

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY
IN
RAJA RAO'S FICTION**

REKHA PAPPU

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD**

November 1991

Makarand R. Paranjape,
Reader,
Department of English,
University of Hyderabad,
Hyderabad - 500134.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Ms. Rekha Pappu worked under my supervision for the M.Phil. degree in English. Her dissertation "The Construction of Femininity in Raja Rao's Fiction" represents her work at the University of Hyderabad, and has not been submitted for a degree or diploma elsewhere.

Date 16.11.91

Makarand Paranjape
Makarand R. Paranjape

Rekha Pappu
16/11/91

G.V. Subrahmanyam
19.11.91
Dean,
School of Humanities,
University of Hyderabad,
HYDERABAD-500 134.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people have helped me during the period of my research. However, my acknowledgements are due in particular to the following persons.

To Dr. Makarand Paranjape, my supervisor, for his friendly guidance throughout the course of my research. His prompt and thorough feedback on my work, and his willingness to help me clarify my critical stance, have made this thesis possible.

To Dr. Tejaswini Niranjana for the many stimulating discussions we had and for her unfailing support and encouragement. To her I owe my interest in feminism which has since moved beyond academic frameworks.

To the faculty of the English Department who during my M.A programme helped develop my interest in the subject and encouraged me to attempt an M.Phil.

To Bharathi for her help in terms of material and suggestions.

To Mr. Satyanarayana Murty for his ungrudging assistance throughout the year.

To the University Grants Commission for financial support at the right time.

To Giri, Indu, Nigel, Satyanarayana, and Vidya who are part of and reason for some of the good times that I have had.

To Srilata, Shoba, Praveena, Karthika, Anita and Ajanta without whom my stay on campus would not have been as enjoyable and memorable. They, in their own ways, have contributed to my education!

To my parents for their love.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- K: Kanthapura
- SR: The Serpent and the Rope
- CS: The Cat and Shakespeare
- CK: Comrade Kirillov
- CM: The Chessmaster and His Moves
- GG: On the Ganga Ghat

CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Abbreviations	iv
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: The Biology of Submission	28
Chapter III: Marriage, Motherhood and Sati	51
Chapter IV: Tradition and Femininity	69
Works Cited	80

The magic of power and the power of magic converge in the Indian context in the social constructions of womanhood.

Ashish Nandy. At the Edge of Psychology, 1990.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The understanding that femininity is not a natural pre-existing entity~~s~~ but a social construction, forms the basic premise of my thesis.¹ From such a premise I propose to analyze the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's fictional works. By 'construction of femininity' I mean a definition of the 'real' woman which insists on a particular kind of behaviour as natural for woman. Femininity, in Raja Rao's works, is constructed through enumeration of the qualities of woman without considering the possibility of difference and deviance.

The absence of a comprehensive analysis of the representation of woman\women in Raja Rao's works makes this attempt imperative not only because of the importance of Raja Rao as a writer, but also because of the contemporary relevance of an issue such as the construction of gender. I shall focus primarily on the two novels, The Serpent and the Rope and The Chessmaster and His Moves, because there is extensive discussion about woman in these two novels as compared to the others. The same consideration has influenced the omission of all but a few short stories from among Raja Rao's two collections.

This chapter attempts to explain the importance of Raja Rao's works to any discussion of the construction of femi-

ninity in Indian English fiction. It also includes a survey of criticism of his works from this point of view and seeks explanations for the trends that emerge from the overview. The two following chapters, II and III, engage with the texts themselves to understand how femininity is constructed in the works. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn from these chapters and tries to explain the need for such a construct in Raja Rao's project of reviving "Indian tradition."

I

Understanding how femininity is constructed in Raja Rao's fiction is important for several reasons. First of these is that no Indian writer in English has discussed 'woman' in fiction as extensively as Raja Rao has. Secondly, Raja Rao is seen by various readers and critics as representing the 'real' traditions of India. Therefore, it becomes important to my project to understand the role offered to woman in this India. Thirdly, no other novelist has used the concepts of Purusha-Prakriti and Shiva-Shakti as consistently as Raja Rao has in order to define woman and her role. Finally, the canonization of Raja Rao's works accords a certain authority to his status as a leading novelist. Consequently his views, including those on women, gain an added and perhaps dangerous potency. This makes a review of his works essential so that the validity of these

ideas can be questioned.

Certainly, no Indian English writer has provided an understanding of woman in her/his works as Raja Rao has. This is evident when we compare Raja Rao's writings with those of other writers. To begin with, characterization of women is a feature found in most fictional works. But a definition or discussion of the meaning of woman is rare. Raja Rao's works, on the other hand, do not merely provide a representation of women but go on to make a statement of what a woman is--a statement which has the authority and clarity of a theory being laid down. Woman as a category becomes the focus of discussions and authorial commentary. Raja Rao's works thus reveal a conscious incorporation of his views on women. The works cannot, therefore, be ignored by anyone evincing interest in femininity as depicted in Indian English fiction. The novels have to be addressed because they display a preoccupation with the definition of woman that is absent in the works of other Indian English novelists.

Also, the levels of identification between author-character are, to a large extent, obfuscated in Raja Rao's works.² Such an impression is strengthened by the parallels between Raja Rao's own life and that of his characters, such as Rama in The Serpent and the Rope, R. in Comrade Kirillov and Siva in The Chessmaster. There are also hints within the texts which underline the close connection between writer and character. Rama, in The Serpent and the Rope,

for instance, comments on the autobiographical element in every work. The similarity of the views expressed by Raja Rao in his interviews with Ayyappa Paniker and Asha Kaushik, in his non-fictional articles like "The Writer and the Word," and in his fictional works, strengthen the impression that there is a strong identification between the author and the male protagonists.

I stress this aspect of the identity between writer and character only to point out that in the case of Raja Rao, his works cannot be seen as distinct from him. So it becomes necessary to study his views considering the importance given to him not only as a writer but also as a thinker attempting to discover through fiction "the essence of Indian classics such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagvad Gita, the Mahabharata, Yajnavalkya sruti. . . . Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, the Vishva Advaita of Ramanuja, Saiva and Sakta cults" (Dayal 105). This impression has supported the feeling that Raja Rao represents the "essential" India in his works.

This underlines the second reason for analyzing the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's fiction. Raja Rao is regarded as representing Indian 'tradition'. This has been the response, of both Western and Indian readers, to his works. Paul Sharrad writes about The Serpent and the Rope:

Ramaswamy seems to be the author's mouthpiece and the spokesman for a particularly sophisticated

brand of Hindu philosophy. It is to this that we first respond with curiosity and awe. Here is, for the armchair explorer, promise of the 'real' India, the Wisdom of the East, from one who knows! This, anyway was more or less my reaction to the novel and I suspect it parallels that of other readers from similar backgrounds. (3)

Sharrad goes on to prove that such an impression is deceptive because there are several inconsistencies in the characterization of Rama and therefore he cannot be seen as the spokesman of Indian culture and tradition. Nevertheless, the impression of Raja Rao as being the representative of India and Indian philosophy, is widespread. Edwin Thumboo too remarks that, "Raja Rao's considerable achievement derives substantially from the uniquely Indian spirit and thrust of his work" (567). The blurb to C.D.Narasimhaiah's book Raja Rao states:

While he [Raja Rao] is keenly alive to the present, his main contribution lies in revitalizing the past of India so as to make it relevant and life-giving today - a thing of inestimable value at a time when the Western educated Indian appears to have lost touch with his own roots. Of Raja Rao therefore, it must be truly said that he made India meaningful not merely to the Europeans but to Indians as well.

Thus, when Raja Rao is seen as proposing the model of a

"meaningful" India (whether taken as a metaphysic or a geographic entity), it becomes necessary to study the role envisaged for woman in it. The status offered to woman needs to be examined so as to reconsider whether the concept of an India as suggested by Raja Rao is meaningful to women as well. It is essential to ask if women are offered nothing but the 'traditional' role of submission and subordination.

Thirdly, Raja Rao uses the concepts of Purusha-Prakriti and Shiva-Shakti to explain the behaviour of men and women. But he uses them selectively and unfairly. Although the identification of woman with Prakriti and Shakti is not overtly stated, it is intrinsic to the definition of woman all the same. Som Sharma's article "Raja Rao's Search for the Feminine," as also Prabh Dayal's article, "The Tantric elements in the novels of Raja Rao," trace the influence of Tantra philosophy wherein woman is revered as Shakti. ~~in the description of woman.~~ Sharma's assertion is that the exaltation of women in The Serpent and the Rope is a result of this influence whereby woman is worshiped as Shakti (110). The Prakriti-woman equation, on the other hand, is evident in the views which stress the need for a woman's dissolution in man, the need for her to submit to him and be guided by him in a relationship akin to the one between Prakriti and Purusha. The Sankhya philosophy emphasises the dissolution of Prakriti in Purusha (Masih 120). It does not stipulate that woman as the exclusive embodiment of Prakriti should dissolve her ego in a man's, as is required in Raja Rao's

conception of the man-woman relationship. This kind of a sustained and exclusive identification of woman with Prakriti and man with Purusha is, I argue, damaging to both man and woman.

Finally, the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's works becomes an important consideration because the works have been canonized and are regarded as part of high literature. The Sahitya Academy award for the novel The Serpent and the Rope, in 1964, and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1988, are just two examples of this canonization. Moreover, his novels form a part of university syllabi. Such canonization implies an acceptance of the ideology inscribed in the works. It also encourages a manner of reading or interpreting the text in ways which make the text acceptable to the existing power relations. This interpretation of canonization follows from the understanding that a literary work does not, by itself, generate meaning but is often determined by critical standards that are used to judge the work.³ A realization of these aspects of canonization has changed the critical practice to include an awareness of the possibility of ignoring certain features while highlighting others. My analysis of the construction of femininity is possible only because different reading practices which take such factors into consideration have evolved.

Critics like Shantha Krishnaswamy have felt the need to apologize for a different reading of Raja Rao's novels.

Krishnaswamy prefaces her discussion by saying,

His [Raja Rao's] novels treat of such complex metaphysical concepts that one is afraid of an exclusive interest in the woman lest it lead to a diminishing or impoverished appreciation of a gigantic metaphysical tour de force. (55)

In the context of such a statement, Kolosony's comment regarding feminist reading gains significance. Defining the feminist as one who questions a fixed meaning, she provides justification for alternate readings of the text.

All that the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and at the same time her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading systems (160)

However, as mentioned earlier, a striking feature of the criticism on Raja Rao's works has, by and large, been the absence of such alternate readings. Most notably, there has been very little work on the representation of woman/women in his fiction. The novels and short stories themselves include discussions on a wide range of topics like religion, metaphysics, history, civilization, man,

woman, the relationship between them, and so on. But, a survey of criticism shows that while aspects such as the Indianness of the novels, the metaphysical quest of the protagonists, the Advaita philosophy, myth, ritual and related aspects have been discussed, a study of the women characters is seldom seen. This lacuna has, to some extent, been filled over the last few years. Critics such as Uma Parameswaran, Shantha Krishnaswamy, and Gita Krishnankutty have, through their focus on women in Raja Rao's fiction, shifted the concerns of criticism. Significantly this kind of interest in the representation of women has been evinced mainly by female critics and their reading of the women characters has been different from that of male critics. The construction of femininity as such has not, however, been adequately considered even by them. This is not to deny the importance of these feminist readings but only to suggest that my thesis attempts to supplement them usefully and add to their value.

II

The survey of criticism here has been restricted mainly to critics who discuss women characters in Raja Rao's works or those who comment on the impersonal statements made about woman in these works. The critics on Raja Rao can be divided into two groups--those who agree with Raja Rao's framework and those who read against the grain. In the

first category are critics like C .D. Narasimhaiah, M. K. Naik, K. Venkatachari, K. R. Rao and others. The second includes critics like David McCutcheon, D. S. Maini, Sharad, Parameswaran and others who have questioned the assumptions behind the texts.

