



✓ ASPECTS OF IDENTITY IN THE INDO-ENGLISH NOVEL:

A STUDY OF THREE NOVELISTS : RAJA RAO,

R . K . NARAYAN AND MULK RAJ ANAND

by

Ronald Shepherd B.A. (Hons).

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SUMMARY

This thesis attempts to examine certain features in the novels of three Indo-English authors which might, in some sense, be called "Indian."

Chapter I considers the Indian mandala or yantra as a possible conceptual model in Raja Rao's novel The Serpent and the Rope. Chapter II deals with Raja Rao's central character Ramaswamy in the light of the traditional Indian hero and the modern novel hero. In Chapter III we look at some of the complexities inherent in Ramaswamy's "pilgrimage." Chapter IV considers Raja Rao's modification in The Cat and Shakespeare of the more overtly emblematic symbolism discussed in Chapter I. The final chapter on Raja Rao, Chapter V, is concerned with a sense of movement in Kanthapura and the way in which a traditional cyclic form is rendered in the terms of a modern cinematic-like technique.

Chapters VI and VII deal with structural elements in the novels of R.K. Narayan. I deliberately consider some later novels first, and then go back to look at some incipient and emerging forms in the earlier works. In these chapters I suggest that, despite the obvious differences between the two authors in rela-

tion to subject, style and personal beliefs within Hinduism, there yet exist structural elements common to the designs of both writers.

I give a single section to the works of Mulk Raj Anand in Chapter VIII. This is largely a study of what might be called the darker side to Anand's revolutionary optimism, but again an "Indian" darkness characterized by elements of folklore and superstition, of ethnic origin.

Chapter IX makes some general observations on the differences between the three writers. At the same time I suggest ways in which they are tied to common patterns as compatriots. This involves a discussion of "myth" and of "allegory" in view of the broad current of Indian tradition.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and (to the best of my knowledge and belief) no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text or notes.

The thesis does, however, contain one chapter (Chapter I) which has been published in slightly modified form in Southern Review Vol. 6, No.2 (June, 1973).

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Resources for this thesis came from the three major libraries in Adelaide, South Australia -- the State Public Library, the Barr Smith Library and the Flinders University Library. Other libraries include the library of the University of Mysore and the National Library, both in India. In all of these places I have been given assistance by librarians and staff.

Among those who have been of special assistance, I am grateful to my supervisor, Mr. H.M. Williams, of the English Department, University of Adelaide; and also to the Head of the same department, Mr. F.H. Mares, for his appreciation of my particular needs. I am also grateful to Dr. S.C. Harrex of the English Department, Flinders University, who has always been helpful and encouraging. In India I was fortunate to have had stimulating discussions with Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah and members of his English Department staff. And having missed Mr. R.K. Narayan in Mysore, I was delighted to meet him personally at a Writers' Week Conference in Adelaide during March, 1974. At a personal interview Mr. Narayan was very patient while answering my questions and, needless to say, I benefited inestimably.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is intended to constitute a "thesis" in a fairly narrow sense of monograph rather than review. Although, for instance, the discussion centres on Indo-English literature I deliberately narrow the scope so as to omit such matters as the sociological, the theoretical and the more speculative problems often associated with this branch of fiction. Even within the given area of "identity" I prefer to dwell on one sort of identity at the expense of others. The word "Aspects" in the title is meant to refer not only to different phenomena, but also to the same phenomena sighted on a number of separate occasions either in the works of a single author or in the various works of all three authors.

In general appearance, the loose ordering of chapters is meant to give the partial impression of a volume of essays, all more or less on the same main topic, but diverging here and there whenever the need arises.

A word about this "need." If I have followed any single guiding star it has been chiefly the star of my own personal interests. The path I have taken has been determined by a combination of personal interest and an awareness of what has al-

ready been said (by other critics) and what still remains to be said. I have deliberately shunned anything as complete (and possibly as monotonous) as a comprehensive survey, preferring to pick on (as they appear to me) the more choice morsels.

There are some problems which arise as the consequence of this method, and I mention these here to register my consciousness of possible objections. It might be felt that such an approach tends toward distortion, reductive simplification, or other such inaccuracies. Nor would I deny that I am often attracted by the unobvious. In defense, I would only make two points. First, that this is perhaps the privilege of the thesis as against the more comprehensive treatise, and that in fact any approach which tries to specialize must automatically reduce or distort by virtue of what is left out. Second, that there now exists a sizeable body of literary criticism in this particular area which addresses itself almost exclusively to general descriptions, abstract speculations, and so on; or else critical works which do little more than reiterate what is already known and established. In the following chapters I have made a conscious effort to do otherwise.

Finally, I make a plea to the specialist in Indian life and philosophy to make allowances for the superficiality of my own knowledge in this sphere. I would remind him that I am not,

after all, interested in sociological or metaphysical issues in themselves, but only in so far as they add to our understanding of particular literary works. I should like to think that any inaccuracies of this kind may be partly atoned for, in a literary sort of study, by an alien's privilege of greater detachment and objectivity.

INTRODUCTION

This volume deals with the novels of three Indian novelists who write in English. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand are Indian by birth and upbringing, though for various reasons they prefer to write their novels and short stories in the English language. On the other hand all three authors, like most educated Indians today, possess a more than superficial knowledge and understanding of the West. Raja Rao took his higher education in France, Mulk Raj Anand in England, and R.K. Narayan his schooling at a Christian mission school in India. Subsequently, all three writers have either spent prolonged periods in the West or else have paid frequent visits abroad. The point is, we cannot talk about the "Indianness" or "non-Indianness" of these writers in any narrow sense unless we are prepared to define rather complex criteria.

This is what the present study tries to do, at least in part. Yet "define" is too astringent a word; "suggest" more properly indicates the tentative spirit in which this task has been undertaken. The various "aspects" of both Indian and non-Indian identity, to which my title refers, are suggested as rough guidelines rather than as accurate indices. Most works of

Indo-English literature reflect, in varying proportions, the Eastern and Western components implied in the heading "Indo-English." Because the proportions are generally different from one writer to the next, it is well nigh impossible to arrive at any neat formula which will be applicable in all cases. One writer may lean toward his Indian philosophies and traditions while another may prefer those of the West. But even if there can be no hard and fast rules in this matter it should still be possible to specify, in broad terms, likely criteria for Indianness, and in default of such characteristics for non-Indianness too.

In an approximate way we often speak of a writer's "identity" meaning his personal, regional, national or cultural identity. The word "identity" itself has something to do with a sense of "belonging." Etymologically, the word "identity" stems from the Latin "idem" meaning "same"; it follows that any study of identity in literature must address itself to certain shared similarities -- such as similarities with other writers, with a place or with an ethos -- as well as to dissimilarities. We might expect to be concerned with affinities of thought and style among these authors in view of their Indian background, but also with particular departures from such common standards. Because of the wide spectrum of possible meanings attached to the word "identity," I wish deliberately to reduce the size of the field in order to

consider the question of Indian identity and of individual identity. In other words, I intend trying to account for the Indianness of these three authors beneath the surface of their individuality.

But this description of intent itself suggests an assumption that Indianness resides in the deeper levels of a literary work; on the contrary it might be argued that the deeper levels reflect a movement toward universality through a common symbology of the human mind. Obviously it is difficult to be sufficiently specific to anticipate all objections. Nevertheless, I feel it is both plausible and convenient to assume that somewhere between the extremes of universality and stylistic individuality one encounters a zone of, for want of better terms, national consciousness or in this case Indian identity. The sense of an Indian, or more specifically an Indo-English (or Indo-Anglian), consciousness is the subject of the following chapters.

But before going further we had better acknowledge a theoretical problem which arises from the title. Although the theory of Indo-English writing will be largely by-passed in this study (Indo-English fiction has probably already received more than its fair share of theoretical speculation) this problem deserves some initial attention. The problem is best stated in question form: Whose identity are we concerned with precisely? In the following chapters we shall speak about this or that author's individual or

Indian identity. But what do we really mean? Do we refer to the author in his real life complexity, or do we really refer to the author as we know him by virtue of his image which emerges from his works? The need to differentiate real author from projected or implied author has been thoroughly argued by Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction.¹ For our present purposes we must remember when speaking of an author's Indian-ness that, unless otherwise specified, we are really speaking about the implied author, or the real-life author's projection of his own or of a national identity. It is just possible (though highly improbable), for argument's sake, that the author of The Serpent and the Rope is an atheist or unbeliever or a person holding views quite antithetical to the views expressed by Ramaswamy. We just happen to possess other evidence which suggests that this is not the case, that in fact Raja Rao and Ramaswamy tend to see eye to eye on a number of major points. Similarly, and as we shall see in a later chapter, we are confidently able to make a number of connections in Anand's novels between the real-life author and certain behavioural traits in his characters by virtue of the availability of biographical

¹The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961).

materials. Nevertheless, the distinction between real and literary author is one that must be borne in mind; when we speak of a writer's identity we shall generally mean the implied author's identity unless otherwise stated.

There are also problems associated with the idea of "Indian" identity. This too will be something projected, either deliberately or perhaps sometimes unwittingly, by the author. But a still more basic question underlies the matter of Indian identity: What is it that constitutes "Indianness?" Consider the novels of non-Indian "Indians" like Kipling and Forster; or the novels of "non-Indian" Indians like Naipaul, Dum Moraes and Ved Mehta; or the novels of "Indian" non-Indians like Ruth Praver Jhabvala; or the novels of "genuine" Indians like Markandaya, Malgonkar, Rajan, etc. Are some of these novels more essentially "Indian" than others, and in what way? Indians tend even to disagree among themselves as to what constitutes Indian typicality. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for example, seems to believe that Indo-English writers would be better to follow the example of the regional language writers and write about ordinary communal life rather than about matters

metaphysical.² C.D. Narasimhaiah, on the other hand, believes that the metaphysical discussion, such as is found in the novels of Raja Rao, comes closest to the Indian heart.³ It is possible that the Indo-English novelists have, as Meenakshi Mukherjee points out, tended to concern themselves with what she aptly calls the "pan-Indian" experience, or what a sociologist

²The Twice Born Fiction (New Delhi : Heinemann, 1971), p.213. One feels that this is almost a foregone conclusion since the author sticks very strictly to an unmodified definition of the novel as having to do with "man-in-society" (p.18), despite her belief that "we must regard Indo-Anglian fiction as a branch of Indian Fiction rather than of English fiction" (p.23). Such a definition, so rigidly adhered to, would seem to automatically preclude a metaphysical writer like Rao. It has often been argued that Indo-English writers ought to forget about the old spurious notions of India as a land of maharajas and mystery, strange spiritual quests, gurus and mysticism. It might of course be argued in defence that the subject matter of a novel is largely irrelevant to its success as a literary work. The relevant criteria for judging would, I suspect, have greater bearing on the question of structural elements (the way in which the author manages to incorporate his maharajas and gurus in the total design) than on the mere question of content.

³Professor Narasimhaiah argues that when Leavis gave us the criterion of 'Man, Society and Civilization' Indians have failed to adapt this criterion to their own different situation. He suggests that "perhaps Man, World and God or Reality might be a more valid criterion, what with our deep longing for the Absolute -- deva kama." From "Values in Literary Criticism," Studies in Australian and Indian Literature (Delhi : Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1971), p.96. He makes a similar point in The Swan and the Eagle (Simla : Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), p.165.

may call the Great Tradition (in contra-distinction to the more local regional lesser traditions). The course of this tradition has undoubtedly been affected, and continues still to be affected, by contact with the West. The result of India seeing herself with borrowed eyes has tended to emphasize those aspects of India which are unique in a world comparison, and to minimize or underplay the very real regional, linguistic and even ethnic differences which remain part of the Indian scene today. This modification to tradition may be called "distortion" by some and "modernity" by others. It is difficult to see on what grounds the author who deals with social realism is more or less Indian than the author who deals with Hindu metaphysics, provided that (and this is the all-important proviso) he manages to project into his imaginative work a consciousness of, or sense of familiarity with, India, Indian life and live Indian traditions. I shall argue in the case of Anand, for example, that this writer's zeal for social reform takes its essential impetus from an awareness of the Indian past.

I have mentioned some of the difficulties attending this topic not to prepare the ground for a series of answers to the questions raised, but rather to indicate that I am aware of the numerous opportunities available to the scrupulous reader for objections. It will be necessary in some cases to over-

simplify by generalization or by the use of a model. Yet certain allowances, including allowances for over-simplification, will have to be made for the sake of the discussion. Amid this uncertainty what I hope to do is to mark out, in an approximate way, an area of ground which might in some sense be considered "Indian". Indianness and non-Indianness may then be distinguishable by the boundaries of our claim.

If we start with Raja Rao's traditional, or more strictly neo-traditional, vision of India we may hope to find some initial bearings in a hitherto largely uncharted critical area of Indo-English fiction; such an initial understanding will then, hopefully, facilitate further discussion.



CHAPTER I

RAJA RAO

Symbolic Organization in The Serpent and the Rope

In a letter to M.K. Naik on the subject of The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao stressed "the fact that both Advaita Vedanta and French culture go so intimately into the working of the book that much would be lost if you did not get the symbols appropriately fixed in the construct of your criticism of it."¹ M.K. Naik has followed up this suggestion with an excellent study of symbolic roles of the various characters in the novel. Other critics (including C.D. Narasimhaiah, S. Nagarajan, and Meenakshi Mukherjee, to name a few) have also paid some attention to the

¹M.K. Naik, "The Serpent and the Rope : The Indo-Anglian Novel as Epic Legend", Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, ed. M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai & G.S. Amur (Dharwar : Karnatak University, 1968), p.234. Anniah Gowda reports Raja Rao's comment that "The Serpent and the Rope (symbols of illusion and reality in Indian tradition) is written from a number of aspects, each interconnected with the other, facts are given the value of symbols, and symbols are combined into one specific experience." (In "Phenomenal Tradition : Raja Rao and Wilson Harris," Bulletin of Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 9 (March 1972), 33.) In the present chapter we shall study this symbolic convergence; in the subsequent chapters on Rao we shall examine the various "aspects" Rao speaks of.

novel's use of myth and symbol.² Yet while all have dealt with the novel's mythic content and with the symbolism of human relationships, few have gone further to examine the pattern of symbols or the symbolic organization of the novel.

