed by a grander one, that of the East-West colonial conflict. The pain of his diseased lungs is alleviated by the British physicians, in Catherine and Georges, his wife's relatives, he finds support he doesn't find everywhere, and his friends devotees from different nationalities offer a guidance in his quest for his spiritual guru.

The major concern of the novel is that of marriage and love with the hero's dream of coming back home as a university professor and of living peacefully with his French wife. But his contact with the European tradition originates in him an awareness that is to look for his guru, in other words to search the roots of his cultural identity.

India which stands for the East in the novel is set in contrast to France which Rao uses to represent the West. Unlike France , India is described in metaphysical terms. It becomes holy "as though gods had peopled the land with themselves."(p.248) India "is not a country like France or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic." (p.380) In India , the past and the present are forever knit into one whole experience. The hero's grandfather rejects the idea that his son-in-law travels abroad. The hero revolts against the ancient traditions that the mind questions.

The differences between the East and the West also manifests themselves through the details of everyday life. The attitude towards a cow in India and in Europe is to show the sentiment of the one and the rationality of the other. The cow for the Indians is that of the reverent-like mother: "I bought some kunkum one day and decorated the faces of all the cows in a temple," (p.27) and for the Europeans it is a milk and a beef yielding animal.

Modernity of India remains on the surface. It doesn't dig deep into the Indian culture: "The crust is so superficial – it lies everywhere but you can remove it with a babul thorn" (p.187) It is also equally true that when an Indian marries a European woman, she doesn't understand India and the Indian culture. Though Madeleine, Ramaswamy's French wife, attempts to comprehend her husband's tradition, she fails to cross the bridge. For her India is a place of mystery: "Ultimately the far and awesome is divine, it destroys the barriers of body and mind, no, rather of mind, and body, and reveals the background of our unborn inaccurate being. That is why Shiva lives in the Himalaya." (p. 44)

Even the Hindu sometimes finds it hard to understand Hinduism: "...the gods were neither Hindu nor Greeks; being certain your own mind they behaved as you made them." (p.156) Since gods live in the heads of their creatures it is difficult for the rational European to accept the Indian's sentiment for their gods. With the same attitude towards the western gods, Ramaswamy comments: "...the Greek gods were made by the Greeks but when the Romans and the Christians came they often metamorphosed into saints of Christ." (p.295)

What is holy in India may seem silly to the Europeans like serving a vegetarian food, for instance. And because they look to the Indian with inferiority they even have the same attitude to everything that is Indian even if it is the land. Madame Patensier, the lady who serves Ramaswamy his vegetarian food, gets surprised to know that the Himalaya are "the highest mountain in the world. Bigger than the Alps and Mont Blanc?" (p.314)

Ramaswamy finds in India a source of immortality, for him it is "like a juice that one is supposed to drink to conquer a kingdom or to reach the deathless." (p.17) Ramaswamy is fascinated with India's mountains, rivers,

and animals. The mere thinking of its vastness makes him feel " large and finite."<sup>7</sup> For Ramaswamy the Ganges stands for wisdom (p.43), and Himalaya, which is "like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable, and yet very intimate" (p.44), stands for truth.

India, as seen by Rao through the eyes of his protagonist, is not taken as a geographical entity, rather it is a spiritual and a metaphysical one: " a patch of triangular earth, surrounded by three seas, somehow caught the spirit without time, and established it in such a way that you can see the disc of gold shine miles above the earth."(p.248) India then is an idea that Ramaswamy carries wherever he goes.

The deeply cultured society of France is set in contrast with the Indian traditional society. France is a place of peace and courtesy where the person enjoys his freedom. While India is portrayed as a country governed by taboos and the old values of the rajas system, universality characterizes the French history: "France alone has universal history. Every battle is a battle . India is free not because of Jermy Bentham but because of Napoleon."(p.103) India , Rao says, " has no history, for truth cannot have history."(p.104) But the novelist doesn't disguise his dissatisfaction with the history of the country:" ...no battle in India was ever fought for humanity's sake. Or if fought , it was soon forgotten –Krishna fought against Bhisman by giving Bhisman courage. Mahatma GHandi fought against the Muslims by fighting for them... ."(p.104)

Through the metaphysical renderings the tradition becomes a continuity. Ramaswamy's visit to Benares, his native city, is an example of the metaphysical formation in which a country's culture is introduced in insubstantial things such as an allusion or a mere recognition. The substantial assumes its significance through the insubstantial:

In Banares death is illusionary as the mist in the morning; Banares is a 'surreal city';' you never know where reality starts and where illusion ends.' 'Banares was indeed nowhere but inside oneself';' all brides be Banares born';' I dipped in the Ganges and felt so pure that I wondered any one could die or go to war...';'The Ganges knew our secret, held our patrimony'; 'The cows have such ancient and maternal looks';'The Himalaya was like Lord Shiva himself, distant , inscrutable, and

yet very intimate there where you do not exist...The Himalaya made the pleasant and the Brahmin big... .' (Pp.43-44)

