

Exploring the logic and emotion Dynamics in the work “The Cat and Shakespeare” and “The serpent and the rope ”by Raja Rao

R. Meenu¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, PERI College of Arts and Science

Abstract – As a pioneer of the Indo-English novel, Raja Rao infuses his fiction with a profound Indian spirit, philosophy, culture, and mythology. His writings consistently manifest an unflinching quest for Truth and absolute knowledge. In *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), this thematic pursuit centers on the protagonist, Ramakrishna Pai, as he navigates life on an august mission toward self-knowledge and self-transcendence. Similarly, his autobiographical-style novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, mirrors this spiritual journey through its protagonist, Ramaswamy. Developed strictly in line with Vedantic philosophy, Ramaswamy's evolving thought process frames every life incident and conversation as either a catalyst or a hindrance to his progress. Ultimately, through the lens of Rama's life and marriage, the novel deeply reflects the traditional flavor and heritage of India.

Key Words: Absolute, Emotion, Justice, Self – transcendence, Truth.

1. INTRODUCTION

An understanding of Raja Rao's (8 November 1908 – 8 July 2006) art is enhanced by a contextualization of his novels. Although Rao admitted to several Western influences, his work is best understood as a part of the Indian tradition. Rao regarded literature as Sadhana, or spiritual discipline; for him, writing was a consequence of his metaphysical life. His novels, hence, essentially represent a quest for the Absolute. From *Kanthapura* to *Comrade Kirillov*, Rao's protagonists grapple with the same concerns: What is Truth? How is one to find it? Their methods vary, as do their results, but they share the same preoccupation. The novels, thus, become chronicles of this archetypal search. Formally, all of his first four novels share certain features. Plot is deemphasized; the narrative is generally subjective—even idiosyncratic—and episodic. The progression of the narrative is not linear but circular; in the Puranic manner of storytelling, which Rao adapts to the form of the

Western novel, there are digressions, stories within stories, songs, philosophical disquisitions, debates, and essays. Characters are also frequently symbolic figures; often, the motivations for their actions might seem puzzling or insufficient. Finally, because the narration is subjective, the language of the narrator also tends to be unique, reflecting the narrator's peculiarities—his or her social, regional, and philosophical makeup. The spiritual experiences of its narrator, Ramakrishna Pai, are reminiscent of the illuminative passages in the Chandogya Upanishad that describe the experience of the Infinite. The dialogues in the novel are also Upanishadic in their question-and answer patterns; the best example is the conversation between Govindan Nair and Lakshmi in the brothel. Nair's metaphysical speculations—such as “Is there seeing first or the object first?”—seem to be modelled on philosophical queries in the Upanishads. The cat links the novel to the Indian beast fable, and Nair's comic roguery shows similarities to the rogue fable in the Panchatantra.

The Cat and Shakespeare is spiritual Rao's sequel to *The Serpent and the Rope* in that it shows what happens after a seeker's veil of illusion has been removed by the guru. Its theme may be summed up in Hamlet's words to Horatio toward the end of the play: “There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Roughhewn them how we will.” A similar view of grace is embodied in the novel in what Nair, the man who is united to Truth, calls “the way of the Cat.” The “way of the Cat” is simply the notion that just as the kitten is carried by the scruff of its neck by the mother cat, the human being is completely at the mercy of the divine; consequently, the only way to live is to surrender oneself totally to divine grace, as the helpless kitten surrenders itself to the mother cat. Nair lives this philosophy and is responsible for teaching it to his ignorant neighbour, the narrator Pai. Pai is like the innocent hunter in the story who unknowingly heaped leaves on Siva and was rewarded with a vision (Mambrol). The major Western debt is to William Shakespeare, who is acknowledged in the title. Shakespeare is a symbol for the universal; according to Rao, Shakespeare's vision transcends

duality and arrives at a unified view of the universe. The various stages in the life of protagonist Govindan Nair are clearly marked out and his trials and tribulations, his spiritual doubts and uncertainties are also indicated in the novel. He is trapped in the midst of emotionally confused age, and feels some deep absence in him. Pai tries to come out of the void he has in his life, and for that he is initiated by Govindan Nair, a friend and Guru of him. Nair helps Pai to take the Vishistadvaitic (qualified non-dualism) practices of Bhakti (devotion) and Prapatti (self-surrender) to lead him to his ultimate destination. He is involved in different kinds of human relationships (Thakur). He is seen playing diverse roles as a civil servant, father, friend, husband and lover. But all his physical action gives rise to psychological action which takes place in the theatre of Pai's heart, mind and soul with the guidance of Govindan Nair. He helps Pai to surrender to God, to destroy 'ego' and to achieve the state of mystic illumination. The self-realization of Pai, his rise from the personal to the impersonal is the outcome of Bhakti.