While it is true that the tissue of myths and legends interwoven with the central narrative is responsible for a distinctive symbolic texture or symbolic aura (as well, of course, as contributing indirectly to the novel's major theme of "Self"-identity), this mythic element is only part of a more extensive thoroughgoing conceptual design. Both of Raja Rao's novels, The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare, owe their symbolic organization to an underlying plan, a scheme of cosmic hierarchies and of universal order. This rather than just the mythic content, is responsible for the distinctive Indian flavour of these novels. As for the French influence, the occasional use of personal (instead of mystical or impersonal) symbols sometimes results in a more familiar (less Indian) kind of symbolism. The modification or "personalization" of traditional symbols, however, is more apparent in The Cat and Shakespeare than in The Serpent and the Rope.

²I refer particularly to C.D. Narasimhaiah's criticism in The Literary Criterion and in his book The Swan and the Eagle, to S. Nagarajan's comments in several articles (see Bibliography) and to Meenakshi Mukherjee's treatment of the novel in The Twice Born Fiction.

In an article relevant to the present paper³ Janet Powers Gemmill disusses The Cat and Shakespeare using the analogy of a musical symphony.³ Many of the features of the novel (e.g., the symbolic patterns, the symbolic repetitions, the gathering together of different symbolic strands as leitmotifs at the end of the novel, and so on) she sees as approximating to symphonic form. Unfortunately, despite the accuracy of her observation regarding the general nature of the novel, this analogy is not altogether satisfactory. In the first place such a comparison tends to emphasize the linear/biographical continuity of the novel rather than its cyclic expansiveness. But more important is the fact that such an analogy does not really help explain the very precise and detailed "metaphysical" plan which underlies the novel. For it is even more difficult to discuss matters of detail in music than in literature or theosophy.

A more helpful plan is that of the Indian mandala or yantra.⁴ The yantra may be regarded as a pictorial summary, a hieroglyph, or a conceptual map of the most fundamental Indian

³Janet Powers Gemmill, "Rhythm in The Cat and Shakespeare," Literature East and West, 13, Nos. 1 & 2 (June 1969), pp.27-42.

⁴My authorities are the works of Coomaraswamy, Zimmer, Eliade and others, all listed in the Bibliography. In the present chapter I am particularly indebted to Giuseppe Tucci's The Theory and Practice of the Mandala, tr. by A.H. Broderick (London : Rider & Co., 1961).

thought regarding the nature of the universe. It "explains" at a glance the relation of the Many to the One, the relative to the absolute, the creation and dissolution of the universe, and so on. The yantra is a mystical symbol which is commonly used in the contemplation of the Absolute, bridging the gap between the physical and metaphysical worlds. It represents not a static view of cosmic order but a universe that it is in a state of constant flux change. This flux or cosmic rhythm is not symphonic but something more complex -- perhaps closer to the rhythmic patterns of classical Indian music. This is the rhythm of Shiva's dance, as he creates and destroys the universe.

The yantra (see Appendix A) is a mystical Indian emblem, corresponding with the kind of "expanding" symbol which Janet Powers Gemmill describes. It is a figure which takes the ordinary world of people, events and objects as its point of departure, and the "area beyond the verge of what can be experienced"⁵ as its destination. It illustrates in a visual design of (lotus) circle and opposed triangles the emergence of a spatial/temporal universe from an Absolute beyond space and time. The circle expands from a given centre to an outermost limit, and then contracts back into the original. This cycle of expansion and con-

⁵"Rhythm in The Cat and Shakespeare," p.30.

traction, of creation and dissolution, gives rise to the basic pulse or rhythm of the universe which itself gives impetus to every other kind of periodic cycle. At the centre of the symbolic circle is God, Shiva or the Masculine Principle; and at the circumference is Shakti or the Feminine Principle. Shiva and Shakti, the masculine and feminine principles, appear in the spatial/temporal universe as opposite forces but really they refer back to the one same thing, to Brahman (neuter) which is sometimes imagined as existing "beyond" or "through" the centre and which is the source and container of all masculine and feminine opposites. Though there exist different Indian schools of religious and philosophical thought, each school with its own doctrine and perceptions, there is general agreement on the most basic aetiological and teleological matters and on the broad outline suggested here.⁶

This conceptual design is evident at almost every level

⁶There is some difference of opinion as to the exact relation of God to Brahman. As impressive an authority as R.C. Zaehner, for instance, would have Brahman subservient to God (Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (New York : Schocken, 1969), p.51, though many other Orientalists would reverse this order. For example, Arthur Osborne, Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism (London : Rider & Co., 1959), p.64; Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought (London : Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.32; Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York : Harper, 1962), p.123; P. Nagaraja Rao, Introduction to Vedanta (Bombay : Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966), p.140-1; and so on. The weight of evidence tends to fall on the side of the latter writers who support the popular, if not the academically correct, view. This also roughly corresponds with the view presented in Raja Rao's novel.

of The Serpent and the Rope. At the highest level the quest theme is exemplified, prototypically, in the behaviour of the universe, which is itself a wanderer and pilgrim in search of its own identity. At a more local level the masculine/feminine polarity is reflected in the organization of the novel's imagery, in the arrangement of masculine and feminine symbols into a particular design that corresponds with the underlying conceptual plan.

Ramaswamy's enlightenment grows upon him as he begins to recognize the hidden symbolic value of ordinary objects in the surrounding world. He attempts to sanctify the everyday world, to displace the actuality with a more cogent subjective reality, so that the world very soon becomes a place of scattered symbolic clues and fragments. Ramaswamy's whole energy is directed towards a meaningful reintegration of these fragments into an undifferentiated whole.

In the following pages I shall look at some instances of this kind of symbolic organization in The Serpent and the Rope. The main difficulty in discussing this kind of symbolism is that, in the final analysis, symbols which appear separate are not separate at all but are related to all the other symbols. Wherever one starts one is caught up in an unending spiral of associated meanings, such that it becomes extra-ordinarily difficult to talk about any one thing in particular without going on to a discussion of everything in general.

Man and Woman

This particular aspect of The Serpent and the Rope, a fairly obvious symbolic feature, has received more attention than any other. The human couple (husband and wife) is of paramount symbolic interest in the novel. Man finds his natural (physical and spiritual) fulfilment in woman, and vice versa. Woman is Shakti, Shiva's consort or more literally his divine energy. She is represented in the yantra-diagram by the rim of the circle and by the downward facing triangles. The downward direction signifies woman's intimate connection with the soil, not in a narrow sense but with the whole of the created substantive world. Woman belongs to the earth in a way that is inapplicable to man:

All women are perfect women, for they have the feminine principle in them, the yang, the prakriti...all [men] are perfect when they turn inward, and know that the ultimate is man's destiny.... (p.314)⁷

Man's quest involves a journey "inwards." This is a journey towards the centre of the circle which is the source of all things. Or alternatively, it may be seen in the macrocosmic view as a journey "upwards" toward heaven, the direction indicated by the upward facing triangle within the yantra circle. The point of balance between masculine and feminine forces (equivalent to the

⁷Raja Rao, The Serpent and the Rope (London : John Murray, 1960).

harmony of a perfect human relationship) is equivalent to a recognition of Brahman. In this state of harmony the two become one, opposition becomes synthesis:

All the world is spread for woman to be, and in making us [man] know the world woman shows that the world is oneself seen as the other. Union is proof that the Truth is non-dual. (p.172)

But Raja Rao uses the symbols for the masculine and feminine principles more subtly than is perhaps generally realized. The conjunction of man and woman is at times described in words which serve a different (but associated) purpose elsewhere. For instance, the sexual experience described in one place as a journey "to a world from which there is no returning" (p.161); is related to Rama's vision of the ultimate Truth where he travels to a land "whence there is no returning" (p.408). Or else, the man/woman relationship becomes associated with politics, and more particularly with stable political rule, as when Rama ponders over the history of the British Empire: "Somewhere one woman, golden, round, imperial, always lay by her young man" (p.201). Or again, the same relationship is connected with death or with dying, such as when Ramaswamy describes himself lying with Madeleine as though on a death-bed (p.162). In Vedanta the distinctions between various kinds of high experience are de-emphasized. All such experience is regarded as more or less a journey towards the centre. The highest kind of reality belongs to the

state of supra-consciousness whether it be in an experience of sex, sleep, death or political rule (the last since only the detached man is fit to rule impartially). This whole Vedantic concept is reflected in the novel by a network of symbolic associations converging about a single point.

At a closer level the novel's prose reflects the kind of symbolic opposition belonging to the yantra. Consider Ramaswamy's description of his sister Saroja:

That Saroja was my sister made the knowledge of her womanhood natural to me -- natural to see, to observe and even to breathe.... I was intoxicated with Saroja's presence, like a deer could be before a waterfall, or an elephant before a mountain-peak; something primordial was awakening in a creature, and I felt that maturity in a girl was like new moon or the change of equinox, it had polaraffinities. There was something of the smell of musk, of the oyster when the pearl is still within, of the deep silent sea before the monsoon breaks. There was, too, a feeling of a temple sanctuary, and I could now understand why primitive people took the first blood of menstruation for the better harvesting of their fields. (p.52)

In terms of the style this passage illustrates Ramaswamy's traditional sensibility. On the one hand we see elements of primitivism and superstition, on the other a considerable degree of sophistication and refinement of response. But in terms of the symbolism we see something never previously attempted in the novel form. First we see a certain verbal drift from simile to symbol as comparison gives way to analogy, and a further drift as analogy gives way (enforced by the primitive blood superstition) to a relation of reciprocal correspondence. What starts as comparison

ends in identification, a relation which rests with the Advaitic supposition of an underlying unity in all things. Where simile and analogy depend on an assumption of difference, the Indian symbol points to the contiguity and continuity beneath apparent difference. The natural phenomena described in this passage not only suggest the operation of the feminine principle in Saroja by analogy but are (quite literally) made up of the very same stuff. In this way the natural imagery in The Serpent and the Rope exists not merely as a passive element of syntax but has a dynamic expanding function instead. It is a special feature of traditional Indian creative art that the reader, listener or viewer must actively participate in the creative act.

Even more important in this passage is the character of the symbols employed. And here I am using "imagery" and "symbols" interchangeably. The most prevalent imagery is associated with water, an element traditionally associated with fertility and the feminine principle. Water is regarded as constituting the very basis of all created life in the form of semen, sap, milk and blood. So the essence of Saroja's femininity is described by Ramaswamy by reference to the waterfall, the sea (together with the sexually implicative oyster and pearl imagery), and lastly by reference to the monsoon. Her womanly maturity is likened further to the (new) moon, again a recurrent feminine symbol associated

with tides and waters and with the cycle of birth and death. The new moon, in particular, marks a transitional phase in the monthly cycle in the same way that the equinox marks a transitional phase in the yearly cycle. If we refer back to the concept of universal order pictorialized in the yantra, this threshold is located at the centre where the manifest universe gives way to the unmanifest realm beyond. Since this is the point where the masculine and feminine principles emerge from Brahman, Rama is reminded by the change in Saroja of "polar affinities" and of "temple sanctuary."

Thus Ramaswamy dramatizes himself as observer and Saroja as the observed (suggesting the epistemological correspondence with "knower" and "known" in Vedanta). What we find in this description is a special collocation of symbols suggesting the operation of these active (masculine) and passive (feminine) principles. By means of the juxtaposition of masculine and feminine symbols a masculine/feminine dialectic is set up at a local prose level which corresponds with the same dialectic or polarity at a conceptual (and structural) level. However we must not look for any rigid sort of schematization. On the whole the feminine symbols predominate in this passage, suggesting the bond of energy connecting woman with the whole of Nature. But these feminine symbols are

sometimes qualified by other symbols which are either masculine or which somehow suggest masculinity. Symbols associated with the more volatile and less substantive forms of creation such as light, fire, sky, wind, etc., are frequently regarded as masculine.⁸

Thus the description of Ramaswamy observing Saroja "like a deer... before a waterfall" connects the deer (perhaps masculine because of its wind-like fleetness of foot)⁹ with Ramaswamy and the waterfall symbol with Saroja. And the following simile, "[like] an elephant before a mountain-peak" can be explained in the same way. The elephant is used as a masculine phallic symbol throughout the novel and suggests Ramaswamy's heightened awareness of his own human and cosmic gender. The mountain-peak, though more often a masculine symbol signifying a movement away from the earth is also used occasionally in the novel to suggest the mountain-like or snow-like purity of the feminine principle. Here as elsewhere throughout the novel the reader is made aware of a dynamic, not a static, opposition of forces. A polarity is momentarily established, then collapses, and then is re-established like the fluctuation

⁸F.D.K. Bosch sees masculine symbols as those concerned with "objects and beings that float, fly and move archwise through space," The Golden Germ (The Hague : Mouton & Co., 1960), p.149.

⁹Bosch observes that certain animals are associated with Agni because of their "fiery nature" (p.109). Wind and fire are closely connected in traditional reckoning.

of an alternating current. Masculine and feminine depend on each other for a mutual confirmation of independent identity, and such a plan permits a large measure of flexibility in the way of reversal, substitution or just a mere hint of symbolic opposition. "The feminine and masculine genders are...promiscuously employed in order to grasp both alternatives in one."¹⁰ In this way Saroja's femininity suggests not only itself but also its direct opposite in "polar affinities."

Quite a lot has been said in various articles about the causes of Ramaswamy's unsatisfactory relationship with Madeleine and his affair with Savithri. At bottom the difference between these two relationships is reflected symbolically. According to Ramaswamy's philosophy sex is properly a matter of gender, and gender a matter of function rather than of form.¹¹ Madeleine's initiative in the woman's sexual role is un-Indian and prompts Ramaswamy to say "I'm a Brahmin, and for me touch and knowledge go with the holiness of surrender, of woman not taking me there, but I revealing to her that" (p.68). Savithri's passivity on the other hand conforms to impersonal cosmic law:

Having accepted bondage she was free. To be a woman, she

¹⁰Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought, p.162.

¹¹"Gender infers function, sex infers form," Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.123.

knew, was to be absorbed by a man.... She wanted to surrender to Truth -- and be free. Life was too much sorrow: not joy was its meaning, but liberation (p.189).

This hierarchy of masculine and feminine powers (with man dominant) is reflected throughout the novel. The yantra illustrates this hierarchy pictorially in the falling off of cosmic potential moving away from the centre.