Earlier criticism on Raja Rao focussed on style, technique, and theme. This interest was perhaps, due to Raja Rao's innovative style and his attempts at evolving an English expression which would convey the "Indian spirit."⁴ There is, thus, high praise for Raja Rao in these analyses. Some critics also include a few comments on his views regarding woman. This issues mainly from a study of the women characters--Madeleine and Savithri.⁵ But, in most cases, though women characters are discussed, what the characters say about woman is not examined, except for some passages exalting women. Consequently, no comparison between authorial commentary and the characterization of women was attempted.

Among the early critics of The Serpent and the Rope, Narasimhaiah is representative in many ways. Later critics adopted much the same attitude in the reading of the novel as did Narasimhaiah. The sympathetic reading of Rama and his point of view, the all too frequent assertion of Madeleine's failure, of holding her responsible for the breakdown of the marriage and of praising Savithri (a view once again coinciding with Rama's) are to be found in Narasimhaiah's analysis, as also in later readings of The Serpent and

the Rope.

Underlying this kind of reading (where Madeleine is faulted and Savithri exalted) is a basic agreement with Raja Rao's insistence that a woman should be the embodiment of the feminine principle failing which she is not a real woman. As a result, a woman character is judged on the basis of how best she enables the man in her life both to understand himself and seek his liberation. In all these analyses, the standards of judging the male and female characters are different. For instance, Naik's analysis of the women characters of The Serpent and the Rope leads him to the conclusion that woman can be

. . . [an] impediment to be overcome in one's quest for self-realisation. She can at times be a means of achieving this goal. Woman kills and woman saves. The two roles are symbolised in Lakshmi and Savithri respectively. (101-102)

Lakshmi is seen as an "impediment" but Rama's infidelity to Madeleine is not even considered. In fact Venkatachari commenting on this, absolves Rama of all guilt by stating that

Rama's affairs with woman are not only an affirmation of sex but also a recognition that 'Man sees himself in woman as essence, the fact of womanhood is the meaning of his life' His encounters with woman teach Rama to accept what is connoted by Anadrogyny . . . (sic). (115)

In direct contrast, a critic like Narasimhaiah holds

Madeleine responsible for her failure in understanding and identifying with a religion (105), for her inability to dissolve her ego (111), for her passionate nature and for the crude manner of her applying for divorce (108). Narasimhaiah even suggests that Georges had a pre-marital relationship with Madeleine (111). But he does not substantiate this from the novel and the accusation itself is baseless. Apart from reflecting badly on Georges, it reveals a gross misreading of Madeleine's character.

On the other hand, even while admitting that Savithri as a character is unconvincing, Narasimhaiah regards her as the ideal woman because her "love for Ramaswamy bears witness to the affirmation of the Self, the Absolute, and is therefore salutary in the long run" (113). There is, thus, an analysis of the women characters but not of the views regarding woman as expressed in the novel. Even in the analysis of the characters, there seems to be an endorsement of Raja Rao's views about a woman having to submit to man and help him in his spiritual quest.

Like Narasimhaiah, Naik's reading of The Serpent and the Rope in Raja Rao is influenced by an acceptance of Rama's point of view.⁶ This acceptance, found in most analyses, is stretched to the extent that while the alienation of Rama is seen to originate from his being an orphan, the fact of Madeleine also being an orphan is not even acknowledged, let alone considered as having any bearing on her responses to religion, marriage, motherhood and so on.⁷

Naik feels that at the abstract level there is glorification of the feminine principle in The Serpent and the Rope. The feminine principle is seen in the image of the cat in The Cat and Shakespeare as well. Naik's reading of The Cat and Shakespeare is summed up in his comment that it "is a modern hymn in praise of the feminine principle in its various embodiments, as Nair's Mother Cat, Shantha, Lakshmi and Usha, in whom woman appears as mother, lady love, sister and daughter respectively" (130). Both, Naik and Narasimhaiah comment on the praise of the feminine principle but do not consider whether women are accorded as much importance in their everyday life, given the assumption that the feminine principle finds its embodiment only in women.

Another work of criticism which commends Raja Rao's depiction of women is S. Nagarajan's article, "Little Mother in The Serpent and the Rope." Little Mother's acceptance of her status, her tradition and culture, is seen as being derived from her "samaskara" and is highly praised. But the tradition that she accepts, has only a series of dependences to offer her. Representing her acceptance of all her hardships as part of her samskara is to depict a voluntary acceptance of that particular way of life. But Little Mother has no choice and so it seems unconvincing to exalt a person who behaves in a particular manner because she doesn't have any choice. Such a reading therefore reaffirms a tradition wherein the position of woman is dependent on the man. The article also suggests that the role of Prakri-

ti should be enacted by the woman so that "man can realise his true identity as the Lord of Prakriti" (emphasis mine) (610). There seems to be a misreading of the notions of Purusha and Prakriti, as I shall discuss in the analysis of Raja Rao's works themselves.

A shift of attitude in the criticism on Raja Rao is evident in the works of critics like Maini, Krishnaswamy and Parameswaran. In contrast to the high praise of Narasimhai-ah, Naik, Nagarajan, and others, Maini's reading of The Serpent and the Rope, in an article titled "Raja Rao's Vision, Values and Aesthetics", seems a strong condemnation of the attitude adopted by the author in the novel. While conceding that "the rich poetry" (64) of India has been evoked, Maini accuses Raja Rao of using metaphysical cliches to achieve this end. The main accusation, however, is that Raja Rao completely ignores the social, economic, and political aspects while privileging what Maini calls "spiritual elitism" (66). Most problematic, according to Maini, is the acceptance (implied in the absence of comment) of "the inhumanity and tyranny of the caste system and the poverty and degradation of life in the midst of moral squalor . . ." (69). Maini is most critical of the abstractions that Rama proposes because they have no relevance on the social plane.

Maini criticizes Rama's infidelity towards Madeleine and his attempts at justifying the relationship with Savit-hri. Unfortunately, he does not comment on the views regarding woman in The Serpent and the Rope. The issue of

oppression of the caste system and of the poor is raised, but the problems faced by women is not discussed in the article.

Krishnankutty's thesis, "Women in the Novels of Raja Rao and Patrick White" is an analysis of the similarities and differences in the representation of women and womanhood in the novels of these two writers. The roles of women as depicted in these novels are discussed under four main categories--women in the man-woman relationship, women in the parent-child relationship, women as Earth Mothers, and women as Illuminati. These divisions are very important because they categorize the main spheres of interaction for women, as envisaged by Raja Rao. They also demonstrate that women are revered mainly as Earth Mothers and Illuminati. But veneration doesn't guarantee power to women, as is evident in the man-woman relationship and the parent-child relationship which shows the dependence of women on men.

Krishnankutty's thesis, however, analyses the women characters with regard to the ideal of woman that Raja Rao has and of how best the characters approach this ideal. The ideal itself is not questioned. The implication of the woman's role is not discussed but is explained in terms of Raja Rao's background, culture and Advaita philosophy. But there are several problematic aspects about Raja Rao's conception of the ideal woman such as the insistence that a woman's submission to man is essential for the emancipation of man as well as woman. Therefore, a critique of Raja

Rao's construction of femininity becomes important.

This is to some extent found in Krishnaswamy's essay, "Raja Rao: The Indian Pattern of Saved Males and Doomed Females," which focuses on the representation of women in Raja Rao's fictional works. The article analyses the women characters of the novels The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare and Comrade Kirillov. The analyses reveal the repeated patterns of portrayal of women in these works. Krishnaswamy points out that the women characters affirm the pattern of doomed females because they do not escape from "domestic injustice and tyrannical custom" (59). She sees them as consistently working towards the emancipation of men at the cost of their own enslavement.

Krishnaswamy shows that in the case of Raja Rao's women characters, rebellion is followed by resignation to the inevitability of life. According to her, the only solution offered in the works is mythic and "intensely personal" (57) because Raja Rao privileges the "masculine conceptual creative pole" (57) over "assertive feminism" (57). Krishnaswamy also observes that the identification of woman with Prakriti and man with Purusha is problematic because in concrete terms this identification does not work.

This is only a passing comment in the essay and is not analyzed further. But this identification of woman with Prakriti is a very important feature of Raja Rao's works. It is, in fact, largely responsible for what I regard as the misconceived notion of femininity as expounded in his works.

However, Raja Rao's bias for the "masculine pole" is explained by Krishnaswamy in terms of his thorough imbibing of the Indian culture. But such an explanation discounts cross cultural interactions and experiences. It implies an uncritical acceptance of "Indian culture" without considering its merits and demerits. Therefore, a critique of Raja Rao's interpretation of Indian culture and tradition becomes necessary in order to negate the inordinate ascendancy of the "masculine pole."

Parameswaran's article "Siva and Shakti in Raja Rao's Novels" is a strong denunciation of the representation of woman in Raja Rao's works. Parmeswaran discusses the characterization and the theorization of women in the context of the notions of Purusha-Prakriti and Siva-Shakti. The article underlines the observation that whereas Siva and Shakti and Purusha and Prakriti are masculine and feminine sensibilities respectively, they have been identified, in Raja Rao's works, with the male and female gender. The result is that though there is equality at the "cosmic level", it does not enter personal relationships.

The main problem, as perceived by Parameswaran, is that Raja Rao confuses androgynous sensibilities with gender. This insight provided by Parameswaran is crucial because it emphasizes that Purusha and Prakriti are not exclusive features of men and women respectively. But while stressing that an identification has been made between Prakriti and woman, Parameswaran does not consider how this identifica-

tion fits into the narrative or how it helps in the construction of a kind of femininity that doesn't recognize man and woman as equal but only as existing in hierarchical relationships. These hierarchies in Raja Rao's works need to be studied. The survey, however, shows that a full length study of the construction of femininity has not been made.

III

A survey of criticism reveals certain trends in the criticism of Raja Rao's works (beginning with enthusiastic praise for the works followed by critiques from different perspectives including Marxist and feminist ones) which can be explained in terms of the time of publication of the works as also the standards of evaluation.

Raja Rao wrote at a time when there was strong need for an Indian identity in the field of Indian English literature. His first novel Kanthapura was published in 1938, around the time when Indian English fiction was gaining recognition. In his article, "Toward Expanding the English Canon: Raja Rao's 1938 Credo for Creativity," Braj Kachru discusses Raja Rao's contribution to Indian English fiction and the evolution of a distinctive style which was "trail-blazing" (582). He writes about Raja Rao, "I do not believe that before Rao the questions of linguistic innovations and

new identities of English had been addressed with this precision and conviction" (583). Kachru points out that though "Rao's credo was not a political statement, as was, for example, that of his compatriot writer Mulk Raj Anand," (583) it was revolutionary.

While the linguistic innovations were regarded as Indianizing English, the works themselves were seen by readers and critics as providing India the identity of a land where the quest for the spiritual dominated every other aspect of life--social, political and economic. India, in Raja Rao's works, was seen as representing a metaphysic, an idea not merely a geographic entity (as emphasized in The Serpent and the Rope). India, in his works, is romanticized in terms of its "superior" non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita. Due to these reasons, Raja Rao's works were hailed as truly Indian. The blurb to Narasimhaih's work Raja Rao (which I have quoted earlier) emphasizes this aspect of his writings in saying that "he made India meaningful not merely to the Europeans but to Indians as well." Hence, the trend in the criticism of Raja Rao's works has been to stress the positive aspects (like language, style, symbolism, the poetic depiction of India, the metaphysical discussions and so on) while glossing over problematic areas such as the representation of women, caste, economic conditions and other similar aspects that I have outlined earlier.