2. ANALYSING RAJA RAO'S "THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE"

Raja Rao calls this a 'metaphysical comedy'. It is a novella in outer form, but ontological comedy in inner form. The 'Prahasana' is wholly Indian in spirit and texture. The novel lacks the range and vitality of its predecessors but is rich in its symbolic particulars and close to the rhythms of life and reality. The physical details of the novel, the cat, the rat, the wall, and the ration shop are all subsumed into the details of the myth and the allegory. The dialectical form of the novel thus lends to it the conceptual unity and the centrality of the theme on hand. It carries the philosophy of self-surrender and acceptance of the world as a necessary step towards metaphysical identification. In short, 'Vishistadvaitic' (non-dualism) that is, mere devotion to the Divine is enough. (Mani)

A good deal of the play or comedy in *The Cat and Shakespeare* arises from the direct participation of the cat in the main events, a kind of divine intervention after the manner of much traditional literature. On the one hand, the cat is connected with the feminine principle, while on the other it is closely connected with Nair, who serves, so to speak, as the cat's apologist. Nair is a man who has learnt to understand the true (Vedantic) significance of symbols, and for him the cat stands as an ideal. As for many works of transcendental vision have

picked up historical incidents and used them for depicting imperishable visions of the soul of man struggling with grim fact of life. Arjuna insists Lord Krishna to teach him the dharma so that he can be able to understand the dilemma of life. He says: "My heart is overcome by the weakness of pity, and my mind is confused about Dharma. I request you to tell me, decisively, what is better for me. I am your disciple. Teach me who has taken refuge in you."

In 1971, after a gap of more than one decade, Raja Rao produced a farcical philosophical short novel *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Some critics have put it into the category of a novella. It follows the style of Hemingway of Turgenev. This novel has a format of only one hundred and four pages Raja Rao has employed first-person autobiographical technique in the novel. Ramakrishna Pai is the narrator and a leading character of the novel. The story starts with Ramakrishna Pai, a Saraswata Brahmin, appointed as a divisional clerk at Trivandrum, some two years back. Pai leaves his wife with two children at Pattanur because of monsoon and difficulty in school admissions. The narrator is thirty three years of age. In summers he is often irritated by heat and in that temper strikes his wife severely. His wife, Saroja, belongs to a rich family of Kartikuras from Alwaye. Pai couple has two children; Usha, the eldest girl of five years and Vithal, a boy of three years. Saroja is busy in managing her land and its produce at their native village. Ramakrishna Pai, with great toil, finds new house on rental basis in Trivandrum. The house is near the sea-shore and surrounded by coconut trees. His next-door neighbour is Govindan Nair, who is a clerk in the rationing department. The novel is primarily focused on the activities, reflections, and speeches of these two characters. Though the narrator is Ramakrishna Pai, there is a little description of his personal life and his reflections on various matters. The reflections of Govindan Nair are predominant in the novel. He has solutions to all the problems and also makes dominating impact on Ramakrishna Pai.

In fact, Govindan Nair is presented as the father figure with universal knowledge and patience. Ramakrishna Pai is in love with another woman named Shantha. She is a school teacher and her financial condition is sound. Shantha deeply adores Ramkrishna Pai and is pregnant with his child. He thinks of purchasing a house for his daughter Usha from Shantha's money. At that point, Govindan Nair leaps into the house of Pai and discusses philosophical principles included in *Ashtavakra Samhita*. The *Ashtavakra Samhita*, or *Ashtavakra Gita*