Finally in this section on man and woman, a word about the Queen's coronation. Ramaswamy interprets this event in a way that is obviously highly subjective rather than objective or actual:

London was esoteric and preparing for the crowning of another Queen; and Englishmen felt it would be a momentous insight of man into himself.... That I, an Indian who disliked British rule, should feel this only revealed how England was recovering her spiritual destiny, how in anointing her Queen, she would anoint herself. (pp.201-2)

For Ramaswamy the event is strictly symbolic: that is, it is the observance of a Truth which is beyond space and time -- what Eliade would call a ceremony or festival.¹² For Ramaswamy it represents "a momentous insight of man into himself" leading to an eventual recognition of Self and Brahman. Let us now see how

¹²"A festival always takes place in the original time. It is precisely the reintegration of this original and sacred time that differentiates men's behaviour before and after it. For in many cases the same acts are performed during the festival as during the festival as during nonfestival periods. But religious man believes that he then lives in another time, that he has succeeded in returning to the mythical illud tempus." M. Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York : Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1959), p.85.

Ramaswamy spins from this single occurrence a web of complex associations and relationships. First of all he describes the same event in a number of ways. For example, the coronation also has to do with a conjunction of masculine and feminine opposites:

...song linked man and woman over the brow of time, as though death were a superfluity. For a moment everyone looked into himself, and found he had nowhere to go. Man was happy, he was very, very happy (p.360).

Because of his highly subjective viewpoint the happiness which Ramaswamy attributes to Englishmen is really, of course, the happiness within himself. The important point is that Self-recognition is shown to be equivalent to the man/woman synthesis. Then a further complication: "Everybody was born a King, and became a Queen the instant the second hand had moved on itself -- for nothing ever moves, nothing is ever said, one is oneself the truth" (p.363). Ramaswamy is here saying that in one respect both man and woman are feminine since they both live in a temporal world. Man's duty is to perfect himself by escaping time and the world; only then does he become truly "man." Here is another instance of substitute gender, the feminine implying (temporarily) both man and woman and also implying, with apparent masculine qualification, the ultimate Truth. Actually, a reference to either gender always immediately implies both genders together. Hence a further remark: "For it was not that a Queen was being crowned, but that man was discovering his integrity as a being, like the

sound in silence, or the swan in the cool, long waters" (p.362). If woman indicates the Truth then so does man in his newly found integrity. But again, this integrity is linked with an opposition of images: sound/silence, swan/waters. To summarize, the coronation symbolically associates Self-recognition with the conjunction of masculine and feminine principles, and this conjunction may be represented by a juxtaposition of opposite genders or by reference to either gender alone.

But we can go further. Consider Ramaswamy's lung complaint. Ramaswamy's quest for "knowledge" (in the special esoteric sense) involves a three-fold discipline that is mental, sexual and respiratory.¹³ The last has to do with the control of breath, practised in Ramaswamy's case by the incantation of holy mantras. Ramaswamy's lung capacity therefore comes to have a bearing on his spiritual capacity, and to that extent his affliction comes to be associated with evil (as in the line "Evil is just part of a lung" [p.364]). At the time of coronation when man finds Truth within himself by the eradication of evil (ignorance), "evil" is being surgically cauterized from Ramaswamy's body in a London hospital. The surgical event is related to, and comes to symbolically cor-

¹³Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (London : Rider & Co., 1965), p.294.

respond with, the coronation event. And because the universe is really a psycho-physical complex in which matter is merely another form of mind, both phenomenal events are essentially psychic and fuse as one in the mind. The merging together of different occurrences anticipates a similar but more thoroughgoing fusion in The Cat and Shakespeare where, for example, a doctor's room can turn into a brothel at a mere stroke of the imagination.

Furthermore, and as C.D. Narasimhaiah has already noted, Ramaswamy's expectation of the Queen's arrival is answered by the arrival of Savithri at the hospital: "Savithri and the queen both merge in the Feminine Principle which is after all an expression of the Absolute." Savithri's arrival thus signifies the "birth of a new knowledge with which man conquers death or ignorance and gains release from the flux of life."¹⁴

The Queen's coronation is a "nodal" or "focal" point, a point of great symbolic concentration where many different symbolic strands converge. It is one of a series of epiphanies in the later part of the novel leading to the climactic experience of Ramaswamy's final vision. In Coomaraswamy's language it is a glimpse of the "monumental" (the continuous ground that forms the base or backing to all Indian art and music) seen briefly through

¹⁴C.D. Narasimhaiah, The Swan and the Eagle, p.192.

the shifting "articulate" (the patterned and fragmentary "super-structure" built upon the base).¹⁵ It is a point approaching the threshold at the centre of the yantra where the phenomenal gives way to the transcendental world.

Heaven and Earth¹⁶

The yantra expands in two dimensions, vertically and horizontally. Vertical expansion is represented by the upward and downward facing triangles signifying the masculine and feminine principles. Certain objects like mountains, trees, towers and so on suggest, because of their vertical emphasis, a connection between the opposite poles of sky and earth. The polarization of Nature into masculine and feminine principles occurs almost everywhere in the novel. Here is an example:

¹⁵"In all art there are monumental and articulate elements, masculine and feminine factors which are unified in perfect form. We have here the sound of the tamboura which is heard before the song, during the song, and continues after it: that is the timeless Absolute, which as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. On the other hand there is the song itself which is the variety of Nature, emerging from its source and returning at the close of the cycle. The harmony of that undivided Ground with this intricate Pattern is the unity of Spirit and Matter." Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva (New York : The Sunwise Turn, Inc., 1924), p.80.

¹⁶"The last achievement of all thought is a recognition of the identity of spirit and matter, subject and object; and this reunion is the marriage of Heaven and Hell," Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva, p.103. "Hell" is "evil" (avidya, Maya) and corresponds with "Earth."

The whole of the Gangetic plain is one song of saintly sorrow, as though Truth began where sorrow was accepted, and India began where Truth was acknowledged. So sorrow is our river, sorrow our earth, but the green of our trees and the white of our mountains is the affirmation that Truth is possible; that when the cycle of birth and death are over, we can proclaim ourselves the Truth. (p.37)

Sorrow is the feminine condition of the ephemeral world, of all creation that is born only to die. The river and the earth, symbolizing the feminine principle, are specifically contrasted with "the green of our trees and the white of our mountains" designating the upper nonsubstantive masculine levels of the world. The conjunction or juxtaposition of masculine and feminine principles in Nature suggests to Ramaswamy "that Truth is possible." Actually it appears here as if the masculine principle alone suggests that Truth is possible -- again a variation of polarity, the masculine principle not only implying its feminine opposite but also implying a conjunction of both principles. The cycle of birth and death, referred to in the above passage, can only be transcended by a recognition of Truth which is equivalent to the Self. This equivalence is illustrated in the horizontal and vertical expansion of the yantra where the movement upwards from the earth to heaven corresponds with the movement inwards from the self to the Self.

The cycle of birth and death is suggested not only by the polarization of masculine and feminine elements in Nature, but also by the natural convection cycle which this polarization produces:

Truth is the Himalaya, and Ganges humanity. That is why we throw the ashes of the dead to her. She delivers them to the sea, and the sun heats the waters so that, becoming clouds, they return to the Himalaya. The cycle of birth and death go on eternally like the snows and the rivers. That explains why holy Badrinath is in the Himalaya; it proclaims the Truth.(p.37)

The same cycle with its impersonal principles is also reflected in the man/woman relationship. Ramaswamy describes his relationship with Savithri in similar terms:

For whatever I gave her she accepted, as the Ganges receives the waters of the Himalayas, that go on down to the sea and come again as white flakes of snow, then blue, then very green; and as, when the sun comes northward again, the ice melts and once more the Ganges takes the waters down to the sea -- so we gave love to each other, as though it did not belong to us, but to a principle, an other, an impersonal reality, from which we saw gifts emerge in each of us, and gave each other with ceremony. For us therefore all was celebration, festival.... (pp.171-72)

Love is a "celebration" and "festival" because it is sacred. It is an attribute of Brahman from which the masculine and feminine principles ("gifts") emerge and of which they, man and woman, are the human embodiments. Because of the continuity underlying matter and spirit, there can be no distinction between sacred and profane kinds of love. Their love is that of the Himalayas for the Ganges, and that of heaven for earth.

An interesting example of mountain symbolism occurs in a "metaphysical" discussion between Rama, Georges and Madeleine.

It is introduced in the guise of simile:

There was a long, unsteady silence, like some silence on a mountain. If one went to the east or to the south, in either direction the snow was deep, and one could see the

avalanche go down on the other side of the valley. It was now not a question of the path, but of instinct -- something in the silence, not in the geography of the mountain, that spoke. Truth is withdrawn-ness. God is affirmation. Georges, who saw the avalanche, stood fascinated. He only heard the stream murmur below, and the flight of birds. (p.113)

First we must see this passage in its context. The mountain with its snow and avalanche symbolism illustrates Georges' dilemma. In the story both he and Ramaswamy are searching for an Absolute though their means of attainment differ. Georges' conception of the universe is Christian and dualistic, postulating an actual rather than an apparent difference between heaven and earth. Because of guilt arising from his feelings about Madeleine, he finds himself caught between two opposite courses of action symbolized as two opposite directions: below him lies the murmuring (feminine) stream signifying a "profane" desire for Madeleine; while in the lofty (masculine) mountain air about the summit a "flight of birds" signifies his religious aspiration. Where Ramaswamy feels confident in an instinctive knowledge that these two directions are really apparent aspects of one single Truth, Georges is overwhelmed by the sight of the avalanche before him.

Ramaswamy contrasts his own confidence with Georges' s: temerity:

I knew the path in the mountain. I had in my feet the knowledge of the avalanche, I had in my nose the identity of air currents. There was no fright, for in that silence you could hear your own feet move. Madeleine was in between us, and sometimes I could almost hear her prayers. (p.114)

Ramaswamy's instinctive knowledge of the right path, the internal path leading to Self, is an important step towards the realization (in the coronation passage) that man has really "nowhere to go." Ramaswamy's instinctive knowledge of the mountain is based on a self-identification with the mountain in terms of the masculine principle. The merging of man and mountain is suggested by the emphasis on sensory contact in the above passage, but more explicitly on the next page where Ramaswamy says "I had felt the mountain and the mountain was in me and not I on the mountain" (p.115). Ramaswamy feels he has caught a glimpse of his goal, the lofty level at which spirit and matter meet and whose chief attribute is silence. For Ramaswamy the experience proves the superiority of a non-dualist over a fear-ridden (because guilt-ridden) dualist doctrine.

But this whole figurative episode, starting with simile and expanding into symbolic correspondence refers back in a larger context to a debate which occurs not on any mountain-summit but in the drawing-room of the Villa Ste-Anne. Ramaswamy's mountaineering prowess actually refers, as a figure of speech, to his success in carrying the argument. Here is an important gain. For the first time he finds he can formulate a coherent and cogent verbal account of his belief, a statement which can stand up in the face of Georges' strong opposition. Ramaswamy's verbal victory is not

just a show of intellect or a gratification of ego (although a more psychological interpretation might detect elements of both these things) but it reflects the power inherent in the spoken word (the Logos) as a manifestation of the Divine.¹⁷

Virtually every passage of natural description in The Serpent and the Rope displays a vertical kind of polarization. Take, for example, the scenery around the Villa Ste-Anne. First, a description of the cremation of Ramaswamy's child Pierre (Krishna):

We were given special permission by the Préfet des Bouches-du-Rhône to cremate Pierre among the olive trees behind the Villa Ste-Anne. It was a large villa and one saw on a day of the mistral the beautiful Mont Ste-Victoire.... The mistral blew and blew so vigorously: one could see one's body float away like pantaloons, vest, and scarf, and one's soul sit and shine on the top of Mont Ste-Victoire. (p.16)

Wind, tree and mountain combine in this description to pictorialize the soul's journey. A similar combination of symbols occurs in a description of the countryside surrounding the house. The house stood beside a

spreading pine tree, under which opened like two frank eyes the two rooms of Madeleine and myself. Behind the house beside the high pine-wood was a grove of mirabelles, and beyond, against the blue sky, Mont Ste-Victoire itself (p.55).

¹⁷"The Voice or Divine Mother...is the Matrix. This is the Sound...or, to use another Hindu symbol, the goddess Vach or Speech." Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish, Man, the Measure of all Things (London : Rider & Co., 1969), p.203.

The movement is again one of ascent, from house to tree-top to mountain-top. At the pinnacle or apex of this yantra-like triangle (the sides of which constitute a sloping perspective up to the summit) there stands a mountain-peak which in its very name suggests achievement and (metaphysical) victory. Traditionally a house is considered to stand on hallowed ground (like the house of three storeys in The Cat and Shakespeare). The link between heaven and earth is suggested first by the "spreading pine tree," and then by extended association with the mountain. The eye symbolism perhaps suggests the "frankness" of Rama's relationship with Madeleine in the early period of their marriage, and possibly brings together traditional associations of sun and moon (masculine and feminine principles).¹⁸

In the previous section I suggested that certain events such as the coronation must be regarded as special focal points of high symbolic concentration. A similar event in this section is Ramaswamy's ritualistic stance on the back of the stone "elephant." Again we see a number of symbolic meanings converging at a single point:

¹⁸"Cosmic symbolism is found in the very structure of the habitation. [sic.] The house is an imago mundi." Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, p.53. Eliade discusses the symbolic correspondence of the sacred house with the human body and with the cosmos at large. Hence the house has eyes which look out upon God. The house of three storeys in The Cat and Shakespeare is also described as "a house of eyes."

The evening was beautiful, and we went up the hill on a walk. September had come and gone, and yet winter had not set in. The leaves were lovely under the arch of evening. Far away, like a truth, I thought, the sea must stretch itself. You could smell the rough air, you could feel the salt in your nostrils. Standing on the elephant I sang "Shivoham Shivoham"; I sang it as never I had chanted, with the full breath in my lungs.... (p.116)

In this passage Ramaswamy is still elated by his success in the discussion mentioned previously. But in addition he is now aware that Madeleine is again pregnant, and so there again exists the chance that their marriage will at last work out. The general tone of the passage is optimistic though this is tinged with just a suggestion of doubt. That they set off in a direction "up the hill" reflects Ramaswamy's new sense of hope. While the implication in "the arch of evening" suggests the cosmic compatibility of heaven and earth. Winter, a period of night and of Brahman, is still in the offing but as yet not wholly attainable. On the (masculine) hill Ramaswamy is aware of the (feminine) sea. But the sea is both "far away," and yet, paradoxically, close enough "to feel the salt in your nostrils." A certain note of doubt is sounded in the word "must" ("the sea must stretch itself"). Here, as elsewhere in this novel, natural description amounts to something more than pastoral interlude. In every case it springs directly from symbolic and thematic implication. Ramaswamy perceives his own hopes and fears reflected in the world of natural objects around him.