Banares is rendered as unique in the meaning it has:" Banares is eternal . There the dead do not die , nor the living live."(P.24) The fact that the old beliefs of the city are rendered through the wanderings of the hero's intellect transmute them into a flow or a living tradition as C. D. Narasimhaiah remarks: "These Brahminic convictions distilled into widely-shared popular beliefs that abound in the novel are not for the pompous display but are strictly functional, that is, evocative – and evocation implies a shared tradition."<sup>8</sup>And while Banares is described as " the sacred capital "(p218), Paris is denied of spiritual peculiarities, but still he can feel the significance hidden under its physical reality. Paris is not seen as a city but as:

An area in oneself, a Concorde in one's being, where the river flows by you with an intimacy that seems to say the divine is not in the visible architecture of the Orangeri or the presence of the Pont des Arts, but where the trees would end; and even when the lorries have trundled over the cobbled streets ...there opposite, begirt in her isle of existence, is the mother of God, to whom man has built a sanctuary , a convocation of stone, uttered truly as never before. For it was the word of god made actual in prayer and fast, in dedication and in pain , that raised layer after layer of that white intimacy of thought, and this once made high and solid and pointed at space , man wanted to withdraw, to gaze inward through tower ... to see how the Virgin sat the Son of God in her lap. I might have led a cow to her altar had I been in Banares. ... Paris is a sort of Banares turned outward.(Pp.53-54)

The contrast between India and France is not limited to the land, it extends to include people ; their religion and their attitudes towards different social issues. The most prominent contrast is that between Ramaswamy and his wife Madeleine. They are both sensitive intellectuals who could be taken as representative of the cultures of their countries. The failure of their marriage and their suffering come as a consequence of the clash between their countries' cultural attitudes. Here is Ramaswamy's account of the way his French wife looks at 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 would come by it; if he missed his connection he would 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.(p.60)

She is conscious of the cultural difference between them as she puts it plainly in her remark to Ramaswamy: " You will never understand us the French. There is piety, of course, and compassion. But Lord, there is no such calculation. I tell you virtue is a part of French bourgeois enemy."(p.88) The failure of their union comes from a disparity of their understanding of the very nature of their marriage. Ramaswamy understands marriage to be a union in Vedantin's terms. To the Vedantin, " union is proof that the truth is non-dual."(p.172) The difference then is between the non-dualism of the Vedantin and the materialistic dualism of his European wife as the following extract from their conversation shows:

'We Europeans believe in being good' she added, thoughtfully

'We Indians in being wise.'

'Let me remain the Marchesa', She pleaded

'And I the Brahminic Bull.' (p.343)

Both Ramaswamy and Madeleine made an attempt to bridge the gulf between them. Madeleine puts flowers and grass on the stone statue of what looks like a bull as an expression of her identification with her husband sharing him his religious rituals. But according to her Christian understanding she finds it difficult to worship a stone image the way the Indians do. Christianity that stays in the seed of her heart prevents her from going deeper into her husband's religion. Ramaswamy says:"For Madeleine there is an idea which is not that fills with Christian longings, but she will not admit it."(p.82)Even her conversion to Buddhism which she takes as an Indian religion never comes with any change in her because her knowledge of Buddhism remains on the surface. She fails to understand that in Buddhism "Dukhe is the very tragedy of creation, the sorrow of the sorrow that sorrow is."(p.82) Besides she looks at marriage as a "social institution based upon a sympathetic understanding of each other."<sup>9</sup> Her study of Buddhism never helps her to transcend the subject-object relationship of lover and beloved

into what S. Nagarajan calls " the hypostasis of a cosmic order."<sup>10</sup> Instead of knowing her husband and his way of life, she becomes alienated. Her love of the bridges is taken to be a symbol of her inability to cross to the bank, to understand her husband's culture. She asks Ramaswamy about the cause of the failure of their marital state just before its formal end:

'What is it that separated us, Ram?'

'India.'

'India. But I am a Buddhist.'

'That is why Buddhism left India. India is impiety.'

'But one can become a Buddhist?'

'yes, and a Christian, and a Muslim as well.'

'Then.'

'One can never be converted to Hinduism.'

'You mean one can only be born Brahmin?'