Secondly, since Raja Rao is seen as representing the "real" and "true" India,⁸ the trend in criticism has been to

read Raja Rao in the context of Indian "reality." Critical appreciation of his works has emphasized the manner in which the reality of Indian life has been captured in works like Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope. Very often the analysis of Raja Rao's works spills over into an analysis of Indian life and the problems faced by women in Indian society. Raja Rao is seen as merely recreating this reality. Nagarajan's article, "A Note on Myth and Ritual in The Serpent and the Rope" is an example of this kind of focus. It explains the behaviour of Savithri in terms of certain customs and beliefs of Indian women. Similarly, Krishnaswamy in her essay "Raja Rao: The Indian Pattern of Saved Males and Doomed Females," comments about Raja Rao, "The culture he springs from and which he has imbibed so thoroughly in his entire being, precludes Rao from resolving the woman's issue in concrete terms" (56). But this does not explain how the same culture produces persons like Gandhi, Ram Mohun Roy, Sarojini Naidu and others who tried to solve the women's problem in concrete terms. Krishnaswamy's comment suggests that the representation of woman is not Raja Rao's but that provided by the culture. Such a premise clouds an analysis of the representation of reality and the choices involved.

In this context it is important to note that there is no single monolithic reality which a writer reproduces. In representing a particular aspect of reality there is not merely an imitation but also a re-production and re-affirmation of that reality. As Makarand Paranjape observes, "The

novel interprets or creates a particular version of reality . . . [which] serves to generate, legitimize and proliferate this version of reality (77). Hence, in proposing his views on woman, Raja Rao is not only recording and relying on a set of observed behaviour of women, but is also defining codes of conduct for women to follow. This is Raja Rao's version of reality which is inimical to the interests of women because it results in their enslavement. Hence this "reality" cannot be accepted in toto.

Also, a case has been made out by critics like McCutcheon, Srinivasa Iyengar, Narasimhaiah and others to the effect that Western standards of critical judgment cannot be entirely applied to Raja Rao's works. Correspondingly, the general attitude to feminism is that it does not fit in the context of Indian reality because it is imported from the West. So it would seem to those holding this point of view that feminist criticism cannot be applied to Raja Rao's works either, since his main project is to define the "real" India. This involves a very simplistic definition of feminism. But as Maithreyi Krishnaraj rightly points out

Feminism in its broadest sweep is a humanistic concern . . . feminist perspective is . . . to become aware of the situation of women, of relation of women to the world, of the oppression and discrimination to which women have been subjected and to use this as a power to change this situation. (34-35)

So, to regard feminism merely as a Western concept and to dismiss it is to willfully ignore its importance.

The complexity of the issue also arises from the definition of tradition in the works of Raja Rao. One definition which emerges from his works is that tradition (in India) is anti-West. And Indian tradition as suggested by Raja Rao's works is an adoption of Advaita, Manu Smriti, and so on. Raja Rao's views regarding women largely coincide with the strictures of Manu concerning the duties and behaviour of women.⁹ So, in attempting to read the novels exclusively in terms of what is regarded as Indian is to also confront the possibility of ignoring certain other aspects that might prove relevant to a different kind of reader such as one concerned with the depiction of women.

An analysis of the definition of woman in Raja Rao's works has been neglected possibly because it is regarded as unproblematic and hence in no need of an explanation or analysis. But with the increasing awareness of the oppression of women and the realisation that it is not "natural" for women to occupy a secondary position, the representation of women in Raja Rao's works has been questioned, as is evident from the articles of Uma Parameswaran and Shantha Krishnaswamy. This, to some extent, explains the trends in criticism.

From a background of this kind of awareness, I propose to read Raja Rao's works in order to ascertain the nature of the woman's role in the man-woman relationship as depicted

in them. Also, the opinion expressed by Kathleen Raine, "I know of no contemporary author whose understanding of women is as full of beauty and depth as is Raja Rao's" (605), is the opinion of a majority of the critics. They have quoted the passage "Woman is earth, air, ether, sound. . . . Woman is the world" (SR 352-53), as proof of the exaltation of woman in Raja Rao's works. In this context, Seetha Srinivasan's observation becomes very significant. In an article titled, "Rebellion against Patriarchy" she comments about Raja Rao's glorification of woman:

This mythical rhapsody on woman makes it impossible for an average woman to break away from the fantasy and she becomes entangled in the "power" myth of patriarchy. In fact by investing woman with so much power she is made powerless to release herself from it.

Therefore a reassessment of Raja Rao's works becomes necessary and a number of questions need to be asked, such as: are all women the same? To what extent can their characteristics be formulated and tabulated? What is the role of woman in relation to man? What is the mode of salvation recommended for woman? How far does it benefit her? Is the power vested in her merely illusory or is it translated into reality as well? Does veneration of her as mother ensure rights and independence for her? Another important question which concerns the construction of femininity, is whether while appearing to empower, the woman's strength and inde-

pendence is actually undermined.

The patterns in the characterisation of women and the views expressed on woman in Raja Rao's different works (considered in the order of their publication) will enable an understanding of his construction of femininity while also answering the questions that have been raised.

NOTES

¹ This derives from a reading of feminist literature such as that of Catherine Belsey, Annette Kolodony, Gerda Lerner, Kumkum Sangari, Elaine Showalter, Susie Tharu and others.

² This aspect of Raja Rao's works has been discussed by various critics like Wimal Dissanyake, K. R. Rao and others, but most extensively by Paul Sharrad who points out that this kind of an obfuscation between author and character results from the emphasis that the works are not fiction. Paul Sharrad's comment on this is interesting.

The upshot of [the] highly personal and religious creative theory [given by Raja Rao] has been to divert attention from Rao's writing as fiction. The emphasis is placed by the author on the work

as received vision and on language as a mystical emanation from the godhead which does not admit of much human manipulation without severe loss of effect. We are led to feel that, really, we should be talking Sanskrit or nothing, and that we as audience are irrelevant anyway, since Rao writes for his own satisfaction. The only other role for the reader seems to be one of a devotee before revealed truth. (12)

3

This aspect of literary criticism has been extensively discussed by critics in recent times. My reference is Annette Kolodony, Nina Baym, Adrienne Rich and Cora Kaplan. For instance, Kolodony points out the possible danger of canonising when she says,

. . . the fact of canonization puts any work beyond questions of establishing its merit and, instead, invites students to offer only increasingly more ingenious readings and interpretations, the purpose of which is to validate the greatness already imputed by canonization. (150)

4

Such an attitude to Raja Rao's works was influenced by Raja Rao's own comments in the Foreword to Kanthapura. He emphasised that he had attempted to "convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own."

5

The Serpent and the Rope was regarded as the most

important of Raja Rao's works for a long time and therefore much commented on. So most of my review of criticism will pertain to The Serpent and the Rope.

⁶ M. K. Naik's Raja Rao (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972) appeared before C. D. Narasimhaiah's book--Raja Rao (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1975) though the article on The Serpent and the Rope had earlier appeared in the Literary Criterion 4.2 (1963): 62-89.

⁷ Rama's sense of alienation has been discussed in articles such as Esha Dey's "Anguish and Alienation in The Serpent and the Rope", Vimala Rao's "Love and Marriage in The Serpent and the Rope", Brij M. Bhalla's "Quest for Identity in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope" and in the works of C.D. Narasimhaiah, M.K. Naik, S. Nagarajan and others.

⁸ This trend was set right at the beginning through articles such as the one by S. Nagarajan, titled, significantly enough, as "An Indian Novel." A similar opinion was expressed by C.D. Narasimhaiah, Srinivasa Iyengar, and David McCutcheon, whose comments in many ways established the "Indianness" of the novel The Serpent and the Rope. D. D. Bhaskiyar's article "Indianness in the novels of Raja Rao" can be cited as yet another example of such a reading of Raja Rao's novels.

⁹ A Dictionary of Hinduism and Prativa Verma's Social Philosophy of the Mahabharata and the Manu Smriti provide

useful commentaries on the Manu Smriti.

Chapter II

THE BIOLOGY OF SUBMISSION

An assessment of the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's fictional works is possible through two approaches. In fact, a better understanding of femininity, as defined in the works, necessitates both these approaches. On the one hand, Raja Rao's fictional narratives include direct theorizing of woman through the views expressed by the narrator (as in the case of Rama in The Serpent and the Rope and Siva in The Chessmaster) as well as the different characters. On the other hand, the construction of femininity can also be inferred through an analysis of the characterization of women in the different works, and the manner in which certain aspects are privileged. There is a coincidence between the features privileged by the characterization and those enunciated by theory. It is paradoxical that a woman is empowered only in theory and not in the characterization. It is this paradox that I propose to address.

The characterization of women can be seen as one aspect of the construction of femininity, just as theory can be considered the other and complimentary aspect. Such a premise is further validated by the fact that none of Raja Rao's characters, especially the women, are negatively depicted. When looking for the ideal there is only the difference in

degree--the Indian woman fits more into the mould of the role model than her Western counterpart. This difference notwithstanding, every woman character, contributes to the theory of the "real" woman, through her opinions and behaviour.

The construction of femininity in Raja Rao's works can be analyzed within the context of it's being proposed by a male writer. Even if the writer were to be distanced from his work and the tale trusted, the male protagonist still contributes more to the definition of woman than the women characters themselves. (Rama in The Serpent and the Rope, Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare and Siva in The Chessmaster). The opinions expressed by the women characters only serve to substantiate those of the male characters. Raja Rao's views on woman, as evident from his works, thus, seem to be doubly coloured by a male perspective--that of the writer and the narrator. Except for Irene's diary in Comrade Kirillov, and the grandmother's story in Kanthapura the rest of the narratives are all by men. Even Comrade Kirillov is not an exclusive female narration. Kirillov's friend Ramaswamy takes over to provide an "objective" and intelligent recording of the events of Kirillov's life. In Kanthapura, on the other hand, the narration is mainly about action and does not include discussions pertaining to a woman's nature.

But every work of Raja Rao's which deals with metaphysical disquisitions regarding existence, the human mind, salvation, and spirituality, necessarily contemplates man,

woman and the man-woman relationship. Of these, the discussion on woman is substantially more than that on man. The nature of an ideal relationship between man and woman is also implicit in the discussion on women.

In the context of the central concern of Raja Rao's works, which is a search for identity, the construction of woman as the Other becomes important. Since man is defined in contradistinction to woman, the representation of woman as the Other could imply that woman is an aberration whereas man is the norm. Such a perception explains the concern regarding the representation of woman in these terms, especially, when the male characters hold such views.

Woman is considered a mystery and therefore the need expressed to understand her. Rama is full of wonder at the "deep and reverential mystery" of womanhood (SR 50). Siva too is struck by his perception that "woman is the miracle" (CM 44) "woman is magic" (CM 134) and so he confesses "Women . . . I am beginning to discover, are so other, so unpredictable" (CM 473). And so the theories evolved about woman are attempts at understanding the mystery. The mystification seems a conscious part of the construction because the women characters are not provided any position to articulate their responses to the various representations of them such as their unpredictability, elusiveness and so on.

Since woman is seen as the 'Other' (an opinion expressed by Siva), a definition becomes imperative in order to understand her. Whether it is "paens in praise of woman" (Sriniv-

vas Iyengar 404) or stipulations for a woman to submit to man, discussion about woman and womanhood itself becomes important in a framework which regards woman as a "mystery" and a "miracle". The discussions, which are more in the nature of facts stated, are premised on the expectation of a certain kind of behaviour from women which then translates into the conviction that only that kind of behaviour is possible. Hence there is only the certainty that a woman must be led by man, she must marry and she must bear children. Such a conception of woman can get oppressive when it proceeds in this manner. And my argument is that Raja Rao's works seem to consistently build this notion of woman.