The symbolic implications go still further. Throughout the novel Ramaswamy associates the elephant with the phallus (e.g., p.161, p.165). Ramaswamy's stance on the elephant thus represents an act of homage (like the miniature temple constructed by Ramaswamy earlier in the novel) to the phallic god Shiva. His exuberant incantation is an expression of (1) the Truth felt as a result of his verbal ^{victory?} defeat over dualist thought, (2) the Truth felt in the prospect of renewed compatibility with Madeleine (and manifest in her pregnancy), (3) the Truth felt as a result of the sudden miraculous improvement in his breathing (and hence in his spiritual understanding), as he now can chant "with the full breath" in his (repaired) lungs. Moreover, there is a certain iconographic suggestiveness in his stance. We are reminded of Shiva's victory-dance over the slain elephant-demon, signifying his mastery over the powers of Nature.¹⁹ It also suggests a kind of symbolism which Frederik D.K. Bosch sees related with *linga* and *yonis*.²⁰ The Indian symbol not only suggests a meaning but actually becomes what is suggested. Ramaswamy's prayer, "Shivoham" (I am Shiva) reflects Ramaswamy's desire to identify himself with God.

¹⁹H. Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.172.

²⁰Bosch, The Golden Germ, pp.163-66.

Bridge Over Water

We have considered the function of the expanding symbol in the vertical plane. But the aspiration for cosmic continuity is reflected also in the horizontal. I have described the Indian symbol's function as essentially concerned with "bridging" appearance and the underlying Reality, connecting matter and spirit in a single continuum. The bridge is a symbol suggesting non-dualism, continuity and passage. It surmounts or transcends all that stands in the way of total unity. The bridge spans the waters which separate the two worlds. The Other Shore or Further Bank is the realm of Truth, while This Shore on which we stand is the realm of Maya, the realm of deceptive appearances.²¹ Since the reaching out away from the earth in pursuit of Truth (a "masculine" function) always requires a means, a feminine co-efficient, the bridge is seen to span, encompass, or embrace the (feminine) waters it traverses. The Indian concept of dominant male and passive female is adumbrated in the novel's "bridge-over-water" imagery.²²

²¹Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.98.

²²The "bridge" does not in itself quite belong to the same order of "natural" symbols; in all mystical religions "the mystics always pass over this bridge on their ecstatic journeys to heaven," Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, pp.181-2. The bridge symbol is thus of major implicit as well as explicit significance in Hinduism.

The happy times of Ramaswamy's relationship with Madeleine, and then their subsequent estrangement, are events communicated by means of bridge symbolism. In the early stages Ramaswamy says that "Madeleine loved bridges. She felt Truth was always on the other side" (p.14). Here Madeleine is still optimistic and hopeful of the possibilities that life can offer. The disillusionment following swiftly upon the death of their first child, and the realization that she cannot serve Ramaswamy as an Indian wife, are matters reflected in her growing fear of bridges -- first as a "shiver" on the bridge of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port (p.15) and later as a "horror" of "the bridge of life":

Madeleine had a horror of crossing bridges. Born in India she would have known how in Malabar they send off gunfire to frighten the evil spirits, as you cross a bridge. Whether the gunfire went off or not, Krishna could never cross the bridge of life. (p.16)

? Ramaswamy seems to imply that Krishna's inability to cope with life is connected with Madeleine's own fear of bridges. This fear of crossing bridges becomes, in Madeleine's case, a metaphor implying her fear of the sexual encounter. Since she can no longer come by the Truth of the Further Bank she adopts an isolationist religious practice based on a dualist Buddhist doctrine. But even before this, all links between Ramaswamy and Madeleine had been severed: "There was no bridge -- all bridges now led to Spain" (p.17). We are told that since Madeleine had been a young girl at the time of

the Spanish Civil War, they could never go to Spain. Whatever the particular circumstances behind this, Spain now begins to take on symbolic proportions signifying the realm across the waters, the spot on the Other Shore, which for her has now become unattainable.

Contrasting with Madeleine's inability to relate to life is Little Mother's relationship with Ramaswamy's father, symbolized by the Ganges and the Ganges Bridge:

...Sridhara began to look out and see the girders of the Ganges Bridge; he looked back at his mother to ask what it meant. Suddenly, without reason, Little Mother shook with sobs.... Long after the bridge had passed it was that I guessed: perhaps for the first time she realized, Little Mother realized, that Father was really dead. Something in the big look of the child perhaps, or perhaps it was the Ganges, with her sweet motherliness that one was unhappy to quit who said it, for she it was, from age to age, who had borne the sorrows of our sorrowful land. Like one of our own mothers, Ganga, Mother Ganga has sat by the ghats, her bundle beside her. (p.35)

The child Sridhara has an instinctive awareness, but not a proper understanding, of the symbolic world he sees through the train-windows. Little Mother who is at one with the Ganges' own "sweet motherliness" seems to possess a spontaneous understanding of symbolic implications. The bridge of life, though ended for Father, is just beginning for the son. The cycle of birth and death, associated with the natural convection cycle in the previous section, is here connected with the masculine and feminine principles symbolized by the bridge across the water.

Ramaswamy's relationship with Savithri is also described

in terms of bridge symbolism, as it was in terms of the convection cycle. Ramaswamy would meet her at Cambridge, "and wander along over sluices and bridges, showing her the spots of silence as in between the two purrings of the Cam, or the broad sheet of space that the sun lit up from Clare Bridge to the tower of St John's" (p.169). We saw earlier that Saroja's femininity was likened to the "deep silent sea" in the sense that the feminine principle is a manifestation of Silence (Brahman). The silence "between the two purrings of the Cam" and in the space between bridge and tower is the condition identified with the conjunction of masculine and feminine principles. It is interesting to observe two movements in this passage. The initial movement is lateral, "over sluices and bridges," the subsequent movement is vertical, "from Clare Bridge to the tower of St John's." Raja Rao uses various sets of symbols, all of which refer back in essence to the undifferentiated condition of non-dualism.

A final and explicit reference to the bridge symbol occurs later in the novel:

...Man is isolate -- and in his singleness is the unanimity of the whole: "when you take away the whole from the whole -- purnam -- what remains is the whole." The job is to build bridges -- not of stone or of girders, for that would prove the permanence of the objective, but like the rope-bridges in the Himalayas, you build temporary suspensions over green and gurgling space. You must feel the mountain in your nostrils, and know ultimately you are alone with silence. Death is our friend in that sense -- life after life it faces us with the meaning of the ultimate. To be is to recognize integrity.(p.306)

Man's singleness reflects the "unanimity of the whole" in the sense that man is a symbol of the whole universe. The bridge is not constructed for permanence since, like all of these cosmographic symbols, it is an impermanent construct in a world of flux. It is connected with death since it is a threshold symbol (like the "equinox" in the description of Saroja). It connects the two banks of the river and affords passage to the supra-physical world. The connection of "this" and "that" in turn implies the conjunction or synthesis of all opposites. These are the outgoing and ingoing, manifesting and unmanifesting, materializing and dematerializing, feminine and masculine principles of the yantra. Wholeness is "Being," hence Ramaswamy's conclusion: "To be is to recognize integrity."

The end of the novel is marked not so much by a conventional climax and resolution as by a convergence and clarification. Symbolic strands responsible for the dialectical opposition of symbols and images throughout the novel are gathered together in a unified vision. Individual symbols are seen as microcosmic replicas of the total design, and each expands to universal proportions. The temporal world is seen as a manifestation of an underlying metaphysical concept.

First we have Ramaswamy's final visit to Madeleine. This takes place "one very cold winter evening early in January, when the snow had fallen, and the whole world seemed re-created" (p.390).

Snow is associated in the novel not only with religious purity in general terms, but with mountain imagery in concrete terms, and signifies the acme of all aspiration. In conceptual terms winter marks a cosmic phase when the universe returns to its original source. Thus at every level, ranging from the physical to the metaphysical, this is a time of re-creation. The dream-like nature of this section of narrative suggests, like the hospital/coronation passage earlier, a slipping away from the ordinary waking consciousness into a new world beyond.

In his vision at the end of the novel Ramaswamy recognizes the Self. At the corporeal level life continues as before. Ramaswamy is to return to India either as "a poor Professor in Hyderabad" (p.407) or as a disciple of his Travancore Guru. But as the physical and metaphysical worlds merge, "India" and the "Guru" take on much wider meanings. The ferryman who waits to convey Ramaswamy across the waters (a "bridge" metaphor) to the Other Shore (Truth) is clearly connected with Death (a synonym for supra-conscious experience). In a mesh of converging relationships India is identified as the Self (p.248) and as the Truth (p.354). The land across the waters is therefore India. Ramaswamy's proposed return to the south of India is a return to "Shiva's crematorium grounds" (p.323), again connecting Truth with Death. The Guru is also connected with Truth: "To such a Truth

was I taken, and I became its servant, I kissed the perfume of its Holy Feet, and called myself a disciple" (p.408). The circle of symbolic identities is completed thus: India is "an idea, a metaphysic" (p.380), India is "Jnanam" and also "the Guru of the world" (p.336). Brahman, Truth, Self, India, Guru, Jnanam, Death, etc., are terms which reduce to the one single Advaitic idea. And in this idea lies the re-creation of the world, equivalent to enlightenment.

In my opening I drew attention to Raja Rao's letter stressing the importance of the French as well as the Indian influence in his use of symbolism. In my discussion I have concentrated on the Indian influence because I believe this to be of greater importance in this novel. Nevertheless, a close scrutiny of the novel brings to light examples of a rather different kind. To mention just one -- the half-packed suitcase first described when Ramaswamy returns from his father's funeral in India (p.71) and referred to again later in the novel (p.106). In the context of the story the suitcase comes to symbolize Ramaswamy's condition -- his homelessness, his indecision (between Madeleine/Europe and Savithri/India), his role as pilgrim and wanderer, and so on. Another example would be the twenty three trees which remind Ramaswamy of his age (p.144). Ramaswamy's lung complaint and Georges' crippled arm perhaps also belong in this category of non-

traditional and personal (rather than national) symbols, though it must be admitted that in the final analysis clearcut distinctions are neither always possible nor particularly significant.

The Serpent and the Rope owes its symbolic organization to a definite plan of cosmic order, the kind of order conveniently summarized in the yantra. The symbols in Raja Rao's novels leave holes in the page, as one critic has put it. We seem to see through the symbols and imagery in a converging perspective to a fixed point somewhere in the beyond. The whole novel from the formal and structural levels down to the level of minute narrative detail reflects the same plan and the same order.

CHAPTER II

RAJA RAO

Character of Ramaswamy

There are at least two quite opposite ways of tackling Ramaswamy, as indeed the novel as a whole. We may see him as man and discuss his "character" in roughly psychological terms, or we may see him as symbol in relation to an ancient Hindu tradition. But a comprehensive account must consider both ways in complement. This double approach is of course suggested by the very nature of the Indo-English novel where Indian tradition appears in a form tempered, to varying degrees, by Western modernity.

What follows is a discussion of Raja Rao's hero from both points of view. It seems to me that the skill and subtlety which has gone into the making of this character has been lost on many critics. The most frequent complaint levelled against Ramaswamy is that he is a cipher instead of a man, and that he lacks psychological or novelistic interest. The chief aim of the present discussion is to answer this charge which, though in one sense true, would suggest some misunderstanding on the part of the reader.

Ramaswamy (or more familiarly Rama) is based on the archetypal epic hero of that name. Rama of the Ramayana was also a

quester whose goal was to see the ascendancy of right over wrong. But the Rama symbol is generalized to include all seekers of Truth, such as Gautama and the successive saints and heroes of Hindu tradition. On one hand Ramaswamy is seen as an Indian Ulysses whose Penelope (Madeleine) sits awaiting his return from abroad (p.41); on the other hand his quest is modelled in part on that of the Buddha who is frequently mentioned in the course of the narrative. Like all of his predecessors Ramaswamy's aim is to reform the world by first reforming himself, and ultimately to enlighten mankind: "a Brahman is necessary to educate you all"¹ (p.214).

First a brief look at his pilgrimage. Initially his problem is to define the right path: "life is a Pilgrimage I know, but a Pilgrimage to where -- and of what?" (p.28). His path lies narrowly between the two alternatives of negation and devotion: "Yet what is the answer? Not the monkhood of the sadhu, or the worship of a God" (p.28). From this point onwards his advance occurs in a number of stages, and the more important among these are as follows: his ideological defeat of Georges (p.115); his reali-

¹This instructional or allegorical element in The Serpent and the Rope is discussed in Chapter IX. In Ramaswamy's assumption that Hinduism is essentially Brahmanical, we need to remember Radhakrishnan's definition: "When the Indian civilization is called a Brahmanical one, it only means that its main character and dominating motives are shaped by its philosophical thinkers and religious minds, though these are not all of Brahman birth." Indian Philosophy (London : George Allen & Unwin, 1923), I, p.25.

zation about half way through the novel that "Truth only dawns when you know you can possess nothing. We can at best possess ourselves -- and life is one long pilgrimage, one long technique of such a possession" (p.193). Then comes the Queen's coronation when he realizes that man must turn inwards to find Truth so that man really "had nowhere to go" (p.360); and of course the final vision of the ferryman near the close of the book where all of the earlier intimations are confirmed.

True to tradition the accent in Ramaswamy's quest is everywhere on experience. Spiritual truths are to be sought in the physical life rather than in the abstract; hence the importance of the biographical element in the novel, and of Ramaswamy's various relationships with Madeleine, Savithri and other women. A powerful iconographic suggestiveness is felt in all important instances. But Ramaswamy also seeks the Truth in everyday life through discursive enquiry. And here we find another strangely traditional aspect of Ramaswamy's character. I mean in the kind of logic he uses. Without venturing very far into the area of Indian epistemology it is valuable to understand the way in which his logic works. Many have felt something long-winded, circular and finally inconclusive about Ramaswamy's "proofs" for the existence of an Advaitic Absolute, and this I think has to do with his own conception of logic. When, for instance, one looks at that rather comical episode between Swanston and himself on the subject of Commun-

ism, Nazism and so forth, one is struck by the strangeness of his assumptions. A hint is dropped (a little later in the novel) that he is starting from quite different premises: the Nyaya syllogism, he claims, is far superior to the Aristotelian one (p.203).