'That is – an Indian, 'I added , as an explanation of India.(p.336)

The novelist attributes Madeleine's failure to her belief in compassion and to her inability to understand her husband's quest for authenticity. In her attempt to be a Buddhist, she fails to reach a deep understanding of Buddhism, she is unfair to her own Catholicism which lies in her blood, and she never responds properly to the emotional life of her husband as a wife of a Brahmin does. She experiences a state of inconsistency resulted from her religious dualism, as Raja Rao himself says in an interview with S. Niranjan who asks him about the cause of their separation:

If she had been a good Catholic, it would still be different from Sankar's non-dualism. I am interested in authenticity. One should be authentic. It doesn't matter what you are , you must be authentic. For example, I have seen Gandhiji and Maulana Azad face to face with each other at Sevagram. I have spent some time at Sevagram with Gandhiji. Gandhi was a good Hindu, Azad was a good Muslim. They could talk to each other with authenticity. They had respect for each other, each was authentic. It is to those who are authentic that misery comes.<sup>11</sup>

Compassion that Buddhism offers to Madeleine overlies other human virtues in her. She changes her behavior with her husband. Consider, for example, her cold reception to Ramaswamy when he comes back from England. Contemplating and counting her beads , she indifferently asks him:" Why did you come?"(p.392) She reached a heartless state in which emotions

become meaningless. She herself admits , in a letter she writes to Catherine, her inability to love Ramaswamy and to understand the oneness of their marriage: "It's all like a ghost story, she wrote . Rama, India-and the world. Contemplation is the only truth one has . I pray that I be forgiven for my sins-my ignorance...I am sure it would be wise to give Rama his freedom. He must marry someone younger from his own country. He will be happy with an Indian woman". (Pp.398-399)

Madeleine's Judaic-Greece background helps her dualism for she is a catholic who could be at the same time an atheist, a communist and a Buddhist . To her, P.C.Bahathacharya says, "marriage was like a pair of parallel rails in which runs the life's train."<sup>12</sup> Her love is without self- denial. Though she is catholic she prefers the intellectual brilliance of Buddhism to the miracles of the Virgin birth and the rising death. She turns to Buddhism for in it " we could not accept god , we had to invent a mother of God, make her into a virgin, and then accept her son and find out how He was born..."(p.305)

The difference between Rama and Madeleine is in a way the same as that between Vedanta and communism. For the Vedantin , "If I am real, then the world is me." But for the communist "If the world is real , then you are real, in terms of objects."(p338) The difference between them is the same as the one between logic and poetry. And in the world of the Buddhist , "you must have compassion toward some suffering 'things' , so suffering exists and compassion as well."(p.338) Accordingly, if Ramaswamy and Madeleine like to be fruitful to their principles , their union is impossible.

Madeleine with the compassion stands in contrast to Sevathri as an embodiment of spiritual love. Savithri's spiritual union with Ramaswamy is set against his marriage to Madeleine. Unlike Madeleine, Savithri loves Ramaswamy when she realizes that he represents the knowledge that leads her to the absolute:

Thoughts intoxicated Savithri as nothing did : men for her were just givers of thoughts. Her maidenhood had no physical basis . It existed , just as in fairy-tales, you cannot win a princess unless you solve a riddle. For her life was such a riddle , and she rejected man after man- not because she found them tall or lean or fat or too rich, or even learned or boring- but because she

fed, as it were , on life itself; meaning consisted of food, breath, sensation. She was restless because nothing, no nothing at all, could fill her – save a steady , self-sounding but un-rippled silence. Who gave her silence gave her life. Sometimes I did , I think, so she liked to be with me. I once teased her, saying, 'You function according to the endocrinology of semantics!' And she laughed approvingly, letting fall the flower from her hair.(Pp.187-188)

In her spiritual contract with Ramaswamy, Savithri gives an inspiring force that enables him to fulfill his quest for the world of truth. About their meeting in Cambridge he says:

People have asked me ...what indeed it was that happened between Savithri and me in Cambridge. Nothing more had happened, in fact, than if you see deep and long at silence, you perceive an orb of centripetal sound which explains why Parvathi is daughter of Himalaya , and Sita born to the furrow of the field. I heard myself say I heard myself. Or I saw my eyes see that I saw . She became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding. I lost the world and she became it.(p.171)

Both Ramaswamy and Savithri lead a mode of the quest for their true identity which they achieve in the merge of their souls. As an Indian girl she is aware of the Indian feminine virtue in her as she says: " I've known my lord for a thousand lives , from Janam to Janam , I have known my Krishna."(p.214) Unlike his marriage to Madeleine, his union with Savithri is based on self-denial in which they realize the non-dual status of existence . The merger is so utter that it " knows naught of 'I' and 'thou', so self embraced by the foreknowing(solar) self knows naught of 'myself' within or 'thysself' without. Not one is the truth , yet not true is the Truth. Savithri proved that I could be I" (p.172)

In the novel , India is personified through the portrayal of the character of Savithri and her vision of detachment."For Savithri's life was a game (lila) a song."(p.124), where as the West is represented through Madeleine's material perception of the world: "For Madeleine geography was very real , almost solid. She smelt the things of the earth, as though sound , form, touch,

taste, smell were such realities that you could not go beyond them-even if you tried."(P.185)

On the religious level the contrast between India and Europe is emphasized in the novel through the recurrent references to Brahminism as an embodiment of Indian philosophy . Its contrast with Catholicism and Catharism is made obvious through the so many comparisons that recurred during Ramaswamy's discussions with the European characters or historical and philosophical reflections all-through the novel.