The basis of the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's works is the woman's constitution. Her attitudes and her responses are seen as being influenced by her biology. This is stated as much in The Serpent and the Rope by different characters. Savithri, for instance, says, "No woman who is a woman can choose her destiny. Men make her destiny. For a woman to choose is to betray her biology" (SR 291). The implication is that a woman's biology dictates and controls her actions. To do anything contrary would be to negate one's womanhood. An extension of the argument suggests that a woman's biology does not permit her to choose her destiny because her destiny is made by men. While the reference to the "biology of woman" is mainly to her procreative abilities, there is also the suggestion of a reciprocal relation between biology and behaviour. Biology is behaviour and

behaviour is biology. This kind of a relation is evident in the remarks of the other characters as well. Rama, referring to Madeleine's efforts to get Catherine and Georges married says, "the biology of woman and the cardinal part it plays in her activity - you see it best, not when she is in love (for that is melodrama) but when she wants to get a man and woman entangled for the continuance of the race" (SR 145). There is also the remark by Rama that "Jealousy with woman is a greater biological quantum" (SR 187). Madeleine also makes a connection between the "biological function of a woman" and her intelligence. She says

Cooking is a biological function of woman: it gives respite to her already small brain. If all the phosphorus in our brains were used up in discussion, woman would easily be fooled by man. So she must retire-cook macroni or wash men's clothes-and thus she recuperates her strength. If you want to rule women just let them talk: they will fall into a coma. (SR 305)

Notwithstanding the levity that Madeleine tries to bring into her remarks, it is evident that even she sees an essential connection between the biology of woman and the role she adopts.

The correlation between biology and behaviour which is overtly stated in The Serpent and the Rope, is only suggested in the other works. It is implicit in the generalizations regarding women wherein the assumption is that the

biology of all women being the same, their attitudes and their responses too must be similar. A construction of femininity, in fact, becomes possible only through such sweeping generalizations; by tracing the behaviour patterns of some women, femininity itself is defined. Such a unified view of woman necessarily ignores the inevitable difference between one woman and the other. But reservations of any kind, which would take into account these differences, are not expressed. Instead the underlying assumption, as expressed by Mirielle's words is that, "All women are women and they speak one language. But every man speaks a different language" (CM 352).

Woman is defined as the collective while man is defined as singular. It is an obvious contradiction that though a concept of woman is so easily evolved, a similar view of man is mostly not considered and when considered it is deemed impossible. This is affirmed by the comment, "every man speaks a different language" (CM 352). Mirielle also says, ". . . a woman is a woman always . . . a woman is a woman first. . . ." (CM 402) and Suzanne, in another context remarks, "It is in a woman's nature to be jealous. . . . Women could be jealous of your favourite cane, or your car" (CM 625).

These comments reveal the connection between biology and behaviour in the case of woman. No such observations are made about man. Perhaps the biology of woman comes into sharp focus due to her ability to reproduce and bear chil-

dren. Consequently, a woman's behaviour and the role allotted to her is explained with reference to the inevitability of biological differences. The equation between biology and behaviour means that the distinctions between sex and gender are obscured. The major connotation of sex is a biological one. On the other hand, gender, as defined by Gerda Lerner is

. . . the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance. (238)

When a certain behaviour is explained in terms of biology, the implication is that this is a part of the individual's mental make up, irrespective of the kind of environment that she/he is brought up in. In fact, it is then regarded as being inherent to the individual since her\his birth. Such a point of view ignores the shaping influence of society and culture. Therefore by equating sex and gender, the possibility of change is lost. Raja Rao's premise in identifying behaviour with biology is not merely that biology influences behaviour but that it irrevocably decides behaviour. This is evident in the comments of the various characters that I have cited. Michel Barrett regards such connections as "biological reductionism" (13) because "they subsume complex socially and historically constructed phenomena under the simple category of biological difference" (12).

Raja Rao's stance (that sex and gender are the same) suggests that biological factors decide temperament, aptitude and even the attitude of the sexes. By relating these aspects to biology, the emphasis is on the unchanging and unchangeable nature of woman. This is a pernicious view because it forecloses the possibility of change particularly in the light of biology being used as the pretext for a man making a woman's destiny as stated by Savithri.

Savithri's comment on the "biology of woman" and the choice of destiny includes an important theory concerning woman which is reiterated in Raja Rao's other works as well. The theory that a woman's emancipation (which in the context of the philosophy propounded in the works is attaining God or the Absolute) is impossible without a man follows from the earlier assumption of man making a woman's destiny. For a woman, it is stated that man is the intermediary between her and God. Just as man seeks a Guru (an enlightened being) for his spiritual salvation, the theory, in the works, suggests that woman seeks a man (who may himself be involved in a search) in order to fulfill her life's quest. Raja Rao, explains that the woman's quest would not only fail but would also be unnatural if it sought to exclude the man. This is exemplified by Madeleine in The Serpent and the Rope. Her religious involvement with Buddhism is represented as being unsuccessful. One of the reasons suggested (in the works itself), is her isolation and her attempt at attaining the Truth/the Absolute all by herself. Also,

early in the novel, when Rama returns from India and the strain in the relationship between Madeleine and him becomes palpable, Madeleine asks Rama, "I have failed your Gods?" (SR 66). Rama's reply to this is "You have failed me" (SR 66). Critics like Narasimhaiah, Naik, Venkatachari and others have made this the basis of their analysis of Madeleine.

Ironically, it is Madeleine who initially emphasizes the need for a man. In a letter to Rama she writes "And how sad, Rama is a lonely woman. Without a man she can see nothing great or holy. There the Hindus are right. Man must lead woman to the altar of God" (SR 40). Rama too feels that "The God of woman must be the God of her man" (SR 113) that is, a woman must worship her man's God. In fact, Rama's reflection on the relationship between Beatrice and Dante and his response to it suggests that it is in the natural order of things that man must lead a woman to the Truth and that it cannot be the other way round. He ruminates,

Beatrice, O Beatrice is beautiful in Paradise.
But what an impossible tyrant she becomes. It is
she who wants to show the truth to Dante....She
who should see light through him now wants to
show the light to him. It is the inversion of
Truth. (SR 379

The different uses of "truth" and "Truth" seems to suggest that a man leading a woman is the highest Truth. Similarly,

though Savithri does not make any statement on the woman's need for man in order to liberate herself from the "illusory" world, her actions speak for her. Her symbolic marriage to Rama can also be seen as acceptance of Rama as her mentor --as a person who would enable her to understand herself and hence reach the Absolute.

The theory regarding a woman seeking man and his guidance in order to transcend the materialistic world, is expressed in Comrade Kirillov as well. Kirillov's wife, Irene, who imbibes much of "Indian philosophy" (an ineradicable part of Kirillov's mental make-up) writes in her diary, "The real man is the one who runs after abstractions, and the real woman she who catches, or tries to catch, the man who is trying to catch abstractions" (CK 117). Woman is thus represented as not being able to and also as not wanting to seek the abstractions directly but only through a man. Her fulfillment seems possible only through him. The suggestion is that a man not only leads woman to her God but also helps her understand herself as explained in The Cat and Shakespeare. Pai is convinced that "Shantha worships me (Pai) and has herself" (CS 23). This view is tied up with his belief that "To be a wife is to worship your man. Then you are born" (CS 32). The reiteration of such statements emphasize that a woman ought to worship her husband\man.

In The Chessmaster, the theory of woman being able to reach the Absolute through the chosen man, is reiterated by Jayalakshmi who says "Our ancestors were right. A woman had

to have a husband and lord, chosen and consecrated by astrology and the vedas, and it was through him . . . you reach back to the Absolute" (CM 172). She also uses the analogy of the sun, moon and the earth to make a similar point. The sun refers to God/Truth, moon to the man and earth to the woman. She expands on this analogy to substantiate her belief that a woman attains God/Truth/Absolute through man. She says

The earth bathes under the sun. The moon reflects the sun. Nothing affects the moon. The earth's shadow alone seems partially to cover the moon. . . . The woman, her husband dead, is inauspicious, impure. She needs the full mirroring of the moon to reach the Sun. Nobody can see the Sun straight, they would be blinded. Nobody can but be delighted by the full-rounded beauty, the flow of the moon. (CM 173)

Sivarama goes a step further with this theory. A woman, according to him, needs man not only to reach the Absolute and to know herself but in fact for her very existence. He tells Mirielle, "No woman can exist - will exist without her thinking of her man, any man, even an imaginary man" (CM 441). A comment of this nature constructs femininity as premised on masculinity, as an impossibility without masculinity. I interpret this statement as being made not in order to define woman as different from man but to emphasize

the importance of man in a woman's life. Man, it is suggested is essential for woman, otherwise she doesn't exist. The recognition of a woman's existence should, by extension of the argument, come from a man.

A parallel is seen in the story of Madhoba and Mohini in On the Ganga Ghat as well. The imaginary Mohini tells Madhobha, "I have lived so long looking for some one who could take me to Rama. For we're of such stuff made, we cannot approach a god directly. We have to go through a man" (GG 37). Though Mohini may only be a creation of Madhobha's imagination, what she tells Madhobha about the reasons for her devotion to him fit into the 'theory' of woman regarding her means of salvation. The inability to approach God directly suggests some kind of structural flaw in women. But in contrast, by stating that a man can approach God directly, a man's superiority is indicated. The only exception to this theory, in Raja Rao's works, is the story of Sudha, the daughter of Ranchoddoss in On the Ganga Ghat. Sudha's initiation into sannyas by a Sadhu enables her to seek her own path of liberation. But here again it is revealed that the Sadhu was Sudha's husband in her previous life and so it, in fact, becomes necessary for Sudha to follow the Sadhu because she believes that her "Lord of one life was the Lord of all lives" (GG 117).

While Raja Rao's work reiterate that a woman's salvation is possible only through a man, they also emphasize that though man seeks his God directly, woman acts as

the illuminati.¹ But the criteria for a woman which make it possible for a woman to be an illuminati are also laid down. The views expressed in the novels together with the characterization seem to suggest that a woman can be an illuminati only when she is submissive to the man. Accordingly a woman must submit to a man because by the very nature of his being a man he is her Guru. A submissive attitude is one of the striking features of Raja Rao's characterization of women. Their submission is considered appropriate and necessary for the "illumination" of both the man and the woman. All the ideal women characters--Savithri, Shantha and Jayalakshmi, who act as illuminati to Rama, Pai and Siva respectively are also characters who submit themselves completely to these men. They perceive in them the ability to help them reach an awareness of themselves, of God and of Truth/Absolute.

In Kanthapura, the submission of a wife to her husband is highlighted. This is evident in the incident involving Bade Khan. During the training of the women from the Kanthapura village, Rangamma advises them, "Be strong sister. When your husband beats you, you do not hit back, do you? You only grumble and weep. The policeman's beating are the like!" and we say 'so they are' " (K 175). This kind of submission involves woman accepting the immediate superiority of her man in every day situations. However, the submission discussed in the other works is of the emotional and spiritual kind. Rama says

For women possession is knowledge. To hold is to

be:to love is to submit. Bondage is her destiny. Not so with Savithri. Having accepted bondage she was free. To be a woman, she knew was to be absorbed by a man. (SR 187)

Therefore, bondage, it is stated, is as an unchangeable part of a woman's life. So there can be no freedom other than through the acceptance of bondage. This is an attitude which suggests that chains are an integral part of a woman and within this limited space, she can be free only if she accepts them and adjusts to them. Therefore Savithri within this framework is the ideal woman. Her submission to Rama is evident in her statement, "I can go nowhere . . . I belong to you" (SR 211). The submissive nature of Madeleine too is emphasized. Rama says

I was happy with Madeleine. I could be bent by the knowledge she had of me - the knowledge of my silences, the vigorous twists of my mental domain. But further down where the mind lost itself in the deeper roots of life, she waited like an Indian servant at the door, for me to come out. Then would she know what was told. (SR 92)

This kind of a submission is privileged in all the works. It is repeatedly stressed that only through submission to a man can a woman hope to reach her goal of salvation. For a woman submission to a man becomes all the more important because as Little Mother says, "for a woman the sacred feet of her husband be Paradise" (SR 294). Submission, it is

suggested then, is an end in itself. Once a woman has submitted to her husband she has attained paradise.