Now the traditional Indian syllogism had a special form of its own; first the argument was stated, was followed by a general rule and example, and was finally clinched by a virtual repetition of the first two clauses.² Returning to their debate, Ramaswamy sets things in motion with a bald assertion about "the inevitability of Communism...and why Nazism had to be defeated, had to die" (p.184). In the ensuing explanation it is an example which crops up first: Nazism "could no more succeed than Ravana did against Rama." For the reader, Ramaswamy's complacency with such an assertion, taken with Swanston's response of utter bewilderment makes for a very funny situation indeed.³ Swanston's amazement

²A.L. Basham, The Wonder that was India (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1954), pp.501-2.

³Of course we cannot be altogether certain to what extent this humour is intentional and to what extent inherent. Ramaswamy's hauteur and aloofness is reminiscent of Gora in Tagore's novel, a character who habitually spoke "as if there were some adversary before him" (R. Tagore, Gora (Calcutta : Macmillan & co., 1966), p.327). In Tagore's novel Gora's arrogant obtuseness becomes the target of deliberate (though always sympathetic) criticism. Dramatically opposed to Gora is his friend Binoy who knew that "however loud he might be in support of a principle in argument, when it was a question of dealing with men, human considerations would prevail"(p.15). Thus Tagore makes dramatically explicit what in The Serpent and the Rope remains, by comparison, implicit.

is by no means lessened when Ramaswamy offers a general rule which he seems to imagine must clinch the argument: that "dharma must win" (p.185). The remainder of Ramaswamy's exposition amounts to little more than a restatement of what he has already said.

Swanston is left baffled by "too many incomprehensible factors" while Ramaswamy is already congratulating himself on his own performance. What we witness is a complete breakdown in communication, symbolically between East and West, with neither side willing to compromise or concede defeat. It is interesting to recognize the depths of Indian tradition in Ramaswamy's character. At one point in the narrative he remarks: "I belong to the period of the Mahabharatha...I have nothing to do with the Board of Trade"⁴ (p.356), and this deep sense of tradition is evident not only in his view of life but also in the way he expresses this view.

The Rama symbol may be also regarded as a paradigm for other heroes of Sanskrit drama, even when they bear different names. Henry W. Wells⁵ has summarized the characteristics of such persons, and one is immediately struck by the similarities of these past characters to Raja Rao's hero. I shall list some of

⁴As we shall see a number of times in the following chapters the Hindu philosophy of all-inclusiveness tends toward exclusion at the extreme margins, as in this case.

⁵Henry W. Wells, "Indian Drama and the West," The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 1, (September 1965), pp.86-95.

these qualities. The typical Indian hero --

1. is not an aggressive person but possesses a high level of imagination and refinement, and of sensibility. To Western eyes he may even seem unmanly or unheroic.
2. does not make independent choices. The action of the plot proceeds from mistakes rather than from decisions.
3. is not a self-conscious sort of person.
4. does not have to grapple with difficult problems, for no problem play is possible in a closed society.
5. is generally greatly concerned with spiritual matters, cosmic principles, etc.
6. does not initiate action. The movement of the plot is often carried or instigated by the action of another, perhaps secondary character.
7. is often involved in a close relationship with a clown or fool whose behaviour is always forgiven.

If we accept these conclusions as a more or less accurate description of the traditional hero then it is easy to see that Ramaswamy belongs to a particular dramatic type. Let us take the above points separately. For a start he certainly fits the picture of the sensitive, highly imaginative hero (point 1). His fits of weeping and dexterity with language are just two aspects of this notion. He himself describes the Indian temperament in a similar

way in the novel:

I slipped into one of those curious moods that fill us in the vastness of India; we feel large and infinite, compassion touching our sorrow as eye-lashes touch the skin. Someone behind and beyond all living things gave us the touch, the tear, the elevation that makes our natural living so tender. If there were no barbarian beyond our borders the Hindu would have melted into his nature, grown white as some women in the Zenana, and his eyes have seen the splendour of himself everywhere. He might have grown emasculated, but he would have played in the garden of the Ganga. (p.38)

On the same point Ramaswamy's "unmanliness" is the subject of Catherine's comment: "he is not a man-man. He is an Indian" (p.348). The fact that he does not make independent choices (point 2) is connected with his search for wholeness; when Truth is seen on both or every side choice becomes meaningless. Choice means preference, exclusiveness, one-sidedness; and it is for this very reason that Ramaswamy rejects the religious teachings he regards as dualistic -- Christianity, Buddhism and Catharism. Despite his sensitivity Ramaswamy is, curiously enough, not a self-conscious sort of person (point 3). We have already seen, in fact, that he can be extraordinarily obtuse in his encounters with other people as with Swanston where he is completely unaware of his personal incongruity and his verbal pedantry. His total preoccupation in spiritual matters, cosmic principles, etc. (point 5), needs no further substantiation for the fact is everywhere self-evident. Because of his own nature and of his particu-

lar preoccupation the action of the novel is left to others (point 6), in particular to Madeleine and Georges. By contrast with himself Madeleine is a whirlwind, all motion and activity. She lectures, she manages house, she buys and sells homes, and makes an un-Indian (overactive) sexual partner. It is she who hurries the first marriage, causes Ramaswamy emotional distress by her relationship with Georges, and later converts to Buddhism. Georges too outstrips Ramaswamy in his successful and child-bearing marriage. The novel even seems to have its "fool" (point 7) in Lezo, albeit an extremely talented fool. Yet how else can his brief involvement with Catherine be accounted for? Lezo emerges from the business with Catherine unblamed and unblemished, somehow as innocent as before. And finally I return to a point (point 4) deliberately omitted in this run down. Ramaswamy does have to grapple with difficult problems; the very nature of his quest for Truth is highly problematical. But here again Professor Wells's remark about the "closed society" helps us to see Ramaswamy's situation more clearly. Ramaswamy is, as I have mentioned before, an incongruity in modern day Europe. As a representative of a different culture belonging to a past age he is an outcast from that society which he represents, so that he cannot enjoy the problem-free existence of his dramatic predecessors. We might reverse point 4 in order to formulate a new clause: the problem play can result from the dissolution of protective social barriers, leading to inter-

action between different social systems holding to different standards and values. This seems to be the crucial problem underlying The Serpent and the Rope.

I now pass on to what I think has been underestimated in the novel, and that is Ramaswamy's credibility as a true to life character. The manner of characterization is, I believe, refreshingly original. Ramaswamy is not introduced to the reader directly; he introduces himself indirectly. We get to know him as we might get to know a person in real life, by paying attention to what the person says. Appearances come very much later. In all of Ramaswamy's talk there is no attempt to court the reader's attention or sympathy, no desire to exchange confidences and no cloying over-familiarity. Raja Rao is never guilty of over-explaining or compromising his central character. Although the narrative proceeds in the first person, Ramaswamy for the most part remains dignified and aloof. The reader can never grasp the whole of this man's nature in a single view or a single instant. As in real life it takes some time. The reader must learn to live with the novel for the length of some four hundred pages.

The most striking feature of Ramaswamy's character in the novel arises from the kind of cultural incongruity already discussed. He displays a strange mixture of pedantry and also of uncertainty, these being the two dialectically opposed (and so related) responses to the same basic problem. We have already wit-

nessed an instance of pedantry. Uncertainty and contradiction are felt at several levels. At a surface level Ramaswamy is a mixture of sophistication and naivety. On one hand he is "too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything" (p.21). On the other hand he can say in all seriousness that the world will be saved by the existence of American "women's clubs" (p.176). And any number of other examples, all arising out of a (peculiarly Indian) method of over-reductive categorization,⁶ may be adduced. Or in another instance, Ramaswamy seems to consider himself the kind of traditional Brahmin who has avoided the social (and especially the moralistic) accretions which have attached themselves to this order in the present day. In the Indian restaurant at Cambridge with Lakshmi and Sharifa he observes that some other Indians present "were not at all amused at the ripples of laughter that came from us," and continues: "Only a Muslim here and there enjoyed himself."

⁶On the subject of types and categories Betty Heimann observes: "The West, according to its belief in the preponderance of a powerful person -- on earth or in heaven -- thinks, in history, too, in decisive sections of time and space, and steps from one powerful person to the next historical period-builder. India, on the other hand, thinks in series and types. Constitutional or general biological types include many individuals of similar characteristics. Typology widens the concept of individuality. Besides, Indian thought extends the classification of temperamental types beyond the human species into the whole sphere of the Cosmos." Facets of Indian Thought, p.66. The symbology discussed in Chapter I in connection with the yantra belongs to this kind of cosmic typology.

We were grateful to Islam, that evening, for respecting human freedom" (p.194). All very well, except that it is difficult to match this picture of the liberated young man with the very different kind of picture given by Little Mother whose description of him suggests a nature that is far more restrained and even in some respects strait-laced (p.261).

At a deeper level the contradictions become more profound. Ramaswamy's main problem derives in part from the difficulty encountered in choosing the right spiritual path, and in part from his relationship with Madeleine and Georges. Early in the novel we see him struggling to determine an adequate concept of reality. Is reality of the senses or of the imagination?

I wrote postcards to friends in Europe. I told them I had come to Benares because Father had died, and I said the sacred capital was really a surrealist city. You never know where reality starts and where illusion ends; whether the Brahmins of Benares are like the crows asking for funereal rice-balls, saying 'Caw-Caw'; or like the Saddhus, by their fires, lost in such beautiful magnanimity, as though love were not something one gave to another, but one gave to oneself. His trident in front of him, his holy books open, some saffron cloth drying anywhere -- on bare bush or on broken wall, sometimes with an umbrella stuck above, and a dull fire eyeing him, as though the fire in Benares looked after the saints, not the cruel people of the sacred city -- each Saddhu sat, a Shiva. (pp.13-14)

The decision must be between the critical intellect on one hand, and the imaginative aesthetic-symbolic faculty on the other. These two levels of the rational and the symbolic are co-present throughout the book, though it is the latter view which holds precedence

and which eventually prevails.

In his struggle for self-mastery Ramaswamy responds to painful situations in a way that indicates he is a true to life character in the best tradition of literary realism.⁷ Take the example of his return to France after his father's funeral. He is feeling guilty because he was due to have returned earlier and hasn't let Madeleine know the date of his arrival. The shock of suddenly meeting her face to face brings on a fit of coughing. (His lung condition, incidentally, serves in every instance as a fairly accurate indicator of his mental and emotional state.) To escape the tension of Madeleine's presence he goes to fetch the luggage from the car, drags out the time by chatting with Madame Patensier, and then finds he simply must have a bath before eating the food which Madeleine has prepared. Ramaswamy himself acknowledges his cowardice: "I slipped into my bath and scrubbed myself dutifully, feeling that I might have more courage thus" (p.63).

But this is a rather trivial example. There are several episodes in the novel which record a similarly human response in larger issues. The first is connected with his triangular relationship with Madeleine and Georges. When Georges confides his

⁷ It is interesting to note that the dramatic qualities enumerated by Henry W. Wells correspond very closely with the psychological qualities discussed by S. Spratt, in his psycho-analytic study of Indian character in Hindu Culture and Personality (Bombay : Manaktalas, 1966).

feelings about Madeleine to Ramaswamy, the latter's response is realistically complex:

After that my mind went black. I would never have thought any intelligent man in the year 1951 could use such a crude word. It spoke more of George's deeper mind than anything he said. I can still remember him saying, "The sin of concupiscence!" I looked out into the sky, and saw the birds pecking away at the figs. I almost felt I should rise and throw a stone at them. (p.83)

The self-contradictions, half-truths, and displaced violence hidden in this utterance speak brilliantly of the narrator's broiling emotions. All his traits of prudishness, charity and sublimated aggression burst into evidence simultaneously. He wonders how an intelligent man can talk of concupiscence, since to the refined Advaitic mind all desire is transmuted (or masked) to serve higher ideals. But really Ramaswamy's thoughts are directed elsewhere, to the concrete allusion beneath the philosophy, to the apparent "affair" between Madeleine and Georges himself. But the next minute he seems to have reversed any harsh opinion of Georges and displays a remarkable sense of charity in the realization of Georges's confidential frankness. But Georges's words have struck deeply, and in the implicitly sexual reference to "the birds pecking away at the figs" and in his surging aggression, the man's instinctive inclinations are betrayed. The direct consequence of this new situation is that Ramaswamy finds himself drawn to Christianity as never before, aware of his own need for a more personalized God.

Moreover, he suddenly finds that he can regard Savithri as physically beautiful. This strong undercurrent of psychological determinism running through the novel cannot be ignored.

Perhaps the most compelling example of Ramaswamy's confused psychological response occurs in the episode describing Saroja's wedding. In the days immediately preceding the wedding Ramaswamy seems to oscillate wildly between contrary feelings of optimism and pessimism.⁸ While he can hold fast to Advaita he is optimistic, but whenever he begins to doubt (which is very often) he becomes sceptical and gloomy. Recalling from his visit to Benares that "holiness is happiness" and "happiness is holiness" (p.24), he tries to take himself in hand in the days immediately prior to his sister's wedding and deliberately to put himself into a happy frame of mind. The struggle within him continues thus: he receives a letter from Madeleine which has the effect of making him irrationally angry (p.264). There are many reasons why remembrance of Madeleine might annoy him at this juncture. Virtually the next moment he receives a note from Savithri telling him: "Be happy for me. In your joy is my freedom" (p.264), reminding him of his

⁸"Pessimism towards this changing world is born from an innate Optimism which postulates a perfect state of happiness beyond human conception." B. Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought, p.113. This would account for part of Ramaswamy's pessimism; the full explanation must include more personal considerations.

dharmic responsibilities to her and everyone beside. But his exclamation of understanding and happiness is edged with a forced shrillness:

I understood it. I must make this marriage a success. I must strive and pray, work myself into a state of happiness, and bring joy and rainshine to others. My happiness was forfeit, but who could prevent me from the gift of joy? Who could stop me making Little Mother and Saroja happy, and Saroja's ugly, big, lieutenant-looking husband -- for he did look so military: governments must make people responsible, heavy, and authoritative. Yes, I would make Subramanya happy. I would make the whole world happy. (p.264)

He now proceeds to hurl himself into a frenzy of activity in anticipation of the forthcoming ceremonies. Yet he finds that he cannot look Saroja (an unwilling bride in a traditionally arranged marriage) in the face, nor answer her question why she must marry against her will. To himself Ramaswamy tries to rationalize the necessity and the correctness of what he, as head of the household, is doing: "It was no moment for cowardice. I, the head of the family, could not be a coward; I could not, should not let down anyone in the world. That was my dharma" (p.265). But at heart he is cowardly, looking for any means of escape, conjuring up escapist illusions of being back in England. The upshot of all this cumulative struggle and anxiety is a severe fit of coughing and physical collapse at the wedding itself. His coughing up of blood over Saroja's wedding sari is an event which in the overall context assumes a symbolic significance.