as it is sometimes called, is a short treatise on Advaita Vedanta, ascribed to the great sage Ashtavakra. Very little definite is known about Ashtavakra. His work does not in any way enlighten us or give any clue to his identity. It is presented as a dialogue between him and Jamaka. (Nityaswarupananda) He also talks of the current affairs of the nation. The action of the novel occurs in 1941, the middle of World War-II, leading to the hardships to every type of people. Govindan Nair talks of the rise of corruption in his own ration office. The people inhabiting the ration office are Abraham, a Syrian Christian; Bhoothalinga Iyer, the boss; Velaydhana Nair who manipulates ration cards and his wife has an array of gold bangles. The recent state of the developments in World War-II is also presented here. Von Boch is moving towards Moscow, Russia attacks the German left flank, British Army is pouring into India, India sends rice to Persia etc. A strange scene is presented in the novel, when Govindan Nair visits a clinic. He is supposed to visit the doctor for his son Sridhar. In the backroom, after the doctor's waiting room, there are many soldiers and civilians waiting for something. Hissing sharp cries of women from the other side of the corridor are heard. Shiva Sankar Pillai in charge of the clinic. S. S. Pillai prefers patients to choose their own doctors. He carries them to a large room with gentle light falling in it. There Govindan Nair meets a beautiful lady whose name is Lakshmi. She reveals that her husband was killed by the British in the War because he refused to shoot at Germans. She has two children. She sings, dances, and undresses herself. Then occurs a catechism about the source of happiness made by Govindan Nair to the lady who wants him to sleep with her and Nair, on the other hand, tells her to come for a ration card. He bows to the lady, predicts her husband will come back and promises to issue a ration card bearing the name of her husband Prabhakar Pillai. She asks his blessing like a daughter. The clinic scene shifts suddenly and he is shown at his own house talking to Ramkrishna Pai about his „want“. Ramkrishna Pai reflects on the loveliness of pregnant women, particularly his beloved Shantha.

He dreams of a house with eleven windows facing the sea. But dramatically the house, Kamala Bhavan, in which he resides now, is ultimately bought from Mudali for seventeen thousand rupees and the papers typed and signed in the name of Usha Pai. Usha is visualized to be the wife of Sridhar Nair. But Sridhar gets seriously sick and ultimately dies. Usha gets solace in the dream, of having a little brother soon. The readers feel sudden

jerk, when it is informed that Govindan Nair is arrested on the charge of bribery. Inspector Rama Iyer accused him of taking Rupees one hundred and nine from an elderly lady. It is narrated that, in fact, Govindan Nair belongs to the Valauthoor family that was cursed for seven generations by a starving elder in the past. Destiny has its revenge with him, thus after his son's death he is arrested on a fake charge. Then one comes across the hilarious scene of John bringing a cat in a large mouse trap to the office. As the staff-members get together, John makes fun of Govindan Nair for his philosophy of men being the kittens and God being the mother cat. Bhoothalinga Iyer, the boss, believes the cat to be a symbol of inauspiciousness and hates its presence in the office. The case of the loss of seventeen sacks of rice is given to Govindan Nair for investigation. There comes a fantastic comic scene in which Govindan Nair produces a parody of Hamlet's soliloquy. He forces Syed Sahib, Abraham, and John to declare the cat as a sacred creature. He makes John to bow to the cat and seek forgiveness. It was John's fault to stuff the cat in a small rat cage. The pick of the scene occurs when the cat jumps on the head of the boss Bhoothalinga Iyer and he dies of heart failure. This is a surrealistic scene. Govindan Nair sympathetically weeps with Lakshmi, the wife of his deceased boss. Ultimately the cat is handed over to Ramkrishna Pai. By now his beloved Shantha has delivered a male child. So the author weaves the web of domestic life and philosophy at a point in the novel. The action of the novel reaches a highly funny climax when the judge allows a cat to become a witness in the court of law, where the proceeding is going on for Govindan Nair's case. The cat jumps on the judge's table and he can see the true point through 13 the sunbeam. Then the cat licks the clerk and he finds the right file in which the signature of Govindan Nair is found to be a false one. So a lawful freedom is granted to him. In the concluding part of the novel, the readers are informed that Govindan Nair is transferred to Alwaye. And Ramkrishna Pai is promoted as a secretary of the Temple Grants Department at the Revenue Board. The details of the salient characteristics of the cat are given there. It feeds only on white-cow's milk. If Shantha is in her „three days“ (menses) and by chance she touches the milk saucer of the cat, it will not drink the milk etc. It delivers four healthy kittens. One by one the cat lifted them by the scruff of the neck across the wall. For the first time in his life, out of curiosity, Ramkrishna Pai jumps across the wall following the cat. There he finds a garden all rosy and gentle. Here he experiences beatitude. Suddenly he hears music of

marriage and announces to go. It remains suspense whose marriage is it? To put it in a nutshell, one may say that the novel does not have system, logic or order. The situations narrated in the novel are pretty comical; such as Govindan Nair never goes to the neighbour house by gate but always through a jump-across the wall and the jumping of the cat in the court and the ration office. In fact the main action is ideation, reflection, and conversation. The readers feel that everything occurs into their dream. But it certainly is replete with deep metaphysical insights. Raja Rao has uniquely used the stream-of-consciousness technique to maintain the compactness of the novel.