In Comrade Kirillov too, Irene sees this kind of submission as exalting. She envies Indian women their natural felicity at being able to unquestioningly follow their Lord. Referring to the story of Sita willingly obeying Rama's command (of forest exile) Irene remarks, "Here, as in many other things, Indian psychology is far in advance of us. Could we ever admire a Sita?" (CK 117). The construction of a particular kind of femininity is made possible through the romanticization of the "Indian woman's" attitude by a foreigner.

Similarly, Shantha, in The Cat and Shakespeare, is characterized as a "real woman because her giving is unquestioning and complete. The implication is that womanhood involves a total acceptance of man's superiority. A woman's submission to man, in The Cat and Shakespeare, is placed in the context of submission (of man and woman) to the Mother Principle. The Mother Principle refers mainly to the nurturing instincts in every individual and also to its existence at the "cosmic level", recognized in God or Destiny. Even within this framework, a woman submits to man apart from submitting to the Mother Principle. Govindan Nair is praised by Pai because of his complete surrender to the Mother Principle. Similarly, Shantha is exalted because she submits to the Mother Principle and also to Pai though at the symbolic level she herself is Mother Principle in

action.

In The Chessmaster too, the philosophy of submission of woman to man is advocated. A conversation between Suzanne and Siva discusses the issue of submission of the woman to man.

(Siva) "Unless you abandon all, all to man-"

(Suzanne) "You will never find yourself."

(Siva) "Yes". I took the occasion to say as delicately the truth as possible. "Yes, give all to man and he will give you back yourself" (emphasis mine). (CM 405)

In the context of Suzanne's desire to retain her individuality and her unwillingness to submit herself completely to Siva, he advises her to dissolve her ego in his or in a man's ego in order to reach back to herself. Inherent in this advice is a reference to a kind of submission which does not desire anything but submission itself. Siva's advice to Suzanne seems important because Suzanne's relationship with Siva is governed by her conviction that her dead son Robert would come back to her through Siva and not because she believes in the importance of submission. Her desire is, therefore, seen as a flaw which comes between her and Siva.

Jayalakshmi on the other hand is regarded as the ideal woman. The simplicity and completeness of her submission to Siva is not just because he is a Brahmin but because, for her, he is the chosen man. This is evident in her reverence

towards him. Reverence, itself, is a form of submission which recognizes superiority. Siva says of Jayalakshmi that she

. . . would never permit me (Siva) to let her go first as we opened the door. She must come behind me. That is how it has always been. That is how it will be even in the Paris of nineteen sixty three. . . . She had an instinctive respect for man. (CM 445)

Jaya believes that submission to man is necessary for a woman not only in order to attain spiritual salvation but also in order to protect her honour. She tells Siva, "Siv, you remember, I am under your protection. . . ." As Jaya perceives it, the danger for a woman is from the "Turk".² This fear prompts Jaya to express her opinion that the "womanhood of the world needs to be housed in zenanas, even veils will not do. The Turk is always at any woman's door" (CM 398). Thus, according to Jayalakshmi, protection from this danger is important and since a woman cannot protect herself, she has to submit to man for this as well.

All these comments suggest that a woman gains her identity only in relation to a man. The comments of the different characters affirm this. In direct contrast, man is seen as a complete unit in himself. Siva says of man, "He has nothing to ask: he is himself that which he seeks . . ." (CM 405). Since man is represented as being self sufficient, his need of woman is only to the extent that she is his

inspirer and his illuminati. However, the woman has only a passive role to play in this. Savithri, Shantha and Jayalakshmi are able to live up to their role of the illuminati only because they are also capable of total submission. The submission of woman to man is a feature that is very often brought up and recommended.

The most important of the reasons offered for a woman's dependence on man is that a woman cannot reach God directly, but must be led by man. While this is stated with the conviction of universal and natural truths being delivered, there is no explanation of why this is/should be so. A woman's spiritual quest is depicted as impossible in the absence of a man. Thus, while other kinds of representations of woman (as commonly found in fiction and elsewhere such as the media) portray the social, emotional and economic dependence of woman on man, Raja Rao completes the system of dependences by ensuring that dependence in matters of spirituality also follows the same pattern. However, it is a striking feature of The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare that at one point or the other, the men are economically dependent on the women in their lives. But this feature doesn't empower the women because the focus in Raja Rao's works is on spiritual matters wherein the man is represented as being far superior to the woman. This aspect of Raja Rao's works is cogently expressed by Krishnaswamy when she comments that Raja Rao's

. . . narrative scheme displays the victory of

idea over fact, mind over body, spirit over physical life. The consequence is the creation of female characters who are always seen externally and who are always reduced to symbols. They are symbols mostly of spiritual aspects of human life at the behest of the creative male perceiver. We catch here and there glimpses of feminine power and a semblance of a balance between the male and the female. By and large the feminine power is illusory and the male dominance over female behaviour to maintain social order is inevitable and everpresent. (57)

The statement that a woman cannot reach God directly but that she must be led by a man only confirms a woman's dependence on man. It establishes this dependence as an inescapable reality. A woman's spiritual salvation is represented as possible only through the man chosen for by her and not through an enlightened Guru. This is because the man in her life, whatever his accomplishments, is her Guru. The implication would be that whereas a man needs a Guru (an enlightened and liberated being) to guide him, a woman can be directed by an individual who may himself be involved in the search for the Truth/Absolute.

As mentioned earlier, some critics have suggested that Madeleine's failure is due to her isolation in Buddhism and due to her spiritual quest which excludes Rama. This read-

ing is influenced by the refrain in The Serpent and the Rope that a woman can attain her God only through man. There is, however, another reason for Madeleine's apparent failure. This is due to the manner in which her religion is represented. Madeleine is depicted as involving herself in superstitions, rites and rituals which lack credibility. The novel does not offer her the space in the work to explain her religion. Instead, it is from Rama that the indictment of Buddhism comes. He dismisses it as the religion of a poet--a religion which could not stay on in India (SR 334). Ironically, it is Rama who points out that Buddhism denies womanhood its right to exist (SR 170). But Madeleine, even with her superior knowledge of Buddhist texts, is silent on the issue. Nowhere does she explain how she relates to and understands Buddhism. Rama, on the other hand, gives a detailed discourse on the nature of illusion and reality while explaining the philosophy that he believes in. In this case the default is through the representation. Woman is spoken for.

In The Chessmaster, however, the cause of Suzanne's failure is clearly stated. It is seen as being due to her inability to submit herself entirely to Siva. Suzanne is faulted on the fact that her submission to Siva is not for the sake of submission itself but because she wants her dead son, Robert, back through him. She is, for this reason, held responsible for the rift in her relationship with Siva. However, Siva's own involvement in the relationship is not

complete. By his own admission, he seeks Jaya in Suzanne (CM 223). In spite of this, far from sharing the blame for the breakdown of the relationship, he advises Suzanne that she should dissolve her ego in a man's. Mirielle, on the other hand, is not condemned for her various extra-marital affairs because her giving and submission is complete, whether to Siva or to any other man.

In The Cat and Shakespeare there is an apparent reversal of this pattern. It is through Shantha that Pai recognizes the Mother Principle and is able to "cross the wall." However, it is not only Shantha but also Govindan Nair who helps Pai wake up to an awareness of a Truth across the wall. Govindan Nair plays an active role in helping Pai reach an understanding of the grace of God through submission to the Mother Principle. Though Shantha, along with Nair, is Pai's Guru, she is not recognized as such because a Guru is accorded a higher status. But Shantha herself is a woman because she, according to Pai belongs. Pai says of woman, ". . . woman is belonging, as mind is belonging _ belonging to me" (CS 34). Also, according to the definition of wife in The Cat and Shakespeare, wife is she who worships her man. This means that Shantha, whom Pai accepts as his wife, cannot be his Guru because it would mean a reversal of roles--Guru worshipping the disciple. So the submission of man to woman is not of the same kind as the submission of woman to man. It is, in effect, not possible given the framework of the relationship between Guru-shishya and man-woman as

adopted in Raja Rao's works.

A woman being led by man is represented as inevitable. It fits into the general philosophy of Raja Rao's works that destiny cannot be changed. What is ordained will take place. Given this philosophy and the assertion that a woman's destiny is to be made by man, the woman is caught in a situation where there is no option for her but that of dependence.

NOTES

1 I borrow this term from Gita Krishnankutty's thesis "Women in the Novels of Raja Rao and Patrick White." Krishnankutty uses the term 'illuminati' to refer to "women who have the experience of illumination" which "implies a heightened awareness of the textures of experience and a perception of the nature of reality" (287).

2 By "the Turk", Jaya means plunderers--the reference being to the Turks who invaded and plundered the Somanath temple - and so the seekers of sensual pleasures who uncaring of the sanctity of any object demean it through their attempts to possess it. By the same token, the reference is also to Western Capitalism.

Chapter III

MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD AND SATI

Marriage, in Raja Rao's works, is considered essential for woman because it is through man that she is able to reach the Absolute. However, marriage, as used in Raja Rao's works, is not restricted to the conventional sense--the one recognized by law and society. The union between Rama and Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope and the relationship between Shantha and Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare is also regarded as marriage. However, in whatever sense the word 'marriage' is used, an unmarried woman is still considered inauspicious. In Kanthapura, Venkamma's daughter's marriage to an old man is condemned. But the inevitability of a woman having to marry is emphasized in The Serpent and the Rope. The view expressed by Little Mother that a "woman has to marry whether she be blind, deaf, mute or tuberculous. Her womb is her life . . ." (SR 258) is echoed by Rama himself when he says, "Happiness is in a husband, a home, children. After all where would Saroja go?" (SR 273).

Marriage, seems the culmination of a woman's experience because it means that she has found her man and also because it enables her to bear children and know motherhood. Referring to the happiness that Little Mother perceives in Saroja after her marriage, she comments, "After all, Rama what more

happiness does a woman need than a home and a husband. The temple needs a bell . . . and the girl a husband, to make the four walls shine" (SR 276). In Savithri's case her symbolic wedding with Rama is the one that is important when compared to her marriage with Pratap. Like Rama, she believes that they (Rama and she) had forever been married. Her marriage with Pratap is comparatively insignificant--a duty to be performed in this life.

The excessive importance given to marriage in The Serpent and the Rope is missing in The Cat and Shakespeare. Marriage, as recognized by society, does not mean anything to Shantha. For her there is only the instinctive and instantaneous recognition of her man. That is marriage to her. Woman and marriage are differently defined in The Cat and Shakespeare. Pai feels that to be a "wife is not be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man. . . . You annihilate time and you become a wife. Wifeness of all states in the world seems most holy" (CS 32). To be a wife, it is implied, is to worship the husband and consequently, understand the difference between illusion and reality which is one sign of enlightenment. Annihilating time is, thus, an indication of having gained knowledge. Woman thus acquires knowledge by worshiping her husband. A reciprocal relation between attaining knowledge and worshiping the husband is suggested.

In The Chessmaster again, marriage in the conventional sense is not the marriage that can satisfy a woman's spirit-

ual inclinations. For instance, Jayalakshmi's marriage to Surrender, recognized by the society is only in name. Jayalakshmi herself desires a wedding with Siva. Here too it is more in terms of a spiritual union that Jayalakshmi envisages the wedding. For her, the wedding has a significance on the cosmic level--she would be Parvati when he was Shiva. But whatever the nature of the marriage, marriage itself becomes necessary for a woman. The construction of femininity seems to suggest that a woman's need for marriage is greater than a man's. Saroja in The Serpent and the Rope, and Uma in The Chessmaster remain in a marriage which gives them no satisfaction for precisely this reason.