Ramaswamy's strange behaviour can be accounted for when one considers the hypocrisy of the condition forced upon him. How can he either admonish or comfort his sister, remind her of traditional proprieties, when he himself broke the strict Hindu code by crossing the waters and marrying a foreigner of his own (poor) choice. His own self-diagnosis hits right on the mark: "I tried to tell myself I was the head of the household, and I must be strong. But to give away Saroja -- she seemed more like me at moments than my own self" (p.272). There is an additional and more abstruse complication. A careful reading of the text makes it clear that Ramaswamy is here guilty of confusing the identities of Saroja and Madeleine. Talking with Saroja, a sudden shift in the directions of his thoughts gives him away:

We circumambulated, and sat on the rocks for a moment. Of course, Saroja will be happy. We make our own happiness. Yes, Madeleine, haemoglobules make for happiness. Madeleine, I shall make you happy. 'Saroja, when you're married you'll come and live with us in Aix. And you'll look after my little daughter.' Saroja did not answer. I had betrayed her. (p.265)

There is no surprise in this confusion of identities. Ramaswamy's reverence of the feminine principle as the chief organizing agent in the relationship of man to woman, as well as in the world more generally, makes for the likelihood of such indiscrimination and there are plenty of further examples in the novel to substantiate this point. Ramaswamy's betrayal of his sister is linked in his

mind with his own betrayal of his wife, while the symbolic referent for both of these thoughts as well as for his own hypocrisy in general is the blood on Saroja's sari.⁹

Considering the human depth revealed in the episodes I have discussed, together with the identification of Ramaswamy as a traditional hero-type, one must credit Raja Rao with the ability to create a character of remarkable dimensions. In The Serpent and the Rope traditional Indian values can be seen to survive, and flourish, in modern style dress. The whole book seems to bear out Ramaswamy's belief that modernity for an Indian is merely a thin veneer; that scratch the surface and the true shape underneath is immediately revealed.

⁹For a discussion of sacred "defilement" in the symbolic guise of stain or blemish, see Paul Ricoeur's The Symbolism of Evil (New York : Harper & Row, 1967).

CHAPTER III

RAJA RAO

Dualism and Non-dualism

In The Serpent and the Rope the question of self-identity, which is related to the question of reality, is worked out at several levels, at a symbolic level and at a more discursive or intellectual level. It is the symbolic or sub-cognitive level which illustrates the Hindu metaphysical concept at the heart of the novel. The more discursive intellectual probe takes place nearer the surface, having more to do with the faculty of reason than with the deeper subconscious centres of intuitive response.

All of the various religious, philosophical, political and historical issues touched on in the novel are intellectually organized by Ramaswamy according to certain suppositions concerning dualist and non-dualist belief. Hinduism is itself divided between the proposition that All is essentially One without distinction (non-dualism) and the proposition that All consists of distinct parts (dualism). As one writer puts it,

If we ask about the world's metaphysical status, we shall have to continue the distinction we have watched divide Hinduism on every major issue thus far; namely, that between the dual and the non-dual points of view. One way of

? life this distinction divides jnana yoga from bhakti; on doctrine of God it divides those who conceive God with attributes from those who conceive him without; on doctrine of salvation it divides the advocate of merger with God from those who aspire to his company. In cosmology an extension of the same line divides those who regard the world as being from the highest perspective unreal from those who think it to be real from every point of view.¹

Non-dualism emphasizes the continuity which exists between man and the world of objects, dualism stresses certain distinctions. Now Ramaswamy divides the world in a similar manner, contrasting dualistic or "poetic" (p.338) religions with non-dualistic impersonal ways of thinking. He links Advaita with Marxism in so far as each system offers, in its own way, a view of the world as wholly continuous and connected:

There can be only two attitudes to life. Either you believe the world exists and so -- you. Or you believe that you exist -- and so the world. There is no compromise possible. And the history of philosophy...is nothing but a search for a clue to this problem: "If I am real, then the world is me." It also means you are not what you think and feel you are, that is, a person. But if the world is real, then you are real in terms of objects, and that is a tenable proposition. The first is the Vedantin's position -- the second is the Marxist's -- and they are irreconcilable. (pp.337-38)

In between these two opposite positions 'are the many poetic systems: monism, tempered monism, non-dualistic modified dualism,

¹Huston Smith, The Religions of Man (New York : New American Library (Mentor), 1959), p.82. But other writers like S. Radhakrishnan argue that both dualism and non-dualism are really monistic at a deeper level since both systems are the product of a single source, the human intelligence. See Indian Philosophy Vol. 1. (London : Allen & Unwin, 1923), p.38.

God and Paradise, Islam, etc., etc....' (p.338). All of these intermediate positions are poetic in that imagination places them in some aspect, apart from ordinary human experience. Imagination, according to Ramaswamy, must serve to bridge the real with the ideal, but never to sever and separate the two into unconnected categories.

In terms of the yantra, discussed earlier, the same idea may be expressed as a dissociation of centre from circumference. Such a lesion makes a division in what is essentially a Zero (the lotus circle):

All numbers are possible when they are in and of zero. Similarly all philosophies are possible in and around Vedanta. But you can no more improve on Vedanta than improve on zero. The zero, you see, the sunya is impersonal; whereas one, two, three and so on are all dualistic. One always implies many. But zero implies nothing. I am not one, I am not two, I am neither one, nor two...I am the "I". (p.207)

All of these statements are various ways of stressing Ramaswamy's fundamental conviction that the world exists as All or Nothing, or rather that the world exists as All and Nothing, the two opposite aspects of a single undifferentiated entity.

But the clarity of these articulations owes to the fact that the above excerpts come from a late part of the book. Ramaswamy commences on his spiritual pilgrimage with an almost impossible ambition. Through a comparison of Advaita with other world religions he hopes to prove the superiority of his own be-

lief over and above all others. Technically speaking, his chosen path is more or less that called jnana-yoga, the steepest though the shortest of all the various paths to spiritual enlightenment. But he is inclined to forget, in the early stages, that other paths also reach the same summit.

Although Ramaswamy claims to examine the past with the objectivity of an historian (p.233) he really interprets the past in the light of his own particular interests and assumptions.² The only possible support for his claim to objectivity lies in the Hindu's supposed ability to be capable of distinguishing the two alternative levels of being, the real and unreal, and in Lowes Dickinson's reported congratulatory remark that Indians are "more like modern scientists than the mystical people we were supposed to be" (p.338). It is true that a preoccupation with an impersonal principle is implied by the Vedantist and Marxist standpoints outlined by Ramaswamy above. Detachment from oneself is an important concept in Hinduism. But it is also true that the Hindu concept of detachment differs at bottom from the detachment of the modern scientist; the Hindu detachment occurs as the direct

²In a press interview "Face to Face," The Illustrated Weekly of India, (Jan 5, 1964), p.44) Raja Rao claimed that his character Ramaswamy is "so completely objective" in his outlook. Asked whether The Serpent and the Rope might have turned out a very different novel had the story been narrated by a character other than Ramaswamy, Raja Rao said he thought not. But most readers, I think, would wish to define "objectivity" rather differently.

result of conviction, the scientific detachment as the result of no prior conviction at all, the former at the lofty level of subjective experience, and the latter at a more worldly level of the laboratory. But the most significant difference between these two kinds of detachment may be seen in the methods of operation. Looking at Ramaswamy's own research methods we are struck by something unusual, something circular, in his whole approach as though his methodology stems from some traditional Indian epistemological procedure (see p46). His starting hypothesis is the correctness of Vedanta, though it turns out that this is more of an a priori personal conviction than a proposition set up just for the sake of argument. Moreover, at no stage during the course of the story does Ramaswamy ever think of having to reject his hypothesis in the face of contrary evidence, though he is frequently very cynical and pessimistic about his prospects of personal achievement. Rather than reject the hypothesis (and this is the crucial point of departure from modern science) he would sooner choose one or more of the following alternatives: 1. reject the contrary evidence, or 2. carefully scrutinize the contrary evidence for any dialectical implication in case perhaps its very contrariness might, by the law of dialectical opposition, prove his own viewpoint, or 3. reject himself as an individual unworthy of the highest enlightenment. There are plenty of examples of all

of these instances in the novel. To mention just a few, there is Ramaswamy's rejection of the real character of Savithri, an interesting side to his character discussed by Uma Parameswaran.³ On the second point concerning dialectical implication or inference, Ramaswamy works from an assumption that what is correct can be inferred from what is incorrect. So "heresy proves the truth -- as the world proves me. Buddhism proves Vedanta, the Cathars the Church of Christ" (p.306). His own study of the Albigensians is, so he says, "to prove that I am metaphysically right" (p.307). From an examination of Christianity, Buddhism and Catharism he hopes finally to "prove" the correctness of Advaita Vedanta. Finally on the last point, there are several occasions in the novel where Ramaswamy comes close to abandoning the Advaitic ambition for Christianity and for Marxism. His feelings of personal incapability result everywhere in the novel in large oscillations in his mood from the heights of optimism at one moment to the depths of despair in the next. The optimism springs from a confidence in spiritual improvement and gain, pessimism from moments of diffidence.

During Ramaswamy's "Christian period" we find statements

³Uma Parameswaran, "Shakti in Raja Rao's Novels," Bulletin of Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, No. 9 (March 1972), pp.4-28.

in the novel which seem to stand in contradiction to what he says elsewhere. Particularly in the diary passages which record his feelings at an extreme point of Hindu apostasy we come across the most surprising statements. Looking back over these entries in the wisdom of hindsight the narrator confesses to finding them "bewildering" (p.80). Practically each entry contains some paradox, some unresolved problem, which is the result of incompatibility between Christian and Vedantist assumptions. In the first entry, for instance, we notice that Ramaswamy is surprisingly unprepared to challenge Georges's distinction between "knowing" and "feeling:"

Georges...thinks I "feel" Sanscrit, I do not "know" Sanscrit. Lezo, on the other hand "knew" a language.... The classical mind has a grandeur I shall never possess. I am too weak, so I see stars where others see planets. (p.81)

At this point in the novel Ramaswamy has scarcely recovered from a severe bout of consumption, and it is this physical disability which must account for his lack of assertiveness. Otherwise how could he allow such a distinction to pass uncontested? In the two last lines he indicates, not without a touch of sarcasm, his inability to grasp the (over) subtlety of Georges's distinction. The Advaitin should see no distinction between knowing and feeling since all knowledge is grounded in sensory experience. Only in ignorance and imperfection can one talk of distinctions, living as one does in a world which is ultimately all-connected.

In the second entry Ramaswamy compares Vedantist "arrogance" with Christian "humility:"

How the Christian humility has beauty.... The Brahmin, the Vedantin, has such arrogance. It was Astavakra who said, "Wonderful, wonderful, am I"; he with the eight deformations. Yes, one is wonderful -- when one is not one, but the "I". (p.81)

Here is a clear case of ambiguity in his thinking. On one hand he praises Christian humility and denounces Brahmin arrogance; on the other hand he concedes the Brahmin to beauty when the "I" Brahman are merged into One.

Subsequent entries move in the same direction, with an increasing emphasis on the attractiveness of Christianity. A number of factors combine to drive him in this direction: his distress at the almost superhuman task ahead of him, of coming to terms with the Absolute; his desire to close the ideological gulf that exists between himself and Madeleine; and most important of all, his distress at the outcome of their relationship, a relationship exacerbated at this stage by Georges's personal involvement with Madeleine. At last Ramaswamy's Brahmin fortitude deserts him altogether, and he is prepared to accept the consolation of Christianity:

I can now understand the Muslim, for Mohammed was the last Historical Prophet of God. I realize that when the son of man comes to earth, he gives us the proof of God in a way that no religion of the pagans, be it Hindu or Greek, could ever offer. Shiva and Vishnu live in Kailas or Vaikuntha, and you may see them or not see them; and once seen they may

again disappear. But religion with a prophet gives God a place in time, gives him a mother and father, even were he Virgin born and gives him friends and enemies.... Historicity is part of human certainty -- it makes man real. If Christ -- or Mohammed -- were not historical there could be no God. (p.84)

The diary section comes to an end with Ramaswamy's temporary conversion to Christianity:

For these few days how happy I feel in the ancient fold of the Church. I feel protected, I feel confirmed in my humanness. I feel truly happy.... How I wish I could tell Madeleine I have begun to worship her God. (p.85)

His choice here in favour of Christianity comes as a direct reversal of his general view denouncing religious historicity, Christianity being the example par excellence of an historical religion. But it does have the desired effect of preserving the marriage for a little longer: "There was a common area where we were together, and for the first time" (p.85). And Ramaswamy is able to confirm his theory that "to wed a woman you must wed her God" (p.86).

Another group of diary entries, even stranger than the first group, comes a little later (pp.146-156). In his apostasy Ramaswamy not merely converts to Christianity but overshoots the mark, as it were. In this second group there is little but cynicism, even nihilism. He rails against women, against Madeleine's "innocence" and Georges's "morality," and not least against Brahminism and himself. His attacks are uncompromisingly bitter,

and seem quite out of tune with the prevailing tone of the novel. Again the mature narrator looks back upon these earlier times with bewilderment, and diagnoses the problem as one "not for the psychoanalyst to explain, but for the metaphysician to name" (p.156).