The social and ritualistic attitudes of both the East and West are made evident through the attitudes of female characters to issues of marriage, sex and death. Saroja's attitude to her marriage and her idea about the position of woman is characteristic of the Indian female:

'In what way , Saroja, do you think Catherine or Madeleine is better than you?'

'They know how to love.'

'And you?'

'And we know how to bear children . We are just like a motor-car or a bank account. Or , better still, we are like a comfortable salary paid by a benign and eternal British government . Our joy is a treasury receipt.'(p.295)

The pictures Rao draws for both Saroja and Catherine and for their marriages are representation of their cultures.

The pointlessness of the life of Lezo , a learned European who indulges in many sensual adventures with female characters in the novel , is presented to be the foil of the hero's ceaseless spiritual quest for meaning and shape for his life.

The differences between the Indian race and that of the European are exemplified in their moods and their severity as well. While " the Christian humility has beauty ... The Brahmin , the Vedantin has such arrogance " (p.378). Addressing the hero , Georges, a Russian character, observes " what I admire is the frugality of your food, the generosity with which you open yourself to everyone and everything."(p.83) And on the French generosity the comment is:"piety, of course, and compassion. But Lord there is calculation...virtue in part of French bourgeois –economy."(p.88) Som Deva calls the Indian hospitality "proverbial".<sup>13</sup> It is even at the cost of the Indian's

personal comfort:"They who come will eat rice and I had –water if we can give them nothing better; and sleep on a mat if I cannot spread them a bed in velveteen."(p.111)

Ramaswamy's renunciation of reality never frees him from suffering his emotional crisis. This is revealed in different forms of conflict represented by his relationships with his sister, Little Mother and Savithri; the repression within himself of his feeling of enmity to all what stands for the West. Even in his study of history he attacks the sages and welcomes the traditional turbulences. Ramaswamy's crisis arises from an awareness of the insistent need to reevaluate the already established way of Indian traditional life. The forces that impress him towards such reevaluation come from the Second World War, the national movement towards India's independence from the white colonial control. These forces are, in Sharrad's words, "aspects of a cultural / spiritual struggle between metropolitan and provincial models of selfhood that have been the results of centuries of colonial conquest."<sup>14</sup>

Rao's experience with the Indian character as a post –colonial being goes back to his story 'The Cow of the Barricades' and his first major work *Ranthapura*. In both works he shows anti-British attitude at a time when he becomes a member in the left-wing anti-imperialism political movement in France.<sup>15</sup> In an interview Niranjana made with Raja Rao, he said that he was anti-British and he went to France for political reasons.<sup>16</sup>

The historical references in the novel are considered by critics, such as Niranjana, "evocative".<sup>17</sup> The first paragraph in the novel demonstrates Rao's application of the evocative power of these historical passages. Through the references to Indian sages and historical European characters and events Rao transcends time and distance, and the tradition of India and the history of Europe gain accessibility to the imagination of the reader. Though the concern of the story is Ramaswamy's personal life but the encyclopedic nature of the chronicle and its marveling in time and space give it the objectivity and the continuity of the historical science. K. R. Rao says: "The past, the present and the future coalesce into the narrative design rendering the experiences related as a communicated continuum."<sup>18</sup>

The continuum of the Indian ageless tradition is achieved also by the use of fables and tales from Indian methodology and folklore for two reasons; the

one is that these are the products of collective consciousness of the Indian people , the other is that Raja Rao followed the Indian tradition in narrating them. He begins his novel with Ramaswamy introducing himself:

I was born Brahmin- that is, devoted to truth and all that. 'Brahmin is he who knows Brahmin', etc.etc... . But how many of my ancestors since the excellent Yagnyavalka , my legendry and Upanishadic ancestor , have really known the truth excepting the Sage Madhava, who founded an Empire or, rather helped to build an Empire, and wrote some of the most profound Vedantic texts since the Sri Sankara? There were others, so I'm told, who left hearth and riverside fields, and wandered to distant mountains and hermitage to 'see God face to face.' And some of them did see God face to face and built temples. But when they died- for indeed they did 'die'- they too must have been burnt by tank or grove or meeting of two rivers, and they too must have known they did not die. I can feel them in me , and know they knew they did not die. Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me.