Savithri's case, in this regard, is not very different. Before her acquaintance with Rama, she seems a spirited girl with an ability to rebel and fight against what she perceives as incorrect. One of the reasons for her unwillingness to marry Pratap was that he had faithfully served the British (SR 30). But later a profound change is evident in her attitude to him. She feels that "Nobody could marry Savithri, nobody could marry a soul, so why not marry anyone?" (SR 197).

Little Mother has a similar view about woman's destiny and her karma. This, in her case, allows her to bravely face up to the fact of her widowhood at a very young age. But it is not so with Saroja. Given the view that the destiny of a woman includes marriage whether she be tuberculous, dumb or blind, Saroja seems to have no choice regarding her mar-

riage. But the irony of the characterization is such that even though Savithri has the advantage of choice, she too settles for a marriage that she had been opposing all along. Her reasoning is that, "If one should have a husband at all . . . Pratap was the very best" (SR 197). The fact that she ends up marrying Pratap suggests that even Savithri's choice is a minimal one. She is allowed the choice regarding the person she wants to marry but not regarding marriage itself.

In the context of the importance given to a woman's marriage, Little Mother's comment about a woman not choosing her man gains special significance. Rama's marriage to a woman of his choice, a foreigner at that, and Little Mother's acceptance of it reveals the different standards applied to men and women. She tells Rama, "Well, yours was a destiny, strange, magnificent; you were always a favourite of the gods" (SR 259). Marriage, is thus seen as being very important for a woman, but it does not involve freedom of choice for her. In Shantha's case (in The Cat and Shakespeare), however, it is different. She chooses the man she wishes to marry. But in giving Shantha the freedom of choice, the case of Saroja, Pai's wife, is neglected. Saroja is depicted as a woman whose interests are material. Hence her incompatibility with Pai. This serves as the justification for Pai's marriage to Shantha. However, even the breakdown of the marriage between Pai and Saroja doesn't detract from the importance of marriage.

Marriage, for woman, as observed earlier, is important also because of its promise of motherhood. The definition of femininity in Raja Rao's fiction lays great emphasis on the ability of woman to procreate. This ability is exalted in all the works of Raja Rao. The woman is to be revered because she bears children. Motherhood confers a special status on woman. She is regarded as holy even in her pregnant state. The notion of motherhood includes not only the idea of bearing children but also of nurturing and nourishing them. The mother, according to the interpretation emphasized in the works, is one who protects her children. This concept of motherhood is evoked in Kanthapura, where the Goddess Kenchamma is the presiding Goddess of the village as well as the mother of its inhabitants. She is bountiful and kind to the villagers. The villagers are confident in their conviction that Kenchamma has never failed them and that she would continue to protect them.

In Comrade Kirillov, on the other hand, apart from Irene's happiness in her son Kamal, and her eager anticipation of another son, much importance is not given to motherhood. Little Mother in The Serpent and the Rope is the ideal mother with her sensitive and understanding care of her children, including her step children. She takes great pride in Rama's achievements and even arranges Saroja's wedding in spite of Saroja's reservations about her (Little Mother). Since motherhood is given such importance, Gita Krishnankuty's reading of Madeleine's failure in the novel

as being due to her inability to become a mother is justified. Rama also is fascinated by the ability of women to bear children as is evident in his attitude to Madeleine's pregnancy. Rama feels that "one cannot tell an untruth before a child-bearing mother, she is holy, a symbol of some certitude: like breath, like a mountain, or the silence of a river" (SR 235).

The centrality of the Mother Principle, in The Cat and Shakespeare, also fits into the pattern of excessive importance that is given to motherhood. The philosophy of submitting entirely to the Mother Principle in order to benefit from the Divine Grace is emphasized by Govindan Nair. It is also the philosophy endorsed and adopted by Pai. Govindan Nair uses the analogy of the Mother Cat holding the kittens by the neck and carrying them to safety in order to explain the benevolent Mother Principle. But the Mother Principle that is referred to here is not merely restricted to woman, but is depicted as being in men as well. The Mother Principle is present in Shantha as also in Govindan Nair. Their love for Usha is a manifestation of this.

Motherhood, in The Cat and Shakespeare, is exalted not only through the concept of the Mother Principle but also in actuality, that is in the physicality of pregnancy. Pai says that he envies women their ability to bear children (CS 29). But Shantha does not think that she is very special in her pregnant state. She feels that since "the mother is necessary for all children . . . motherhood has nothing

special" (CS 93-94). But Shantha is also aware that her ability to bear a child becomes the means by which Pai's fatherhood can be proved. In fact Pai defines a wife as "she who makes you the child" (CS 35). That is, the wife is also the one who is a mother. Motherhood is thereby privileged even above wifeness. While this is seen as the ultimate exaltation of women it proves, in fact, to be a mere fallacy because it is meaningless not only on the social plane but also at the theoretical level. As Ashish Nandy points out in his essay "Woman versus Womanliness in India"

To make the issues of emancipation of woman and equality of sexes primary, one needs a culture in which conjugality is central to male-female relationships. One seeks emancipation from and equality with one's husband and peers not with one's son. If the conjugal relationship itself remains relatively peripheral, the issues of emancipation and equality must remain so too.

(41)

A woman's wanting to and needing to be a mother is emphasized in The Chessmaster and His Moves as well. Suzanne's longing for the return of her dead child seems to be her only quest and the most important reason for her relationship with Siva. Her conviction that "woman is ever a mother" (CM 404), leads her to believe that her Robert would be returned to her through Siva, a brahmin who would be able to give her dead child back to her. Suzanne's mother is yet

another character who is convinced of a woman's obsessive desire for children. She says

For a woman, you know . . . a child is her only meaning. Man lives in the abstractions of his work and his dreams, but woman she lives in her ventre, in her belly. For her, life is surrender. For man, it's conquest. (CM 40)

Even Jean-Pierre thinks that a "woman is a woman, a child-bearer" (CM 533). A woman is thus recognized and accorded a place in the society.

Siva's comment, "Hysteria in a woman is only her cry for the baby. That is all - who does not know it?" (CM 266), is substantiated by Uma's hysteria. Her story in The Chessmaster is entirely about her obsession with her childless state and her attempts to cure her barrenness. Her insecurity and feeling of incompleteness arise from her childless state. Uma's trauma can be better understood in the light of the comment in On the Ganga Ghat, in the story of Rati. Rati thinks

Even a scorpion is worth bearing for a woman than one be childless, that is how the saying goes. A childless woman brings ill luck. Women will not invite you to their houses. They will not even look at you, lest your inauspicious gaze fall on them and make them thus forever barren. (GG 81)

This may be a representation of attitudes in society. But what is striking is that, in Raja Rao's works, there is

no critique of such attitudes but instead a sympathy towards such beliefs which borders on endorsement without taking into consideration the negative aspects. There is merely a statement of the woman's compulsive need for a child and this is seen as natural and unavoidable. This attitude towards motherhood emerges from an assumption that it is part of a tradition where woman is expected to fulfill the role of a mother. It is seen as the "natural and primary destination and responsibility of woman" (Dutta 84). Motherhood is seen as an essential function for women. The desire for motherhood is conspicuous by its absence in Jayalakshmi. But, it is so obsessively present in every other woman character's psyche that the importance attached to it is very evident. Motherhood is exalted in all of Raja Rao's works. Woman is granted a very powerful status due to her life-giving ability. But this power is illusory.

In the article, "Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English" Sangeeta Dutta writes about motherhood and its implications, "The role places the virtuous self-abnegating mother on an exalted position while depriving her of real power - of control over material resources and of rights over her children (84)." The truth of this statement is seen in the characterization of Little Mother who regards her son Rama as the head of the family. Despite the woman's ability to nurture and nourish, the material powerlessness of women is apparent.

This feature, of women being empowered in theory but

denied it in reality, is characteristic of the works of Raja Rao. While the problems are solved at the abstract level, the solutions are not applicable at the concrete level. In Glimpses of Women in India, Shanta Krishnaswamy points out that in The Serpent and the Rope only the mythic and symbolic unions are successful, in that they give happiness to those involved. This is true of The Chessmaster also.

The importance of a man in a woman's life is seen as deriving from his ability to provide guidance to her and also because her exalted state of motherhood is attained through marriage with him. Therefore, woman without man, according to the construction of femininity is, to quote Jayalakshmi, "inauspicious, impure" (CM 173). It is perhaps because of this that the idea of Sati is evoked so often in the works of Raja Rao, especially in The Chessmaster. A woman's need for Sati is hinted at in The Serpent and the Rope in the Mira bhajan that Savithri sings

O Cenobite, O Cenobite, do not go.

Make a pyre for me, and when I burn,

Put the ashes on your brow,

O Cenobite, do not go. . . . (SR 212-13)

However, Jayalakshmi, in The Chessmaster, is convinced that a widowed woman must commit Sati. A woman willing to jump into the pyre is regarded by her as the real, the virtuous woman. Sati also becomes very important because of the "Turk at the door" that Jayalakshmi always refers to. Sati, according to the view expressed in the work, is not

destruction but self preservation, self protection. The celebration of Sati through the narration of episodes highlighting the bravery of Rajput princesses in committing Sati, emphasizes approval of the practice. The argument in favour of Sati seems to be that either the woman, like the mythical Savithri, should be able to bring back her Lord from death or should herself prepare for death. This is suggested by the frequent references to Savithri as well

According to the definition of femininity in Raja Rao's works, the dharma of a woman is to serve her husband in life and follow him in death. This is illustrated in the story of the concubine who administers to the needs of her customers devotedly and claims that every customer of hers is her husband for the time that he resides in her house. So when God decides to test her and disguises himself to appear as her customer and dies in her house, she, true to her dharma, commits Sati. The concubine is spoken of in laudatory tones because she follows her dharma and as a true wife mounts the pyre and burns with her husband. She goes to heaven for this reason. The implication is that Sati is also a part of a woman's dharma.

The fact that Jayalakshmi, whom Siva admires greatly and who is represented as an ideal Indian woman, is always thinking in terms of Sati is yet another proof of the fact that the work romanticizes and approves of the idea of Sati. Jayalakshmi tells Siva, "I need your nothingness for my dissolution. Thus the pyre of the Lord for the Sati. There

have been at least three Satis in my family. I shall be the fourth" (CM 84). She clarifies again later to Siva saying, "I must mount your pyre. You cannot follow and be my courtier" (CM 146). Mirielle too appreciates the idea of Sati because she not only sees it as appropriate but also perceives a certain beauty in it. She explains this to Siva, "A woman's need is her death. I perfectly understand your Hindu wife, mounting her husband's pyre. Why not? She can only die in beauty, which, as the Greeks truly knew, is another form of wisdom" (CM 359). Also when Siva asks Suzanne, "Can you die on a man's pyre like an Indian woman?" (CM 404), there is a challenge in the question and also the underlying belief that a "real" woman should be ready for Sati.

Sati is represented not merely as an act of duty and of protection of the woman's honour, but also as an act of love as in the story of Madhobha in On the Ganga Ghat. Madhobha, a young man who sells firewood for cremation comes across a case where a girl insists on dying on the pyre of her husband. Later when talking to his Mohini, Madhobha remarks, "Protect her, beloved, this lady on her journey. She loved her husband so" (GG 34). Even in the story of Ranchoddoss, his daughter, Sudha, recalls her grief in the death of her husband in her previous life. Since "she loved him more than she did God himself" (GG 116) she thinks about how "noble it was in the old virtuous days: you could be burnt with your spouse, your Lord. It's a pity the British

came and stopped it all" (GG 116).