3. INTROSPECTING RAJA RAO'S THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE

The *Serpent and the rope* is often considered as the magnum opus of Raja Rao. The *Serpent and the Rope* is undoubtedly one of the finest novels written in English during pre-independence days. It attempts to concretize the metaphysical structure of thought. It is a novel of ideas and at the same time a symbolic novel and yet it defies those categories as they are known in English literature (Pramod Kumar Singh). As the title suggests, the novel involves two ways of apprehending reality: the recognition of the object as object and the recognition that the object exists because the perceiver perceives it" (p. 68). Ramaswamy, the protagonist of the novel, is on his journey from India to Europe on one level, and at the deeper level, he is on the pilgrimage from ignorance to wisdom, seeking for the Absolute (Ram Sebak Thakur). Rama is described as a kind young man who is somewhat frail because of his tubercular lungs. He has been living and studying in France and has married a French woman, Madeleine. Rama plans to finish his thesis on the Albigensian heresy and then to move back to India, bringing Madeleine with him. Early on in the novel, from the moment Rama first references his wife, the reader gets a sense that something is not right in their marriage.

Madeleine and Rama have a son together, their first child, but he dies when he is only seven months old. After this tragedy, Rama must return to India because his father is dying as well. Rama stays in India to preside over his father's cremation in Benares and accompanies his stepmother whom he refers to as "Little Mother" on a pilgrimage of the city's holy places, after which he must return home to his wife in France. For Rama, this trip intensifies his longing to better understand himself, making him acutely aware of the nagging feeling of incompleteness inside of him.

During this trip home, Rama also meets Savithri, a Cambridge student engaged to one of his friends, though she confesses to Rama that she is not in love with the man. When Rama first meets Savithri, his first impression of her is not great; he believes she is too much of a "modern" woman. Although he does not think too highly of her at first, he finds that he cannot get her out of his mind. This further serves to confuse Rama and complicate the situation between him and Madeleine.

Rama returns to France and to his wife, though he feels more distant from her than ever. At their first dinner together after his return, Madeleine, sensing the change in her husband, asks him if she has failed his gods somehow. He responds by saying that she has not failed his gods, but she has failed him. Rama thinks of the toe rings in his bag that were given to him by Little Mother to bestow upon Madeleine, but he cannot bring himself to give her the gift, feeling that things are just too far gone. Rama and Madeleine struggle to maintain an air of normalcy, even temporarily reigniting the intimacy in their marriage, but it is short-lived. Savithri, always in Rama's thoughts, comes back into his life when she visits him and Madeleine in France. Rama then accompanies her to England in order to continue the research for his thesis. The more time they spend together, the more Rama becomes aware of his deep love for her. He recognizes that his feelings for Savithri far surpass his love for his own wife. Rama has a hard time coming to terms with his feelings for Savithri, especially considering that he is married to someone else. At the same time, he feels that his love for Savithri is bringing him closer to understanding his own truth and following a path of integrity. In a climactic symbolic gesture, Rama gives the toe rings from Little Mother to Savithri. Considered an important marriage ritual in India, this bears great significance for the relationship between Rama and Savithri.

Rama goes back to France where Madeleine is pregnant. He once again leaves her for India and his sister's wedding. Rama needs to make an emergency visit to Bangalore for health reasons, and while he is there, he learns that Madeleine gave birth prematurely to a second son who has died. Soon afterward, he learns that Savithri has gotten married. He returns to France to be with Madeleine who has become deeply ingrained in her own Buddhist practice, withdrawing further from Rama. Rama goes to London for lung

surgery where he receives a visit from Savithri. They accept that they must part ways and that fate has led them in separate directions. They acknowledge that love is about rejoicing in one another's happiness. Rama divorces Madeleine after the distance between them grows too big to ignore. He realizes that the answer he has been seeking lies in the journey to seek out his Guru and that all of the trials and tribulations of his life have led him to this realization.