These early allusions as well as the other historical passages in the novel constitute a historical and political context in which the images of the modern independent India appear. Ramaswamy's references to the coronation of Elizabeth the Second, Rama and Pandana as exiled kings, the Aryan Conquest in Northern India(p.37), Ulysses and Achilles, Troy, and its relationship to founding Rome(Pp.39-40), Madeleine's description of Mediterranean as a cradle of civilization and its wish to be born during the Athenian Republic (p.21), Stalin's new emporium (Pp.8, 176, 187), the conflict between the Cathars and Orthodox (Pp.60, 79), and the Grail Legend(p.69) all relate his life to the world-wide political and cultural realm and his inner conflicts with those of the cosmopolitan tensions . Even his thesis tackles the cosmopolitan structures in historical terms. It studies the influences of the Eastern boundaries of Europe on its Western boundaries.

The image Ramaswamy draws for Thames is similar to Marlow's meditations on the historical role in the European imperial enterprise in *Heart of Darkness*. The spirit of the European Mercantilism is recalled by Ramaswamy's mode of thinking while standing on the bank of the river:

What an imperial river the Thames is-her colour may be dark or brown, but she flows with a maturity of her own knowledge of herself, as though she grew the tall towers beside her, and buildings rose in her image , that men walked by her and spoke inconsequent things- as two horses on a cold day while the wine merchant delivers his goods at some pub, whispering and frothing to one another- for the Londoner is eminently good. He is so warm, he is indeed the first citizen of the world. The mist on the Thames is pearly, as if Queen Elizabeth the First had squandered her riches and femininity on ships of gold and Oberon had played on his pipe , so worlds , gardens , fairies, and grottoes were created , empires were built and lost , men shouted heroic things to one another and died , but somewhere one woman , golden , round, imperial , always lay by her young man , his hand over her left breast , his lip touches hers in rich recompense. There is holiness in happiness, and Shakespeare was holy because Elizabeth was happy. Would England not see an old holiness again.(p.20)

As the case in Conrad, the deterioration of the Empire is attributed to the mercantile spirit of its builders and the lack of faith in its original principles. Ramaswamy traces the causes back to the nineteenth century capitalism:

That ugly revolutionary word 'Capitalist' took on a new significance for me: clearly it was born of the man-proud nineteenth century, century of inventions, empires. Man, the hero of man: Clive more proud to be the obedient servant of Company Directors than of some Azalais des Banx. After the death of the Prince Consort how much more Queen Victoria incarnated in him than as herself. Victorianism was born of her widowhood- in the contemplation of him. Gladstone and Desraeli were her alternative symbols. She the Sovran of the Empire, to whom Gordon of Khartoum knelt as a liege. How different the lovers of queen Elizabeth, and the world of Marlowe. Shakespeare and the Arneada ! the ascetic world of Queen Victoria disintegrated into many man-kingdoms, and the last was the one created by Mahatma Gandhi. Victorianism died not in London or Melbourne but in New Delhi, created here by a distinguished representative of the Germano-British royal Family.(p.173)



Similarly the Empire of George the Sixth declined for the nation "became afraid of the Stock Exchange, and of what Mrs. Petworth would say in Perth or Mr. Kennedy would say in Edmonton , Alberta-...it's all a question of wool-shares or the London-Electronic- this mercantile country drove away what might have been her best king."(p.206)

As for Ramaswamy's handling of Modern Empire, it is conducted through his references to Mahatma Gandhi and through portraits of post-independence Indians. He quotes Gandhi addressing the British during the war with the Japanese:" Clear out and leave India to anarchy. We will know what to do with ourselves."(p.337) And through delineating the social background of certain Indian characters with whom he has personal relationship, Ramaswamy directs a rather severe criticism to those who still yearn to the British colonial control and still live on the British social heritage. Protap , who proposes to marry Savithri and Savithri herself both descend from families who were formerly loyal to the British political services and who face difficulty to identify with the modern life of Independent India. Protap still enjoys the former social life of his family and the official support of the British:

He sat for the examination but the competition was too severe. They took only seven Indians , and he was the twenty-sixth or twenty –seventh on the list. The British Resident , however, immediately recommended him for the nomination into the political services. He was a Raja Sahib of sorts; besides he was such a clever lad and the family had always been loyal to the crown.(p.30)

This is also represented by Savithri's father who attended the coronation of Elizabeth the Second as an indication of loyalty to his former government, and by Savithri's habits of smoking, flirting, and playing jazz. For these characters , to be in the political services , to attain a high rank in the government of India , to play polo and to be received by the British at the club mean superiority and social distinction and a sense of belonging to the days of colonial culture.