A striking feature of these observations is that they revive the concept of Sati. Sudha's comment, in particular, works towards reviving certain customs in the face of the threat to "Indian tradition" and its sanctity. In the absence of Sati being defined otherwise, it refers to the self immolation of a woman on the death of her husband. Sati is spoken of in extremely laudatory tones. It becomes the standard by which to judge the "true" woman. In comparison with Suzanne, Jayalakshmi is the ideal woman because of her readiness to commit Sati. The idea of Sati is advocated on the basis of the assumption that a woman without her husband is "inauspicious, impure" (CM 173). Since a woman's identity, in Raja Rao's works, is related to her man, she becomes identityless without him and hence the importance of Sati. But the view that a woman cannot have an identity independent of man, is in itself, problematic. And then to advocate Sati to rectify this is extremely oppressive for a woman. This is more so because it is explained, as in the case of the incident of the concubine, in terms of a woman's dharma.

The concept of dharma, in the works of Raja Rao, defines a woman's dharma regarding her relationship with man but does not elaborate on the man's dharma towards a woman. The dharma of man, as suggested, in the allusion to Lord Rama, seems to be the upholding of the Impersonal Principle. The Impersonal Principle, on its part is of the kind which justifies even the banishment of Sita. Dharma, thus seems to

be more exacting where woman is concerned and hence seems unfair.

Critics like Beatrice Menezes have regarded the success or failure of the women characters from the point of view of their adherence to dharma. When these standards are applied, Madeleine seems to be a failure because she doesn't follow the dharma of dissolving her ego in Rama's. Savitri, on the other hand, is the ideal character because she submits entirely to Rama. But in the same framework, the question of Rama's dharma towards Madeleine (his wife) is not raised. In judging Rama secular standards are applied. Dharma, an integral part of Hindu philosophy, becomes operative only as long as it reiterates the subordinate position of women.

In The Serpent and the Pope, dharma is defined as having evolved from the word dhru, meaning, to uphold or to sustain. The emphasis on the dharma of a woman implies that women are meant to uphold values such as respect towards one's husband. While there are very positive features of tradition, the aspects which women are meant to uphold seem to be extremely oppressive, especially the ones like sati, the total dependence of woman on man and so on.

The notions regarding motherhood and the dissolution of a woman's ego in a man's, can be traced back to the concept of Purusha and Prakriti. There is, in Raja Rao's works, an identification of man with Purusha and woman with Prakriti. Purusha and Prakriti are merely certain characteristics

which are present in every individual, male and female, in varying degrees. Prakriti, as defined by Sankhya philosophy, is matter, and Purusha is intelligence. Liberation is from Prakriti in oneself. Purusha is, therefore not exclusively a feature of men nor is Prakriti exclusively a feature of women. They correspond to the masculine and feminine principles respectively and together they constitute an individual's personality. But in identifying Purusha totally with man and Prakriti with woman, there is the risk of attributing certain features completely to one sex to the detriment of the other. This can lead to conclusions which would be unfair to one sex because it would lead to definite expectations regarding the way in which men and women ought to behave.

However, the construction of femininity, as it comes across in the works of Raja Rao mostly rests on the assumption that woman and Prakriti (the feminine principle) are the same. Rama, in The Serpent and the Rope believes that "women are perfect women, for they have the feminine principle in them, the yin, the prakriti. . . ." (SR 311). The association between woman and Prakriti, moreover, is suggested by views which assert that woman belongs to the earth. This is also a characteristic of Prakriti which is regarded as "primal material nature" (A Dictionary of Hinduism 264). Rama says, "The object . . . is woman" (SR 37). He expands further on it in his reflections on woman

For her (the woman the beauty of this earth, the

splendour of houses and parliaments, the manufacture of sword and of brocade - be it even from Benares - the pearl necklace, the lovely cradle, the cinema, the circus, the Church-all, all is a device for copulation and fruition, of death made far, of famine made impossible, of the smile of child made luminescent on the lap of her, the Mother of God. (SR 146)

A similar view is expressed in Siva's theory of woman in The Chessmaster as well. The woman playing the role of Prakriti is more obvious in this theory. Siva reflects on the nature of woman

The woman is the miracle. She subsumes you with her presence, and makes you know yourself. She gives not only blood and bone to your abstractions, but the sense of the real. . . . (For the woman) Every act is unique, every sight an object, every child her own. Earth and air were made for her, and the flow of the river. Boats were created for her to ride on, and the air spaces cut. . . . The sun pierces, the clouds give way, and she floats through the Mediterranean space into her own kingdom. . . . She destroyed abstractions, made them history. (CM 44-45)

Suzanne too affirms this relation between woman and concreteness when she says, "The woman creates what she wants, that is, concrete objects - the child, the jewel, the

home and . . . even the male member" (CM 303). A woman's identification with the external world thus seems possible only in terms of the concrete. Inversely the theory seems to suggest that it is the woman's recognition of them as object which gives them an identity.

Apart from the identification of Purusha with men and Prakriti with women, another problem with the works of Raja Rao is that they conflate categories. For instance in The Serpent and the Rope the general and concrete are regarded similarly in the statement by Rama that, "Eternity is only for men . . . naturally" (SR 139). The view that "eternity is for men" cannot be interpreted literally and so just when the reader is beginning to think that the allusion is to an abstract and that "eternity" is only meant metaphorically, this "eternity" is used to make a case for polygamy. Polygamy, situated in the context of the three religions--Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, brings to mind the customs sanctioned by the religions and forecloses any interpretation on the metaphorical level. However, the very theory about eternity being for men only, is in itself confusing. The parameters of time and space in which eternity is defined is unclear.

Another aspect that femininity, as defined in the works, emphasizes is a woman's loyalty to her man--in terms of the physical relationship but more in terms of the spiritual. The option of Sati is a demonstration of this loyalty. In The Serpent and the Rope Savithri's loyalty is to

Rama in spite of her marriage to PrataP. For Madeleine too there can be no man other than Rama. Similarly, Catherine's brief affair with Lezo is frowned upon by Rama as well as Madeleine because Lezo is seen as coarse and vulgar while Georges is considered the right companion for her. Shantha's relation with Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare becomes possible because Shantha sees Pai as her husband and so promiscuity is unthinkable.

In The Chessmaster also, the woman's loyalty to man is emphasized by almost all the characters. Siva knows that for "the woman . . . her man is the only man alive - there are no species" (CM 45). Mirielle is even more explicit when she says, ". . . we all want to be virgins, we never can bear the thought that any man but the man, just there, above me, beside me, has ever known me" (CM 357). Also, since the emphasis is on the loyalty of the heart and the mind, Mirielle is able to say, "Every woman is a virgin. . ." (CM 402). The construction of femininity is, thus, made possible by essentializing woman and by describing her attitude to marriage and motherhood, considered the two important realities of her life.

Chapter IV

TRADITION AND FEMININITY

In the preceding chapters, I have analysed how femininity is constructed in Raja Rao's works through the importance given to the womb in influencing the behaviour of women and through the total identification of woman with Prakriti. Femininity is constructed to mean the submission of woman to man for her spiritual salvation. Enormous importance is also given to marriage, motherhood, the idea of Sati, and so on. In this chapter, I propose to examine what such a construction of femininity entails.

One of the most pertinent questions regarding the construction of femininity in Raja Rao's works concerns the need for a definition of woman and the place that such a construction has in the larger project of Raja Rao's works. The works themselves deal with the individual's need to transcend the material world through an ability to distinguish between illusion and reality. I have suggested in the second chapter that this may be due to the perception that woman is the 'Other', the 'mystery' and the 'miracle'. Since the unknown could be a threat, and woman is regarded as the unknown, there arises the compulsion to understand and define her.

Another explanation can be provided for the construction of femininity. I wish to contend that the definition of woman is imperative to Raja Rao's interpretation of

tradition. By 'tradition', I mean a heritage of certain values which privileges some aspects while devaluing, discounting or dismissing the others.

One of the central concerns of The Serpent and the Rope and The Chessmaster is the interpretation of tradition in the context of a post-independence India. 'Indianness' and 'tradition' become interchangeable and are expressed in terms of Hindu spirituality. Paul Sharrad comments about The Serpent and the Rope that "Ramaswamy . . . presents us with an 'Indianness' that partakes of an unchanging Upanishadic tradition" (43). The need for a tradition can be understood in the context of the characters being situated in the West. This necessitates an identity which while being different from the Western one not only offers a way of proving the superiority of the Indian tradition but also reveals the protagonists' involvement with the tradition. Such an identification is made possible by reviving the image of a traditional India where the spiritual is privileged over all other spheres of activity such as the social, the political and the economic. The implicit admission therefore is that where materialistic aspects are concerned the West is ahead of India, but in the spiritual domain India's superiority is unquestionable. Rama's research into Albigensian, a sect of Christianity, is significant in this context. His attempt is to prove that this sect was influenced by Buddhism which originated in India.

This reveals not only a desire to prove the superiority of

Indian tradition but also the need to survive in an alien culture by establishing the identity of one's own culture. The definition and dignity of a culture is at stake. Hence the need to emphasize the importance and richness of the tradition. As Esha Dey points out

. . . the true worth of Rao's novels . . . [lie] not in a positive and unequivocal affirmation of Indian values, but in an acute longing for such affirmation the source of which lies in a basic fear of alienation from the core of Indian ethos.

(62)

The compulsion to interpret traditions in order to establish new ones has always been a part of human endeavour. This is generated by a need for continuity between the past and the present. However, a tradition that is privileged without critique can have serious repercussions. In the tradition that Raja Rao valorizes, woman is denied real powers such as independence and control over her own life. In fact, these aspects are devalued with all the narrative force at Raja Rao's disposal.

The emphasis on tradition influences the attitudes expressed in the works, as also the definition of woman. Rama and Siva may be characters who privilege tradition. But the importance of tradition arises from the value bestowed on it by the female characters. Both Rama's and Siva's involvement with and awareness of tradition is heightened by their association with Savithri and Jayalaksh-

mi respectively. In fact, Savithri and Jayalakshmi themselves become aware of the importance of tradition only after their acquaintance with the South Indian Brahmins. It is significant, however, that Savithri and Jayalakshmi intuitively know and understand tradition. It is only their acceptance of tradition which enables the male protagonists to come closer to an understanding of their own selves.

Savithri and Jayalakshmi live out a tradition that Rama and Siva can merely imagine and theorize about. For this reason they are privileged over the Western women, Madeleine and Suzanne. Through such a model, Raja Rao seems to be emphasizing the importance of tradition while also suggesting that women are the actual carriers of tradition. While there is nothing against such a notion, the problem would arise if the women were to gain nothing from being the bearers of tradition but in fact were to suffer because of it. This is evident in various comments which emphasize the appropriateness of a tradition that ensures the total dependence of woman on man.

In The Chessmaster, for instance, Jayalakshmi is traditional in that she is religious, respectful towards Siva and insists on her orthodox beliefs. She believes in the importance of Sati, in the need for a woman to be housed in zenanas, and for decisions to be made for her. Even Jaya's feelings for Siva, outside of her marriage, emphasize her traditionality because of the manner of its representation. Vimala Rao's observation about Savithri and Rama that "It is

love outside marriage and needs the support of legend and myth," (18) is true in the case of Jayalakshmi and Siva also. Jayalakshmi's love for Siva is represented in terms of the Mira-Giridhar love which is more religious than profane. This traditional image of Jayalakshmi becomes very important because it lends authority to her views about woman and her role--views which do not allow women equal status with men.