4. EXPLORING THE CHARACTER EMOTIONS IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF RAJA RAO

Raja Rao's characters in *The Cat and Shakespeare* are not mere imaginary but real. They belong to the various classes of society. Raja Rao has given vivid glimpses into the various facets of women-life in Kerala, their superstitions, traditions, casteism and yet full of colour, freshness and vitality. The matriarchal family setup in Kerala provides Raja Rao's women characters greater amount of freedom than an average contemporary Indian woman, even in this century of feminism. Raja Rao's women in this novel assert their individuality, and lead the life of their own choice, discarding the traditional domination of men and social customs. They are fascinating and non-conformists. Particularly Nair women are worshippers of mother; they are conscious of their self and have a sense of identity. For instance, Saroja is the realistic creation of Raja Rao who is the second child of her father, married to Ramakrishna Pai but stays away from him at Pattanur, Alwaye. Their son Vithal lives with Saroja in her own ancestral home called the Kartikuras House, whereas their daughter Usha accompanies her father in Trivandrum, at Kamla Bhavan. Saroja has thirty-three acres of wet land and her family business in coconut. She is a tremendous worker and cannot remain away from her home for long, not even for the sake of her sick husband. She is always busy in taking care of her lands, repairing boats, making rope. She ably manages her own affairs keeping her identity separate from her husband's. She has the courage to tell her son that he has no father, the sun is the father and to bring him up as her own, single headedly. She belongs to a race which believes that motherhood is certain and necessary fact of existence. Saroja refuses to live in a dream though she knows in the logic of her dreams two and two make seven, but in reality two and two is four. She does not follow illusory and unearthly logic truth to her is a tangible fact and she knows how to take rather than to give. She is a contrast to Shantha. She is a practical woman mostly with meagre

education. Thus Saroja is Raja Rao's realistic creation and a convincing character not sophisticated like Madeleine or Savitri but fascinating due to her consciousness of self and individuality. Perhaps matriarchal pattern of family has provided her adequate training for self-assertion. Pai has an extra-marital relationship with Shantha, a Nair woman. She is true to the ancient customs of her community, not ashamed of this extra-marital alliance 'Sambandam' of a Brahmin. For Shantha freedom of choice is a birth right and the devotion she shows to her man is also self-chosen, not imposed. She is not a conventional mistress at all, she moves in with Pai of her own free will. She never feels guilty or sinful in their relationship. She worships her man; in love, her 'giving is complete. (H.S.)

Raja Rao himself notably mentioned that "For her marriage is not a fact; it is a state mere rituals do not make a wife. Saroja is married to Pai, but when he needs her help she is not present. Then what is the use of having a wife if she cannot take care of one? Shantha on the other hand is a true wife, as she believes... To be a wife is not to be wed. To be a wife is to worship your man" (Rao). On the realistic plane, Shantha is a teacher, a gentle mistress, but on the symbolic level she manifests the feminine principle in human form and with human limitations. She displays tremendous courage to choose her own course of life and to adhere to it. Inevitably she is the product of matriarchal family system of Kerala. Being a teacher, she is financially independent. She is Raja Rao's woman with different layers of personality – realistic symbolic, spiritual, and metaphysical. She is womanhood personified whom Raja Rao has idealized. Though she is traditional, devoted and submissive, she asserts her individuality in many situations. Raja Rao has painted beautifully the word-sketches of women characters in *The Cat and Shakespeare* with their individual and peculiar traits of Kerala background which offers Saroja and Shantha tremendous courage to confront life and assert their individuality. They are not highly educated or sophisticated like Madeleine and Savitri of *The Serpent and the Rope* yet, they are quite individualistic in their behaviour. Raja Rao's favourite conception of 'mother-principle' is also manifested here which glorifies and idealizes woman. Thus, Raja Rao can be said to be consistent in maintaining his attitude towards women. His attitude towards women is idealistic as well as paternalistic. (H.S)

Ramakrishna Pai, the narrator hero is just an average human male, an everyman as he says, "I am not

particularly tall or fair or good or bad. I am just a man” (Rao). Pai desires to receive grace – like the absent – minded hunter who, throwing leaves on the sunken image of Shiva, becomes blessed with the manifestation of the Lord himself. Ramkrishna Pai, the ‘innocent’ and ‘ignorant’ quester realizes that he is actually the mythical hunter who was blessed by the vision of Shiva. He too is unaware of where the leaves dropped. Ramkrishna Pai observes, I am just like that hunter carelessly dropping ‘bilva’ trees on some Shiva as yet unknown when this big creature Govindan Nair leaps across the wall..... The fact is to him all the world is just what he does. He does and so the world comes into being (Rao). Govindan Nair, a clerk in the Ration office and Ramkrishna Pai, also a clerk in the Revenue office; in Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala. Ramkrishna Pai, the narrator, is an innocuous little man, who loves the beautiful Shantha and dreams of building a big house; his neighbour Govindan Nair is a genial soul and a man built on a large scale, whose philosophy of life is that one should surrender oneself completely to the supreme energizing principle in the universe which he symbolically calls ‘Mother Cat (Dave).

Characters in *The Serpent and the Rope*

Ramaswamy (Rama); The protagonist, an Indian student who embodies a seeker torn between personal desires and spiritual pursuits. Rama represents the internal conflict faced by a modern individual navigating complex cultural terrains.