These historical , political and cultural constituents have reflected themselves clearly in Ramaswamy's personal life particularly his marriage . Madeleine 's family look at him only in terms of imperial school texts of the

mid-nineteenth century. Uncle Charles tells Madeleine what his mother thinks modern India and Indian to be:

'Mother thinks you have married a Maharaja, Mado', he said, looking at me, 'else there were no reason why you should marry a man from les Indes.' "Mon auteur dit," she would say, and then go on to tell me about the castes and the kings, and of the Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva that some school books of the fifties of the last century had taught her in her convent. But she cannot believe India is no more British India, nor you, Rama, dark as dark as Negro, and that you will not make Madeleine one of your concubines- for you must have a palace – and then make her mount your pyre and be burnt with your dead body. She is not so much worried about the marriage, but she's worried about burial and resurrection.(p.89)

Madeleine does not marry Ramaswamy because of love but because of showing what Sharrad thinks it to be "solidarity with the colonial –oppressed by taking in a representative of anti-colonial struggle."<sup>19</sup> Ramaswamy himself believes that Madeleine loves him for "she felt India had been wronged by the British."(p.20) The attitudes of Madeleine and Saroja towards their cultures and the culture of each other show an interplay of cultural contradictions. The inherited colonial experience is responsible for these confusions. Ramaswamy's response to this experience is evident in his reaction at visiting London:

Standing on a bridge near Chelsea and seeing the pink and yellow lights of the evening, the barges floating down to some light, the city feeling her girth in herself, how I felt England in my bones and breath, how I reverend her. The buses going high and lit, the taxis that rolled about, green and gentlemanly; the men and women who seemed responsible, not for this Island alone, but for the whole areas of humanity all over the globe; strollers – some workman, who had stolen a moment on his way to a job, some father who was showing London to his little daughter, two lovers arm hooked to arm- how with the trees behind and the water flowing they seemed to make history stop and look back at itself.(p.201)

Another aspect in Ramaswamy's character is that which marks an important distinction between the Easterner's tolerance and acceptance of

the world in its totality and the Westerner's individualism. This tolerance is at home in the tradition of his family. He shows a full understanding and sympathy with Islam: "I can now understand the Muslims, for Mohammed was the last historical prophet of God." (p.84) And here is Ramaswamy expressing his feeling when entering a Roman Catholic Church : "For these few days how happy I feel in the ancient fold of the church. I feel protected , I feel confirmed in my humaneness. I feel truly happy." (p.85) For his inherited tolerance, Ramaswamy tries to bridge the gaps between the East and the West through marrying Madleleine first and through the understanding he shows to all the Europeans he comes in contact with. His absorption of both Eastern and Western attitudes towards life is an attempt on his part to bring together into an essential oneness. He sees Paris as "a sort of Benares turned outward ,(p.54) for "Benares is everywhere where you are, says an old Vedantic text, and all waters are the Ganges." (p.388) He puts an oral lingo on the bank of The Seine River as a ritualistic practice and he takes the big stone in his garden to be a Shiva's bull. (pp.56-57) He even finds that despite its heretical overtones Catharism has some affinities with Hinduism: "But I had such a tender heart for Cathars, as I had for Budhists, that I felt I must go down south , and see in the light of the Longuedoc the truth of this truth". (p.388)

Few lines before this he has affirmed the integration of the Indian and the Cathars: "You need not take comsolamentum and jump into the fire to be a Cathar, for what are you but a Cathar? Europe beyond his body and beyond his mind , is a Cathar. The Ganges dissolves all sins . Even the ashes of the dead that the fire has burnt must dissolve in the Ganges and have absolution." (p.388)

His worship of the Christian God and his acceptance of Catholicism is an attempt to bridge the gulf between himself and his wife, as he writes in his memorandum: "How I wish I could tell Madeleine I have began to worship her God." (p.85) And the very nature of his work as an Indian Scholar dealing with history reveals that he absorbs the tradition , the attitudes and the values of the people in India , France and England. For both India and Europe he points out the shams of their modernity and at the same time he shows the significance of their traditions.

His contact with the French characters like Madeleine, Uncle Charles, Tante Zoubie, Catherine; his visit to London and his evocative concentration on the essential nerve-centres of Cambridge make the European culture vivid to us and bring it into a unity with his own, as Narasimahaiah says: "Ramaswamy's visit to Benares, Paris, London and Cambridge have helped, on the one hand, to evoke the spirit of each and sharply bring out their identities, which, on the other, to lose their identities."<sup>20</sup> His recurrent visits to England for contacting its scholars for consult to his thesis and his use of English, the language of political power, and for its neutrality, are all to span the gap between India and Europe.