The traditionality of Jayalakshmi becomes a matter of great pride and admiration for Siva because she is so totally uncorrupted by Western materialism, that she can, even in France, maintain her attitude of respect towards him. Jayalakshmi insists on following Siva in the traditional manner of Indian women instead of succumbing to the Western notion of chivalry--women preceding men. It is significant, therefore, that Jayalakshmi dismisses Western materialism in her comments:

Oh, the West, . . . how much they have still to learn to be civilized. . . . The west, by which I mean Western man, is half woman. And civilization. . . . any civilization that makes the object important, that civilization becomes feminine. And you can see this in America. The woman reigns there. . . . And so these half-men played with one-third women - and so at all times missed the point, which explains the state of America. (CM 173-74)

This comment works at two levels. Firstly, it discounts

Western materialism by stating that it has much to learn. The implicit suggestion is that the lessons should be drawn from India regarding the evolution of civilizations. Secondly, the masculine is privileged over the feminine. Materialism is identified with the feminine and is deplored. While such an identification is found in the Sankhya philosophy (Masih 125), it is important to note that the identification is between the feminine and materialism and not woman and materialism. But Raja Rao does not differentiate between the feminine and woman. Consequently, woman reigning is seen as a sign of degeneracy. In spite of the 'exaltation' of woman, the crux of the matter is that woman cannot reign. The representation and comments suggest that the Indian tradition does not allow primacy to woman. Her importance derives only from her role as a liberator. This tradition is privileged by Raja Rao. Therefore, in saying that the Western civilization is feminine, Jayalakshmi is not being complimentary but is referring to the degeneracy of the West where woman reigns.

A similar definition of tradition emerges in The Serpent and the Rope as well. Savithri, in The Serpent and the Rope, is represented as a very traditional woman in spite of her "modern" ways of smoking and dancing jazz. Her identification as a traditional woman arises from her acceptance of Rama as her guru. Rama himself favors a traditional way of life. Savithri's acceptance of tradition is doubly significant because it endorses tradition. This is important

because Savithri is acquainted with modern ways and yet chooses tradition. On the other hand, Saroja abhors a tradition which sanctifies her marriage to a stranger. However, she is forced to bow to "traditional authority" (Bhalla 103). So also Little Mother accepts traditional ideas and values almost unquestioningly in the absence of any alternative. But Savithri by exercising her choice in favour of tradition, emphasizes its usefulness and also its relevance in modern times. Her endorsement of tradition is extremely important in the framework of the novel because as Bhalla points out, "Savithri symbolizes modern India caught up in the conflict between tradition and modernity" (103). Through the characterization of Savithri Raja Rao resolves the conflict of "modern India."

In the context of the Indian tradition being represented as superior to the Western one, the characterization of Indian versus Western women gains significance. The characters, both Indian and Western, acknowledge the superiority of Indian civilization. For instance Madame X's view about India as a "land of eternal wisdom" (CM 33) is also the opinion of the other characters. In The Serpent and the Rope, Madeleine comments, "Oh, to be born in a country where tradition is so alive . . . that even the skin of her men is like some royal satin . . ." (SR 19).

By subscribing to the supremacy of Indian culture and civilization, the Western characters, women in particular, lend themselves to evaluation by standards considered Indi-

an. These standards rely upon certain customs such as the behaviour of Indian woman towards man, attitude to life and so on. Since the Western women are fascinated by Indian thought, they attempt to mould themselves according to it. In fact, Rama and Siva comment on the Indianness of Madeleine and Suzanne respectively. Therefore, within this framework, comparisons are made between the Indian and the Western women. Rama, for instance, tells Madeleine, "You are more of a Brahmin than I" (313).

However, the comparisons reveal that the Indian woman (Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope and Jayalakshmi in The Chessmaster) is the ideal one because of her instinctive perception of tradition. Savithri's instinctive understanding is repeatedly emphasized in comparison with Madeleine's lack of it. Also, in both the works, the Western women, Madeleine and Suzanne respectively are regarded as failures for the same reason--their inability to dissolve their ego completely in the man's (which is also a part of tradition as defined by Raja Rao), as I have discussed in the earlier chapters. In contrast, the Indian women are able to accept the guidance of the male characters, and hence are regarded as being able to live the tradition more successfully than their Western counterparts. By privileging the attitude of the Indian women over that of the Western women, the tradition of woman submitting to man is also reinforced.

The construction of femininity serves to reinforce a version of tradition which accords woman a secondary posi-

tion. But the construction itself is made possible, as pointed out in the earlier chapters, through broad generalizations and the Purusha-Prakriti identification. But the kind of narrative mode adopted also contributes to the construction of femininity. For instance, The Serpent and the Rope, The Chessmaster and The Cat and Shakespeare have male narrators and hence a male perspective. So that point of view gains precedence. The works provide certain positions with which the readers can identify (Belsey 3). A recognition of Rama in The Serpent and the Rope and Siva in The Chessmaster as authorities (in matters of spiritual and metaphysical knowledge) is made explicit in the attitude of the other characters towards them. They are held in awe and their views are privileged above the rest. Critical assessment of the works has also been along these lines. As I have mentioned earlier, nothing can illustrate the case as tellingly as the fact that critics have been sympathetic to Rama and hostile to Madeleine. This arises from Rama's representation of himself wherein he emphasizes only his alien and isolated self. Rama's self-involvement is such that it focuses attention on only such aspects as interest him. Moreover his construction of femininity is not questioned by anyone but in fact finds concurrence in the comments of the other characters.

In fact, the major problem with Raja Rao's construction of femininity is that the woman is mostly empowered in terms of abstractions. In actuality her power is very limited.

While the works state that men need women in order to inspire them, that is act as the "illuminati", it is they (men) who are more important in the social structure. As a result while Rama and Siva accept the respect that is due to them as men and also as the eldest members of their families, they do not take on the responsibility that arises from this position. In The Serpent and the Rope especially, Rama is regarded with great respect by Saroja and Little Mother as the eldest brother and eldest son respectively but he does not perform the duties that are expected of such a relationship. He is not able to help Saroja in her moment of crisis.

So the problems of women do not get solved at the concrete level. In fact, the problems themselves are erased in the abstract generalizations of woman and so no solution is suggested for them even in here. On the contrary, the story of Gautama leaving behind his wife and children is frequently brought up suggesting thereby that a man can seek an answer to his various questions only by leaving the world behind.

This seems to be the attitude in Raja Rao's works. The model of living that he offers for the actual world is detrimental to the interests of women because it leaves them powerless to act independent of men. By continually emphasizing that a woman's responses are forced by her biology and by stating that her liberation is possible only through her submission to man, it is implied that the woman is

incapable of acting otherwise. There seems to be no option for her except to surrender to man or she is considered a failure (as in the Madeleine and Suzanne's case). A woman's approach to the ideal is represented as being possible only through the adoption of such a role by her. So while not contesting the importance of Raja Rao's works as regards their form, technique, style and subject matter, I regard the construction of femininity in them as being inimical to the interests of women on the mundane plane in which, the struggle for equality must first be won. Later, when men and women are equal socially, economically and politically, their voluntary submission to either, man or woman, for spiritual salvation will not be questioned. Nor will it seem as inimical to their interests as it now does.

WORKS CITED

- Barrett, Michele. Women's Oppression Today. London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1980.
- Baskiyar, D.D. "Indianness in the Novels of Raja Rao." The Indian Journal of English Studies. 25 (1985): 131-140.
- Belsey, Catherine. The Subject of Tragedy. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Belsey, Catherine and Jane Moore, eds. The Feminist Reader. London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1989.
- Bhalla, Brij M. "Quest for Identity in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope." Ariel. 4.4 (1973): 95-105.
- Dayal, Prabh. "The Tantric Elements in the Novels of Raja Rao." Literary Half-Yearly. 28.1 (1987): 105-118.
- Dey, Esha. "Anguish and Alienation in The Serpent and the Rope." Littcrit. 7.1 June. 1981: 62-73.
- Dissanayake, Wimal. "Questing Self: The Four Voices in The Serpent and the Rope." World Literature Today. 62.4 (1988): 598-602.
- Dutta, Sangeeta. "Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English." Economic and Political Weekly. 25.42-43. Oct. 20-27. 1990: 84-94.
- Kachru, B. Braj. "Toward Expanding the English Canon: Raja Rao's Credo for Creativity." World Literature Today. 62.4 (1988): 582-86.
- Kaushik, Asha. "Meeting Raja Rao." The Literary Criticism.

- 15.2 (1983): 33-38.
- Kolodony, Annette. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism." The New Feminist Criticism. ed. Elaine Showalter. London: Virago Press, 1986.
- Krishnankutty, Gita. "Women in the Novels of Raja Rao and Patrick White." Diss. U of Mysore. 1987.
- Krishna Raj, Maithreyi. "Why Women's Studies? Some Feminist Perspectives." Women's Studies in India. Bombay: Popular Prakashan Private Limited, 1986.
- Lerner, Gerda. The Creation of Patriarchy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Maini, D.S. "Raja Rao's Vision, Values and Aesthetics." Commonwealth Literature: Problems of Response. ed. C.D. Narasimhaih. Madras: Macmillan India Limited, 1981.
- Masih, Y. The Hindu religious Thought. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.
- McCutchion, David. "The Novel as Sastra." Considerations. ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1977.
- Menezes, Beatrice. "Female Characterization in Raja Rao's Novel, The Serpent and the Rope." Journal of South Asian Literature. 17.2 Summer. 1981: 5-14.
- Nagarajan, S. "A Note on Myth and Ritual in The Serpent and the Rope." Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 7.1

- June. 1972: 45-48.
- . "An Indian Novel." Considerations. ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1977.
- Naik, M. K. Raja Rao. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.
- Nandy, Ashish. "Woman Versus Womanliness in India." At the Edge of Psychology. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- . Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Narasimhaiah, C.D. Raja Rao. New Delhi: Heinemann, 1975.
- Paniker, Ayyappa. "A Conversation with Raja Rao on The Cat and Shakespeare." Chandrabhaga. No.2 (1979): 14-18.
- Parameswaran, Uma. "Siva and Shakti in Raja Rao's Novels." World Literature Today. 62.4 (1988): 574-77.
- Paranjape, Makarand. "The Ideology of Form: Notes on the Third World Novel." Social Scientist. 18.8-9. August-September. 1990: 71-84.
- Raine, Kathleen. "On The Serpent and the Rope." World Literature Today. 62.4 (1988): 603-605.
- Rao, K. R. The Fiction of Raja Rao. Aurangabad: Parimal Prakashan, 1980.
- Rao, Raja. Kanthapura. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1971.
- . The Serpent and the Rope. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1968.

- . The Cat and Shakespeare. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1971.
- . Comrade Kirillov. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1976.
- . The Chessmaster and His Moves. New Delhi: Vision Books Private Limited, 1988.
- . On the Ganga Ghat. New Delhi: Vision Books Private Limited, 1989.
- . "Entering the Literary World." Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 13 (1979): 28-32.
- . "The Writer and the Word." The Literary Criterion. 7.1 Winter. 1965: 229-31.
- Rao, Vimala. "Love and Marriage in The Serpent and the Rope." Littcrit. 7.2 Dec. 1981: 12-21.
- Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, eds. Recasting Women. New Delhi: Kali, 1989.
- Sharma, Som P. "Raja Rao's Search for the Feminine." Journal of South Asian Literature. 12.2-4: 95-111.
- Sharrad, Paul. Raja Rao and Cultural Tradition. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1987.
- Showalter Elaine. ed. The New Feminist Criticism. London: Virago Press, 1986.
- Srinivas Iyengar, K. R. "Raja Rao." Indian Writing in English. Srinivas Iyengar. Indian Writing in English. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962.
- Stutley, Margaret and James Stutley. A Dictionary of Hinduism. Bombay: Allied Publishers Ltd., 1977.
- Srinivasan, Seetha. "Rebellion Against Patriarchy." The

Hindu. Magazine Section. 1 September 1991.

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalitha, eds. Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Thumboo, Edwin. "The Chessmaster and His Moves." World Literature Today. 62.4 (1988): 567-73.

Venkatachari, K. "The Feminine Principle in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope." Osmania Journal of English Studies. 8.2 (1971): 113-120.

Verma, Prativa. Social Philosophy of the Mahabharatha and the Manu Smrti. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1988.