Madeleine; Rama’s French wife, who symbolizes Western ideals of rationality and logic. Her worldview often clashes with Rama’s spiritual leanings, leading to their separation.

Saroja; Rama’s estranged ex-wife from India, representing his rootedness in Indian ideals despite their earlier dissolution.

Supporting Characters

The narrative features many side characters that provide additional philosophical insights, functioning as foils or complements to Rama’s journey. (Rishit)

5. SYMBOLISM IN “THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE”

In *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) the larger natural symbols of *The Serpent* and the *Rope* (1960) have been adapted for a deeper and more intensive examination of Truth, now sought in the familiar domestic details of the ordinary workaday life—houses, walls, cats, coffee, illness, and so on. These are the dominant symbols of the novel, which recur page after page. The wall defines a threshold between the physical and supra physical worlds; the *bilva*-tree hangs over the wall, thereby sanctifying it through contiguity (as in the legend of the hunter explained at the beginning of the novel); the house of three storeys encompasses the three worlds, heaven, earth, and the underworld (according to one traditional interpretation of Hindu cosmology); the ration shop becomes a symbol of all mundane activity governed by clock time, while the cat stands for the fundamental regenerative and sustaining principle known variously as Brahman or the Great Mother. (p. 347)

[The cat] exists at two levels—at the level of actuality within time and space, and at a metaphysical level transcending time and space. At the level of actuality the cat figures as God Shiva, whose symbolic function is concerned with the creation, preservation and final dissolution of the physical universe. In the novel the cat presides over birth (creation), the course of law or *dharma* (preservation), and death (destruction). But Shiva also symbolizes what goes beyond Shiva; that is, the Brahman or Matrix. So at this metaphysical level the cat represents the Great Mother of the universe. (pp. 350-51). A good deal of the play or comedy in *The Cat and Shakespeare* arises from the direct participation of the cat in the main events, a kind of divine intervention after the manner of much traditional literature. On the one hand, the cat is connected with the feminine principle, while on the other it is closely connected with Nair, who serves, so to speak, as the cat's apologist. Nair is a man who has learnt to understand the true (Vedantic) significance of symbols, and for him the cat stands as an ideal (p. 351). The cat too exists at several levels. At the naturalistic level its behaviour and cry are absurd, again reflecting the absurdity of life. When Nair says "All my language can be reduced to ... meow, meow, meowooow,"... he means that language too is hopelessly inadequate, hopelessly absurd.

At the same time he extends Shakespeare's meaning to embody a metaphysic that is strictly Indian. The famous question now becomes a question as to whether or not the finite world (kitten) can exist independent of, and unrelated to, the infinite universe (cat). Shakespeare epitomizes man's capacity for knowledge, understanding and expression but mainly within the realms of the physical world. The cat implies the possibility of a sustaining principle beyond what can be ordinarily known. The novel's title links together the physical and supra-physical realities. The startling juxtaposition of symbols demonstrates the Advaitic premise that all difference is only apparent, that everything can be ultimately related to everything else (p. 352). Both the absurdity and the profundity of the cat can be seen in the ration office and courtroom episodes. In the court it is the cat rather than the judge who presides over proceedings. The judge, as Nair proves, is not even certain of his own identity—that is, he does not know his own Self, in the metaphysical sense.... The cat is the focus of all attention. And yet its movements are by no means spectacular or even especially unusual or interesting. Rather its movements are unexpected and difficult to explain. It is not a logical creature and in this sense it serves as an ideal paradigm in Nair's philosophy. The ways of God are inscrutable, often apparently downright absurd. But they offer the only proof we have of God's existence. (p. 353)

Raja Rao creates a world which symbolically closes in upon itself and in which all the usual sort of problems and contradictions of life are finally resolved in a vision of the beyond. He exploits, in novel form, one traditional Indian view of cosmic order, albeit a view that is peculiarly modern on account of a heightened sense of intellectual awareness. To describe the book's form as cyclic or as symphonic is helpful, but such a description does not go far enough. The subject of the novel is that relation of the physical and the supra-physical life, and the quest for self-identity. The formal elements of the novel reflect this preoccupation. Every symbol, wherever it occurs, seems to imply all other symbols connected either directly or indirectly. Each occurrence serves as a reminder of the beginning (of the universe, of the quest, of the novel) as well as of the end. The role played by Shiva in the varied aspects of cat, Nair and the world at large is reflected in the formal cycle (creation, preservation, destruction) of the story. Characters, places and events separate and then merge together in a convergent dialectic. The book itself becomes the universe in the same way that the