Again his painful historical recollections together with his feelings of loss after his separation from his wife oppress heavily on his soul and subject him to a mood of restlessness which he manifests in his cry of despair: "There is nobody to go to now; no home, no temple, no climate, no age." (p.407) This experience of suffering and isolation ends with his own awareness that leads to his search for a spiritual guide: "No not a God but a Guru is what I need." (p.408) In the last section of the novel, the action takes the hero's mind as its setting. The hero's consciousness moves through the history and geography of India and Europe. In Ramaswamy's mind are interwoven the world of reality and that of introspection. This gives the novel a new dimension since his diaries shed more light on his inner life and his relationship to Madeleine. Their estrangement is given a symbolic significance since it explains the unbridgeable disparity between the two cultures of the East and the West."<sup>21</sup> Though both Ramaswamy and Madeleine try to transcend the actualities of their cultures they fail to reach a mutual personal understanding. Her intellectualism and her indifference to outer reality that stands in opposition to the idealism of her selfhood are behind her failure to involve herself in her husband's life.

Ramaswamy's spiritual relationship becomes the remedy for his crisis. It inspires him with a new vision. He discovers that the feminine involvement in man's life is essential to his self-realization. His wanderings on the Queen's coronation and on the spiritual union between him and Savithri, in K.R. Rao's words, "reinforce the coronation-wedding metaphor. Truth (Satyakame) wedded to Purity (Savithri) or the impersonal self joined to the feminine principle assumes the crown and scepter of power."<sup>22</sup>

Ramaswamy maintains the unreality of the world through his metaphysical experience and he reaches the realization of the self through the transcendence of the soul. In the transcendental consciousness the reality and unreality become relative. To know yourself you have to have the faith that transcends the reality into nothing which is the only truth. Searching for the real through knowledge entraps Ramaswamy into so many predicaments and in his attempt to overcome his dilemma he realizes the need to his guru, the spiritual guide.

In his quest for truth and his search for a solution to his crisis, Ramaswamy discovers that the very existence of the world is but an illusion. To act according to this truth you have to attain the knowledge of a unique order. This is possible with the help of a guru. He meditates:

The world is either unreal or real-the serpent or the rope. There is no between-the-two and all that is in between is poetry, is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time, 'No, no, it's the rope,' and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradises, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes... You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it , the serpent , the saint. One-the Guru brings you the lantern... 'It is only the rope'. He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent.(p.340)

Rao, then, applies an example he takes from the Vedanta philosophy, particularly from Sankara(8<sup>th</sup> century A. D.), who interprets the world with an analogy of the serpent and the rope. The serpent as an illusion presupposes the existence of the rope and illusion will be there till the rope is thoroughly recognized. The serpent stands for the world and the rope for the Brahmin. It is through knowledge that he realizes that the world is not but a manifestation of the Brahmin.<sup>23</sup>Ramaswamy's position is similar to that of the Vedantin which Swami Prabhavananda states as follows:

The world, according to Sankara, is and is not. Its fundamental unreality can be understood only in relation to the ultimate metaphysical experience, the experience of an illumined soul. When the illumined soul passes into transcendental consciousness he realizes the self... Then the self shines forth in the One, the Truth, the Brahmin...When the truth is known we

are no longer deluded by the appearance –the snake-  
appearance vanishes into Brahmin.<sup>24</sup>

Rao's choice of his title from the Indian philosophical heritage marks his emphasis of the Indian tradition in opposition to that of the western tradition. In the western tradition the emphasis is primarily on the material aspects of the world. Illusion is often used in reference to deception and the material is always the remedy, while in the tradition of the Vedantin the world is looked at as an illusion which is the outcome of ignorance, and knowledge is the only cure. Rao takes Ramaswamy 's story to be the journey through this illusionary world toward realizing the truth with the help of the guru's light. Ramaswamy's devotion to a dvanta helps him to transcend all the contradictions and affinities of the East and the West, blending them into a complete unity, whereas he chooses a place under the feet of his spiritual guru, as a European Brahmin who drank from the deep waters of both rivers, the Ganges and the Seine, and where all illusions of life and death are removed out. Thus he comes back home to find comfort in the vast and tranquil metaphysics of India.

#### Notes

1-Raja Rao, *The Serpent and The Rope*, London: John Murray, 1960,p.16. All subsequent references will be to this edition, and only page numbers will be parenthetically cited within the text.

2-Paul Sharrad, *Raja Rao and Cultural tradition*, Banglor: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., 1987,p.42.

3-Shyamala A. Narayan, *Raja Rao: Man and His Works*, New Delhi: Sterling publishers Private Ltd.,1988,p.48.

4-Som Deva, *Raja Rao's The Serpent and The Rope: A critical Study*, Bara Bazar: Prakash Book Depot ,1983,p.46.

5-O.P.Mathur, "The Serpent and the Rope: A Study in Raja Rao's Treatment of the East-West Theme" in *Perspectives on Raja Rao*, (ed.)K. K. Sharmal, Gaziabad: Vimal Prakshan, 1980. P.48.