I have deliberately stressed the strangeness and incongruity of these sections for several reasons. First, I think that the various commentaries on the novel have overlooked the extent of Ramaswamy's uncertainty and confusion, and also the instances of ironic self-criticism which often undercut the narrator's smooth and sometimes pedantic complacency: Ramaswamy is capable of ruthlessly objective criticism, even of himself, though it is true that this sort of objectivity lies close to the unimaginative realism he is generally at pains to reject. Second, I am suggesting that the incongruity of these passages is deliberate, that they are not just a clumsily mismanaged literary device as claimed by Ali Ahmed.⁴ Remembering that the greater part of the narrative has been written in retrospect, these sections stand out in their immediacy and directness. They lack the sense of emotion recollected in tranquillity which characterizes the tone

⁴Ali Ahmed, "Illusion and Reality: The Art and Philosophy of Raja Rao," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 5 (July 1965), 20.

of the book elsewhere. But further, these sections serve as breaks in the narrative facade where the man behind the narrative is seen presented instead of presenting. They provide an ironic, and at times nihilistic, counterpoint to an otherwise assertive and highly metaphysical text.

Shortly after Ramaswamy's brush with Christianity he is involved in a friendship with Savithri. In Ramaswamy's view (though possibly not the reader's) Savithri stands as a paradigm of non-dualism. He contrasts her internal harmony and fixed focus with his own disorder and double-focus:

Savithri just was, it was only me that had the Brahmin, with the Brahmin and the I as separate points of reference. Having only one point of reference, it seemed to me she had no problem, no equations. (p.136)

Equations exist only where there are two or more quantities, where there is dualism. Ramaswamy sees himself split into two parts, the I and the Brahman, or as we might say the body and the soul. This dualism he finds in Christianity and also in Catharism, a Christian heresy whose doctrine layed stress on this division by an ascetic denial of the flesh:

Strange, so strange it seemed to me, that after Indian non-dualism had passed through different countries at different epochs of history men came to affirm just the opposite -- that instead of Advaita, where both duality and contradiction are abolished -- men affirm that purity is not of the flesh, and so leap into the flame like Esclarmonde de Perelha. (pp.100-101)

Such denial Ramaswamy considers a corruption of the Advaitic

Truth whose doctrine incorporates both body and soul. According to Advaita body and soul exist in dialectical opposition, both having their origin and their extinction in the same divine source:

Just as thought cannot be transcended but has to be merged in that which is the background of thought, neither can evil be destroyed, but can only be merged into that from which it arose; the essence of evil, the root of evil, can only be the spring of life. (p.101)

Any final solution to the problem of life must be found in this source. You can never be a Brahmin but you must be Brahman. You can never be a Cathar but you must be Cathar (p.101). That is, you can never employ an adjective to describe one thing in terms of another if there is no "one" and no "other," that is, if all things are essentially One. Ramaswamy argues that because Catharist idealism was unable, or unwilling, to face physical reality (Maya, bacilli, evil, etc.), it was bound to defeat itself in the long run:

If the Cathars had remained they would have built a city of steel, in which virtue and vice would have been tested by electro-magnetic oscillographs. And inside you would have seen beautiful men and women walk through well-heated corridors, almost naked; and they might have produced children in crucibles, and through chemical tests created the Cathar that would have no evil thought or bacilli. Only when he went out -- when he crossed the iron wall -- would he catch cold, and be sold to a prostitute. The Cathars created the noblest communist society of the western world. (p.102)

This sort of idealism he equates with exclusiveness and hence with morality (which inevitably depends on moral choice and exclusion).

Heresy and morality (contrasting with orthodoxy and amorality) are thus connected, heresy leading to exclusion, fragmentation, isolation -- and atrophy.

When Madeleine converts to Buddhism Ramaswamy commences an examination of her new religion. As before, he uses the criteria of dualism and non-dualism in his evaluation. Buddhism too he finds to be dualistic since Nirvana is conceived of as separate and distinct from the physical world:

Truth, which always is, and is therefore never born and can never manifest itself in any way, cannot have a mother or a father. Maya, on seeing the Truth born from herself -- that is, man in seeing his own true nature as Truth -- sees that illusion has never existed, will never exist. So Maya did not die; Maya recognized truth being truth; Maya was as such nothing but the Truth. Who has ever seen nothingness -- Nirvana? The Void is only the I seen from within as the not-I. (p.112)

The Hindu Brahman is ever-present and exists wherever and whenever realized, since manifestation is really realization. But Nirvana is different. Nirvana cannot be known in life and so cannot be properly verified. Nirvana, he concludes, arises from an erroneous relativist way of thinking, where the I is not seen in its true relation to the all-embracing Absolute. Nirvana is a country seen across the waters but which cannot be reached because of a broken bridge (p.382).

I said before that Ramaswamy comes to realize the impossibility of proving what he set out to prove, the superiority of Advaita Vedanta over other systems of belief. Belief, he later

realizes, must depend on personal conviction. Proof must be a personal affair:

In fact it would seem, speaking objectively, that almost any theory will fit in with most facts, just as almost any system makes it possible to play chess efficiently. The only difference is, in how many cases can you say you really are convinced yourself? (p.380)

This process, the subjectivizing of Truth, is also described in The Cat and Shakespeare in connection with Govinand Nair: "If he saw black and found it brown, he could prove it was brown because he saw only brown."⁵ Each of the main characters in The Serpent and the Rope paints the objective world in his own colours. Georges finds Truth in Christianity, Madeleine in Buddhism, and Ramaswamy ultimately in Advaita Vedanta. And all paths lead to the same goal.

Yet this is perhaps going too far. Ramaswamy does not completely abandon his original wish to demonstrate the objective superiority of Advaita. We are left with a theory of "spiritual Darwinism" which postulates the superiority of Catholicism in Europe and Advaita Vedanta in India in terms of durability:

No wonder therefore, I argued, that early Buddhism was fought against by Hinduism, which ultimately defeated Buddhist moralism and integrated Buddhism into itself so that today one does not know in what way Mahayana differs essentially from Vedanta. Similarly Catholicism, with its virile tradition

⁵Raja Rao, The Cat and Shakespeare (New York : Macmillan, 1965), p.95.

that came not only from the Church but a great deal from the pagans too, had such truth about it that had Catharism not been destroyed European humanity might have been. The war was not between Christianity and the Cathars, but between the living principle of Europe -- from the time of Homer on to the present day -- and this defeatism of life, against the endura and the slow death: Darwinism may not only be a biological principle, it may well be a spiritual one too. (p.102)

I have been talking about Ramaswamy's interest in religious and philosophical subjects because these take central place in the novel. It would be easy to extend the discussion to include social, historical and political topics, all of which are handled by Ramaswamy in a similar way. Take modern political history, for example. On the subject of Nietzsche, we are told that his whole life-plan failed when he refuted "the she-world" (meaning the feminine principle) and rejected the Jews (p.175). Or on the subject of Nazism and Communism, Nazism is seen as protestant and moral, Communism as catholic, all-containing and hence amoral. Nazism thus falls into the dualistic category while Communism comes into the non-dualistic category. This is the scheme of (over-reductive) categorization which is applied to practically every subject raised for discussion. But in Ramaswamy's eventual recognition that religion depends on personal conviction there exists also an awareness that rationalization has very narrow limits. If his own Advaitic path is dialectically linked with Marxism, as indicated earlier, then there is still the problem of the gap left between theory and practice:

I was 'corrupted' by noble socialist ideals, and my Monarchy would be the ideal society of castes and functions equally distributed. I would have cooked for Enfantin and for Saint Simon, but I would have shouted 'Vive le Roi!' A stupid idea indeed. (p.104)

This is as far as argument can go when it comes to the attempt to rationalize a concept of metaphysical dialectic. All such intellectual left-overs tend to be brushed aside in the final sweep of the novel toward the Absolute. This final transcendental Absolutist view attests the voracity of Advaita, which draws together in a single nexus and consumes a whole order of cosmic hierarchies -- together with any remnant intellectual crumbs.

Ramaswamy's examination of world religions takes a change of course midway from "competitive religion" to "comparative religion." I have distinguished the discursive level of the novel from the (perhaps subcognitive) symbolic level which comes closer to what is important in Ramaswamy's vision. Actually the two levels merge together rather than stand separately or independently. At the symbolic level the novel is more clearly cyclic in its form and structure, while at the more discursive level it tends to be linear, following a man's life from ground level. This linear component rests on the biographical (hence temporal rather than atemporal) nature of the story, and on the fact that, for instance, Ramaswamy's research and thesis progress at about the same rate as the story itself; the end of the novel corresponds very closely with the finish of the thesis. This synchroni-

zation of intrinsic with extrinsic factors itself suggests the nature of non-dualism. In the large overall view the intrinsic and extrinsic, temporal and atemporal, linear and cyclic elements are seen to converge. But the preparation for this convergence starts right in the beginning, in the whole manner of narration, in the smaller circular eddies which in various places follow "stream of consciousness" patterns, as well as in the shuttling retrospective manner of story-telling combining historical events with Absolutist truths.

CHAPTER IV

RAJA RAO

Symbolism in The Cat and Shakespeare

M.K. Naik in his study of Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare quotes the author from a private source as saying that the novel was intended as a sequel to The Serpent and the Rope.

Professor Naik continues:

Govinand Nair has thus gone a step ahead of Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope. The latter had, at the end of his quest, at last found his way to the feet of the Guru; but Nair has already been blessed by the Guru and Pai has also become completely initiated by the end of the narrative.¹

But at this thematic level there is no reason why The Cat and Shakespeare cannot be regarded as an alternative version of the earlier story rather than as a sequel. After all, we would sooner associate Ramaswamy with Pai than with Govinand Nair, since the main interest in both quest novels centers around the questers, Pai and Ramaswamy. On the other hand The Serpent and the Rope contains no equivalent to Nair or to the cat; there is no direct manifestation of the Absolute in the earlier novel. In this

¹"The Cat and Shakespeare : A Study" in Indian Literature of the Past Fifty Years, 1917-67, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah (Mysore : University of Mysore, 1970), p.163.

sense The Cat and Shakespeare is an advance over The Serpent and the Rope. In The Cat and Shakespeare one feels that Raja Rao is moving (though perhaps only slightly) from the strict non-dualism of Shankara towards the modified system of non-dualism advocated by Ramanuja.

Whether The Cat and Shakespeare is sequel or alternative is perhaps of no great importance. What is more interesting is the new kind of symbolism in the later novel. The advance from The Serpent and the Rope to The Cat and Shakespeare is largely a technical one, utilizing a similar symbolic structure but a modified set of symbols. One of the most striking features of the later novel, coming as it does directly upon The Serpent and the Rope, is the sudden reduction in overall size and bulk. The quest theme appears stripped bare : all discursive and explanatory prose has been replaced by plain, almost colourless speech; while the broad geocosmic view of The Serpent and the Rope now gives way to a narrower, almost domestic scenario. I don't mean that The Cat and Shakespeare displaces The Serpent and the Rope in the sense that the earlier novel is made redundant; the two books are clearly different in tone and texture though they may be similar in kind. All the same The Cat and Shakespeare seems to reflect, in concentrated form, what is central to The Serpent and the Rope and that is a concern with certain metaphysical principles whose operation governs the whole of the created order.

To this end Raja Rao has adapted the symbolic technique of The Serpent and the Rope. Where the earlier novel depends largely on the kind of mountain, tree and river symbols (one might correctly say emblems) found in traditional Indian art and literature, the symbolism of The Cat and Shakespeare has been modified or personalized for more specific literary ends. Here the quest is carried on at home rather than abroad: continents, mountains, trees and rivers give way to houses, walls, cats, coffee and personal illness. It is the same Truth being sought, but it is here sought in the more familiar objects and surroundings of the ordinary workday life. For instance, whereas in The Serpent and the Rope the question of dualism versus non-dualism in religion is thrashed out at length both by means of discursive discussion and by the use of massive symbols (e.g., the Himalaya/Ganges symbolism), the same question is raised in The Cat and Shakespeare through a delicate and pointed arrangement of specific and more denotive symbols (e.g., the garden wall which divides the One into the Many). Similarly in other related matters: the feminine principle is dramatized by the mother cat, and the Self (totalling the traditional three worlds) by the house of three storeys. There is also a closer interrelation of physical and spiritual values. Instead of the stepped or ladder-like ascendancy of physical and supra-physical planes found in The Serpent and the Rope these different levels seem more nearly coincidental. Each symbol irradiates a

full spectrum of meanings at many levels simultaneously.

Although M.K. Naik and C.D. Narasimhaiah have discussed the novel and its symbols in comprehensive terms, only Janet Powers Gemmill has attempted to focus attention on the novel's symbolic patterning in greater detail.² In the following pages I wish to look again at the symbolic organization of the novel in isolation from the work as a whole. I shall try to reconstruct the skeleton which determines the book's form and structure.

There are a number of dominant symbols in The Cat and Shakespeare which are constantly recurring: the wall, the bilva-tree, the house, the ration shop and the cat. The wall defines a threshold between the physical and supra-physical worlds; the bilva-tree hangs over the wall, thereby sanctifying it (according to the legend of the hunter explained at the beginning of the novel); the house of three storeys encompasses the three worlds extending between heaven and earth; the ration shop becomes a symbol of all everyday earthly activities governed by clock time; and the cat stands for the fundamental regenerative and sustaining principle known either as Brahman or the Great Mother.³ In the progress of the narrative all of these

²"Rhythm in The Cat and Shakespeare."

³In The Serpent and the Rope the feminine principle is contrasted with the masculine principle, and both principles are traced to a common source in Brahman. Even so, Brahman is always in danger of being displaced by the feminine principle, as actually occurs in The Cat and Shakespeare. The ambiguity arises in part from conflicting myths of an early period and in part from the evolutionary course Hinduism followed.

symbols become interwoven into a texture which characterizes the metaphysical nature of the book.