Indian *mandala* becomes equivalent to the whole existential order in the eye of the beholder. (pp. 355-56) (Shepherd)

Sankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta and Ramanujacharya's Vishistaadvaitavada are different stages to the Ultimate Truth. They are not contradictory but complementary. After his death, Ramanujacharya's philosophy of modified non-dualism, according to which Man can save himself not through knowledge, but through self-surrender, came to be interpreted in two-different ways, called the 'monkey-theory' (Marjara – Nyaya) and the 'cat-hold theory' (marjara-nyaya). According to the first, the human spirit should actively strive to seek union with god, like the young monkey dinging desperately to its mother; the second school holds that man's surrender is so total as to involve complete dependence on the Divine as in the case of the young kitten lifted by the scruff of the neck by the mother-cat. The divine Mother principle is represented by the central symbol of the cat. The 'Cat-hold' theory is expounded in the novel by Govindan Nair who displays absolute confidence in the mythical animal. In the words of Sridhar Rao, The image of the mother cat carrying its kitten grows into a complex symbol embodying in itself the theme of the woman, and the theme of gradual surrender to experience which leads to a gradual realization of Truth. The knowledge of Truth provides a proper perspective by which one views the complex problems of life and death (Dave). An answer to the concept of Hindu karma, Raja Rao's "Cat and Shakespeare is a metaphysical novel where the Indian philosophy ideally blends with the western thoughts. English is somewhat "de anglicised" and creatively unified with Sanskrit chants. The indo European affinity between Sanskrit and English is nicely braided in this novel whilst making the Sanskrit rhythm to gel well the sophistication of English.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is very much true that Raja Rao's philosophical and metaphysical predilections and their articulations in his writings make him a complex yet unique writer. His purpose is quite different from the writer whose prime concern is to present a faithful account of some unique physical experience. His fiction is essentially in the form of a spiritual quest. Hence it is more promising than the fiction that is ignorant of any metaphysical or visionary approach to life. Thus, his writings demand a different level of competence in the reader – the sincerity and

capacity to share something deeper than physical experience. Metaphysically, Rao wishes to portray life as a mode of celebration, which successfully catches readers' attention and compel them to think about spirituality and metaphysical connotations coined with the mundane life. On the path of metaphysics, male or female remains an embodiment of the Absolute (Brahman). If one can read the episode of clinic-scene in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, Govindan Nair gently refuses to Lakshmi when she is eager to surrender. The dialogue occurred between them is a very good example of philosophical truth that as such every human being is important in the creation of universe. His projection of Mother Cat principle itself is evidence that he believes in feminine principle. Secondly, the importance of Shakti worship is also highlighted in most of the works of Rao. In the novels of Raja Rao, in which he also propagates that in Tantra, females are given a higher position to males. Because the women are the bounties giver and the men are always takers. *The Cat and Shakespeare* exhibits the theme of quest for self-recognition through Bhakti and Prapatti. Pai has been a pilgrim to no shrine except the Divisional office at Trivandrum. But he has given up totally to the Lord and has Dhruvasmriti on him. God, in response to Pai's Bhakti and Prapatti, rewards him with His Kripa (grace). Pai goes across the 'wall and finds him in a garden all rosy and gentle. 'The 'Wall' is a symbol of the conceptual barrier beyond which illumination lies; it stands for the ever-present obstruction of the intellect which has to be transcended before enlightenment can dawn. Pai himself accounts for it thus:

"That was the first time I went across the wall. I found a garden all rosy and Gentle. There were bowers and many sweet-smelling herbs; there were Pools and many orchids that smelled from distance. There were old men With beards as long as the knees and they talked to no one. Young men Were in green turbans and others, children and women, sang or danced to No tune but to the tune of trees. Snakes lived there in plenty, and the mongoose roamed all about the garden. I saw deer too". (Rao)

Between Pai's house and Nair's is a wall over which Nair leaps every time he visits Pai. The wall is an important symbol because it represents the division

between illusion and Truth. Nair crosses it easily, but Pai has never gone across. Toward the end of the novel, following Nair's cat, Pai accidentally crosses the wall. Like the lucky hunter, he also is vouchsafed a divine vision: For the first time, Pai sees the whole universe as a unity. The novel ends with Pai's spiritual as well as material fulfillment, as he has partially realized his life long ambition of owning a three-story house. Pai, after the recognition of his true self has become totally one with the moment (Thakur).