6-*Ibid*,p.48.In this respect, the hero is like the author,for details about this likeness, see S.Mercanti,'The Rose and the Lotus: Partnership in the work of Raja Rao',Edition Rodop, New York,2009.

- 7-Ramesh Srivastava, "Structure and Theme In Raja Rao's Fiction", in *Perspectives on Raja Rao*, (ed.)K.K. Sharmal, p.153.
- 8-C. D. Narasimhaiah , *Raja Rao*, New Delhi: Arnold –Heinemann, India,1991,pp.86-87.
- 9-Shiva Niranjana, *Raja Rao: Novelist as Sadhaka*, Gaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1985,p.79.
- 10-S.Nagarajan, "An Indian Novel", *Considerations*, (ed.) Meenakshi Mukkherjee, New Delhi: 1978,p.86.
- 11- Shiva Niranjana, "An Interview with Raja Rao", in *Indian Writing in English*,(ed.)Krishna Nadan Sinha, New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1979,p.24.
- 12-P. C. Bahattacharya, *Indo-Anglican Literature and the Works of Raja Rao*, Delhi: Atma Ram and Sons,1983,p.292.
- 13-Deva, *Op. Cit.*,p.46.
- 14-Sharrad,*Op. Cit.*, p.48.
- 15-M. K. Naik, *Raja Rao* ,New York ,1972,p.20.
- 16-Niranjana,"An Interview with Raja Rao",p.21.
- 17-Niranjana, *Novelist as Sadhka*, p.82.
- 18-K.R.Rao,*The Fiction of Raja Rao*, Angaranabad: Parimal Prakashan,1989, p.68.For details about Rao's technique of story telling and relating history, see t.J. Abraham,*A Critical Study of novels of Arun Joshi, Raja Rao, and Sudin Ghose*,Atlantic publishers and Distibuters, New Delhi,1999.
- 19-Sharrad,p.62.
- 20-Narasimhaiah, p100.
- 21-K.R. Rao,p.71.
- 22-*Ibid*,p.81.See also Kaushal Sharma, *Raja Rao: A Study of His Themes and Technique*,Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, 2005.
- 23-K. M. Sen, *Hinduism*, London: Pelican ,1961,p83.
- 24-Swami Prabhavernanda, *The Spiritual Heritage Of India*, London, 1962,pp.283-284.

البحث عن المرشد الروحي في رواية راجا راو: الافي والحبل  
الكلمات الافتتاحية: الافي والحبل ، المرشد الروحي، الهوية الثقافية ، الفلسفة  
الهندية عنيد ثنوان رستم  
استاذ مساعد

كلية السياحة و ادارة الفنادق/ الجامعة المستنصرية

### ملخص البحث

يتناول البحث رواية راجا راو " الافي والحبل" ومحاولة بطل الرواية ، راماسوامي، التوصل الى قرار بشأن تساؤله الملح حول حقيقة الوجود. ان بحثه عن هويته يتأى من معاناته للصراع المحتدم في داخله بين قوتين تتمثلان بالتقاليد الهندوسية لعائلته البراهمنية المتشددة والتي تشجعه على الالتزام بالثقافة المحلية من جهة، و مجتمع ما بعد الاستقلال الذي يوقعه في شرك تعقيداته. ان عملية التساؤل في الموقف من طقوس الحياة في موطنه تعيق الوعي باتجاه وجود فلسفه ايجابية في الحياة، مما يؤدي الى حالة من عدم الاستقرار تقوده الى السفر الى اوربا لدراسة التاريخ. تتناول الرواية في الالاس موضوع زواج راماسوامي وعلاقاته العاطفية وهدفه في العودة الى موطنه الاصلي كاستاذ جامعي ليعيش حياة هادئة مع زوجته الفرنسية. لكن أتصاله بالثقافة الاوربية اوقد في ذاته نزعة البحث عن الحقيقة من خلال بحثه عن مرشده الرحي. ان الصراع الذي يعيشه نتيجة التناقضات بين التقاليد الاوربية والهندية اوجدت انعكاساتها على نحو واضح في حياة راماسوامي الشخصية سيما في زواجه ، فقد احدثت في داخله شعورا بالضياح بعد انفصاله عن زوجته واخضعته لحالة من التامل الفلسفي ليذهب في رحلة في عالم الوهم ليذكر من خلاله ان المعرفة هي الطريق الوحيد نحو الحقيقة التي يمكن ان يستدل عليها عن طريق مرشده الروحي الذي يساعده في التسامي على كل اتناقضات والحدود التي توجدتها التقاليد ويعمل على مزجها كوحده متكاملة خالية من اوهام الحياة و الموت.