Rama's thought of re-establishing deeper relationship with Madeleine by ensuring the continuity of family tradition. For him, his new identity would consist of the best in his own tradition and the best of France and England. In short, the wholeness will be constituted of these diverse elements. Diversity is essential but the essence is unity. If duality persists, the identity crisis will persist also. In order to partake and perpetuate this new self-Madeleine should believe in this unity and strengthen it. But Madeleine's identity crisis is of a different nature. To her, her marriage to Ram a is based on duality i.e. an understanding between two individuals. She is extremely sincere in her efforts toward making this marriage successful. Rama's Indianness is meant to add to her knowledge and awareness to strengthen her own identity. She is proud of Rama's brilliance and loves his lofty impersonality, but she hates Indian haphazardness and haughtiness. She feels insecure in cutting herself off from her own cultural moorings. She thinks she has failed Indian gods but she is mistaken, for Rama can easily worship her gods, and is actually anxious about his Christian becoming.

The failure of their marriage, therefore, is due to a gap in understanding how much they respect each other's cultures. From now onwards, Madeleine comes under the influence of Georges, the Christian fanatic, and drifts away from Rama. Ram a wants her as his "companion of pilgrimage to lie at the feet of God together and un alone" (p. 99). But unfortunately Madeleine loves him out of pity to redress the wrongs the British have done to India. Apart from these two characters, Saroja and Savithri also face identity crises. Both have been exposed to western education and both refuse to accept the traditional roles assigned to Indian women. In the end both accept the traditional destiny. But in the case of Saroja the conflict is resolved by traditional authority and her revolt fail for lack of conviction and courage. But Savithri's quest assumes the symbolic and mythical

proportion of an epic character. She offers a contrast to Madeleine's development, for we are told that if Madeleine was all explanation, Savithri was all recognition. Like Madeleine, Savithri is also trying to imbibe new values from a distant continent. Emancipated and shockingly unorthodox in her way of life, she refuses to accept the traditional role dictated to her by her parents. Savithri symbolizes modern India, caught up in the conflict between tradition and modernity. The quest for identity does not end with the end of the book. The dissolution of Rama's marriage with Madeleine does not signify any shrinking of Rama's spirit. It only signifies that Madeleine's France is not his France, nor Madeleine's India is his India. So their divorce is also a discovery. The obvious tragedy is actually an enrichment and affirmation in the sense that identity crisis has been successfully resolved. (Minaxi).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The heading should be treated as a 3rd level heading and should not be assigned a number.

REFERENCES

1. Dave, D. D. (2015). The Cat and Shakespeare: Journey Towards the Ultimate Reality. *International Journal of English Language and Literature* , 2(3), 355-363.
2. H.S, D. P. (2018). Depiction of Women in Raja Rao's the Cat and Shakespeare. *JETIR* , 896-899.
3. H.S., D. P. (2018). Depiction of Women in Raja Rao's the Cat and Shakespeare. *JETIR* , 5, 896-899.
4. Mambrol, N. (2020, June 20). *Analysis of Raja Rao's Novels*. Retrieved September 9, 2026, from <https://literariness.org/2020/06/29/analysis-of-raja-raos-novels/>
5. Mani, K. R. (1998). Mythic Form in Raja Rao's 'Cat and Shakespeare'. *Triveni journal* , 67(2), 42-44.
6. Minaxi, D. N. (2024). Cultural and Philosophical Reflections in the works of Raja Rao: An Analytical Study. *Shodkosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts* , 5, 2307 - 2315.
7. Nityaswarupananda, S. (1975). *Ashtavakra Gita*. Mayawati, Almora, Himalayas, India: Advaita Ashrama.
8. Pramod Kumar Singh, A. K. (2015). Raja Rao's „The Serpent and the Rope“: The. *International Conference on Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences (ICSHSS'15)* (pp. 103 - 106). Phuket, Thailand: Emirates Research Publishing.
9. Ram Sebak Thakur, A. S. (2024). Quest for the absolute: A study of Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope. *Rajarshi Janak University Research Journal* , 2, 80-87.
10. Rao, R. (2014). *The Cat and the Shakespeare*. Gurugram: Penguin Books Random House India Pvt India Ltd.
11. Rishit, M. (2025, February 1). *The serpent and the rope; comprehensive Analysis*. Retrieved September 9, 2026, from <https://litgram.in/the-serpent-and-the-rope-raja-rao/>
12. Shepherd, R. (1975). "Raja Rao: Symbolism in 'The Cat and Shakespeare'",. *WLWE-World Literature Written in English* , 14, 347-56.
13. Thakur, R. S. (2023). Journey Within: The Study of Raja Rao's the Cat and Shakespeare. *Ars Artium: An International Referred Research Journal* , 11, 54-65.