The wall is virtually the starting and the ending point of the novel. Everything is connected in some way with the wall since the crucial question and preoccupation of the story concerns the One and the Many, the creed of non-dualism and dualism. What is the reason for the wall? First we must consider Pai's observation regarding the "heart" of a temple and by analogy the heart of man:

Strange how we transform all things into ours. Our houses must look like us, just as our ancestors built temples in the shape of man. In Chidamabaram Temple, Shankar Iyer says, the image of Shiva occupies the place of the heart. (p.6)

A little later Pai says of Govinand Nair: "His heart is so big, it builds a wall lest it run away with everything. He always wants to run away with everything. In fact he himself is -- running" (p.8). The wall is constructed for the practical business of physical existence. Unless the One becomes the Many physical existence could not be. The wall helps check Nair's essential volatility, helps to limit and define that which is essentially limitless and undefinable. Yet in all matters of importance the wall cannot contain Nair, for he can cross it in a single leap (like the cat). Nair's "heart" is symbolically equivalent to the image of Shiva in the temple, or alternatively to the cat. All are symbols of Truth.

The wall presents no obstacle to Nair in matters of importance since its function is meaningful and effective only in a relativist world. In important (metaphysical) affairs the relativist world is transcended and the wall crossed. Pai questions the wall's reality:

What a will-o'-the-wisp of a wall it is, going from nowhere to nowhere; tile-covered, bulging, and obstreperous, it seems like the sound heard and not the word understood. It runs just a little above my window, half an inch higher, and on the other side it dips and rises, running about on its wild, vicarious course. (p.11)

But the wall, delineating the threshold between the physical and metaphysical, is blessed by the bilva-tree:

The bilva leaves fall on the wall. And sometimes as if to remind us what a serious tree it is, a bilva fruit drops over the cowshed on the other side, and the thud makes even the cattle rise. The cattle see me, and urinate. The smell of dung and urine of kine is sweet to me. Purity is so near, so concrete. (p.11)

The bilva leaves fall not only on the wall but on what is sacred and what is profane alike. The "dung and urine of kine" belongs to the same order of holiness since everything, good and evil, springs from a common source. Even the trivial homely comforts derive from the same source. In The Serpent and the Rope we remember the soft chairs and hot chocolate, an affirmation of present life, on the last page of the novel; in The Cat and Shakespeare it is Pai's favourite hot coffee which seems to descend from over the wall. The coffee-bean, we are told, is Pai's "flower of

Paradise" (p.35) and Nair in his symbolic capacity "loved people who sought the Paradise flower" (p.35).

Not only Nair but Usha too knows the secret of the wall. Though still a child she is a suggested match for Shridhar with whom she talks across the wall. Speaking across the wall becomes a metaphor for "marriage," a word implying both the union of man and woman and the union of man and God. In this metaphysical scheme the ego and alter-ego seem to correspond with man and woman. When Pai comes eventually to cross the wall he understands the meaning of this symbolism: "This is what Usha meant when she said she saw Shridhar. She did not really, but when she went up, she saw herself and called herself Shridhar" (p.114). The "music of marriage" which Pai hears in the final lines of the novel celebrates the marriage of Self with Brahman, the consequence of crossing the wall. This is the Truth to which a child like Usha responds instinctively, and which a woman with child like Shantha can also understand (e.g., p.91).

Closely connected with the wall symbol is the bilva tree. The symbolic significance of the tree is explained in detail (p.7). The tree blesses whatever it shades, whether it shades an image of Shiva or a cowshed. In particular, "the bilva leaves fall on the wall" (p.11). Nair is associated with the tree: "He lives across the wall and the bilva spreads like a holy umbrella above

him. It gives him spiritual status" (p.62). Shantha "looked from under the bilva tree" (p.22). And Usha "stood under the bilva tree" (p.56).

On the near side of the wall (as opposed to the farther or supra-physical side) is the ration shop. The ration shop sums up the whole business of everyday life and everyday activity: "life is a ration shop. The scale weighs everything according to the ration card" (p.46). What man earns depends on what he deserves, which is the law of Karma. The emphasis falls on the practical necessity of life and work. All action does is provide food for living.

What can you do after all? If you have to buy you must sell. If you want betel and tobacco, you must work in numbers. You issue ration cards, six hundred seventy a day and God gives food to the needful. I must say I have never come across so much respect for God as amongst the British. I often think God is a ledger keeper. (p.25)

On the other hand there is little that is reasonable and much that is absurd about practical necessity. Corporeal existence is a kind of necessary evil to be endured for the sake of what it can teach. Much of the humour in The Cat and Shakespeare is of a despairing kind, arising from the unreasonableness of everyday events and appearances: "Life is a riddle that can be solved with a riddle. You can remove a thorn with another thorn, you solve one problem through another problem. Thus the world is connected" (p.35).

Like The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare is

concerned with the question of knowledge, but more specifically with the law of cause and effect. When Pai attempts to find a cause for the sudden appearance of his boils the only explanation available seems to be the war in Europe (p.14). He is equally stuck when he tries to imagine the cause of Shridhar's illness (p.64). He realizes how confined is the area of knowledge beyond names and apparent causes. Finally he asks: "Does one know anything?" (p.65) or "Who knows?" to which question he himself supplies the difficult answer : "Knowledge alone knows" (p.90), corresponding with Nair's view: "The unknown alone resolves the unknown. So, brother, work and be merry, distribute cards in Ration Office No. 66" (p.35). Nair suggests that reason cannot supply the right answers and that work ("life" or "living") is the only thing man can properly attend to. In one immediate sense life is absurd, futile. To understand how "the world is connected" reason and the logic of cause and effect must be transcended. Even evil and disease will then be seen to have a place in the overall scheme of things.

Disease has a special place, an almost Shakespearean intensity, in The Cat and Shakespeare. Consider, for example, Nair's indictment of man's corporeal condition:

When you know this rotten fat thing, with pus, blood, excreta, with semen for procreation, and bile for digestion, with the five sheaths and the nine supports (called dhatus by our forebears) the blood that oozes to the heart and

the urine that is thrown out -- this filthy sack of the five elements, what does it become? It stinks, sir, it stinks when it is laid on fire.... (p.95)

Disease and evil belong to a state of mind, a state of ignorance or avidya and connected with Maya. Thus Nair can say: "The Hitlers are in us, like objects in seeing. We think there is Hitler, when Hitler is really an incarnation of what I think" (p.24). The level of thought, the level of the psyche, extends within time; the higher levels of Truth are ineffable and un-thinkable. Thought together with the symbols of thought (language and expression) therefore come to be symbolically equated with disease. As Nair says, "All my language can be reduced to... meow, meow, meowoooo" (p.32). For Nair the Shakespearean kind of knowledge and expressiveness is inadequate. Shakespeare, he says, "Knew every mystery of the ration shop" (p.81). That is, Shakespeare was conversant with every mystery of man's physical and mental condition. But Nair also implies that he either knew nothing of the cat (the world across the other side of the wall), or at least failed to describe the world in terms of the cat.

A different but equivalent type of disease is revealed in the corruption of the ration office and ration shop. These government departments encourage rats, Govinand Nair quips, so as to give an excuse for those missing records which the rats have supposedly eaten (p.25). The rats stand ambiguously in the novel as

symbols of disease, and also of God: on one hand they must be kept down by a cat, on the other hand the rat is the vehicle of Ganesha (p.73). This deliberate ambiguity once again conveys the idea that disease is essentially sacred. Thus life too is ambiguous: on one hand physical existence represents a lapse from the pure condition of Brahman, but is yet a manifestation of Brahman; on the other hand life is a necessity, just a matter of ration cards:

In fact you could ask what is life. You issue a ration card. Your house number, numbers of the family, are all indicated: you are class A, B, C, or D. You buy what you want and when you want, but only what is available." etc. (p.60)

And the ration shop is of course necessary because it feeds the starving (p.76).

The mother cat and her kittens are dominant symbols in the novel. The cat too 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 the 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.

According to Govinand Nair: "The kitten is being carried by the cat. Some, who are lucky...will one day know it. Others live hearing 'meow-meow' (p.8). Or again,

Ah, the kitten when its neck is held by its mother, does it know anything else but the joy of being held by its mother? You see the elongated thin hairy thing dangling, and you think, poor kid, it must suffer to be so held. But I say the kitten is the safest thing in the world, the kitten held in the mouth of the mother cat.... I often think how noble it is to see the world, the legs dangling straight, the eyes steady, and the mouth of the mother at the neck. Beautiful. (pp.9-10)

Nair is quite explicit in his analogy. The kitten dangling from the mouth of the mother is "the world". The world is created and sustained by a Mother principle, and even destroyed with the passage of time. Nair uses the word 'know' in its special esoteric sense: that is, the sort of conviction that comes as the result of spiritual enlightenment. The majority of people, Nair seems to suggest, never come by this kind of 'knowledge.' They live hearing the cat's (unintelligible) 'meow', but understand nothing of the implications. Nair exhorts Pai to submit to the will of the mother cat. She is the "one blessed thing" in "the kingdom of Denmark" which is "like a ration office" (p.81). "The mother cat carries you across the wall" (p.78).

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 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 (Vedantist) significance of symbols, and for him the cat stands as an ideal. A cat in the ration shop, he declares, could control the rats (corruption) that exist there. Boothalinga Iyer, the boss of the ration shop, turns a blind eye on the shady practices perpetrated by members of his staff; or put in symbolic terms: "For Boothalinga Iyer rats existed and not cats" (p.72). The practical joke played at Nair's expense, the caging of the cat within a rat-cage, is an indication of the inverted values obtaining in the state of Denmark. The play, in the sense of lila, conducted at one level of the novel (at the level of practical joke, implying malpractice) is subsequently answered from another level. Malpractice or evil is nothing strange to man's natural physical condition; rather it is equivalent to that condition, since the manifest world is but a temporary diminution of Brahman. The cat attacks Boothalinga Iyer in the malevolent aspect of Shiva whose job it is to destroy in order to recreate. Iyer's last words go deeper than just superficial imprecation, and should be taken quite literally: "Boothalinga Iyer opened his eyes wide and said, 'Shiva, Shiva,' and he was dead" (p.87).

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, meowoooo" (p.32) he means that language too is hopelessly inadequate, hopelessly absurd. He improvises on Hamlet's famous soliloquy in a way that deliberately disturbs the beauty of the poetry in order to reveal some of this absurdity, to reveal the potential ugliness of language:

To be or not to be. No, no. (He looks at the cat.)
 A kitten sans cat, kitten being the
 diminutive for cat. Vide Prescott
 of the great grammatical fame.
 A kitten sans cat, that is the
 question. (p.80)
 Etc.

At the same time he extends Shakespeare's meaning to embody a meta-physic 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. Like his Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope, Raja Rao "relates things apparently so unrelated."⁴

⁴Raja Rao, The Serpent and the Rope, p.184.

Both the absurdity and the profundity of the cat can be seen in the ration office and court-room 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) (p.105). 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 the ways of God offer the only proof we have of God's existence.

Finally there is Pai's house of three storeys. In one sense the house stands in the actual physical world, a temple-like structure in appearance (p.4). But this meaning is extended to mean the whole universe or God himself. Pai's earnest desire to own this house implies his desire to know God (equivalent to his own Self). Pai's big question at the start of the story is, "Will I build a big house?" (p.7). Nair tells him:

God will build you a house of three stories[sic] -- note, please, I say three stories -- here, just where you sit. It's already there. You've just got to look and see, look deep and see. (p.10)

Enlightenment is not so much a matter of becoming as of recogni-

tion. Nair knows that basically "man is happy: Because he knows he lives in a house three stories high" (p.49). Pai's own course towards enlightenment is expressed in one place in terms of house-building: "I have a house. I have laid the foundation for myself -- and through time" (p.61). He wants to live with Shantha in a house three storeys high with "the windows that go running along the wall toward the sea.... A window on the sea is a window on God" (p.51). The house is a symbol of marital bliss as well as of spiritual bliss; human marriage (or, metaphorically, crossing the wall) implies a transcendental marriage of the Self with Brahman. The most explicit comment on the house symbol occurs late in the novel where the description, starting from the ground floor and moving upwards, identifies ascent with spiritual progress:

There's only one depth and one extensivity and that's (in) oneself. It's like a kitten on a garden wall. It's like kittens walking on the garden wall. It's like the clock of the secretariat seen through a mist of clouds -- time moves on according to a moon (and the sun) but the offices go on working, people scribbling, smoking, typing, belching, scratching, farting big, fibbing, exuding asafoetida perspiration or the acrid smell of buttermilk -- there will be peons to whom a rupee warrants well, but two warrant more, and up the staircase you go, one two, and three, and each step is worth a rupee, on to the first floor. On the second floor the prices are higher. You pay ten rupees a step. And on the third, it's like offerings to the Maharaja, you pay according to ceremony. And above it all sits time like a nether world recorder asking no questions. (p.60)

Money is an associate symbol in the novel, connected with the value of the house and so sharing the same kind of ambiguity as

the house symbol: on one hand it represents hard cash, on the other spiritual worth. It provides the means for the purchase of the house; but it also lends itself to corruption. Shantha asks, "How can anything mean one and one thing?" (p.91), and this is the question underlying the whole symbolic interplay of the novel. Raja Rao once described his progress as a novelist in terms of his interest in "the complexity of the human condition,"⁵ and this interest is patent in Shantha's question. The One has many aspects, so that any particular single aspect automatically implies all other aspects, as well as implying the essential Oneness of all aspects.

The final pages of the book bring together and interconnect the main symbols I have been discussing. The cat with her newly born kittens are seen walking confidently along the wall (p.112). The birth or renewal signals the end of Pai's quest. He says:

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 a distance. There were old men with beards as long as their knees, and they talked to no one. Young men were in green turbans and others, children and women, sang

⁵"My main interest increasingly is in showing the complexity of the human condition (that is, the reality of man is beyond his person), and in showing the symbolic construct of any human expression." Quoted from Contemporary Novelists, ed. James Vinson (London: St. James Press, 1972), p.1042.

or danced to no tune but to the tune of trees. Snakes lived therein plenty, and the mongoose roamed all about the garden. I saw deer, too. The air was so like a mirror you just walked toward yourself. (p.112)

And again:

So that day I walked behind the cat. It went down into the kitchen of the White House and left the litter in the corner of the granary room. Then it went up a series of stone steps. Up and up it went, up the staircase. Everybody bowed as if awed. Then I, too, followed it. This time I would not be defeated. I must win, I said. The winning was easy, for I heard a very lovely music. I was breathless. The staircase suddenly turned, and in went the cat. I stood there white as marble. I looked in and saw everything. (p.113)

It isn't possible to determine from the text whether the crossing of the wall and the following of the cat up the staircase are separate events occurring in a temporal sequence, or whether they really refer to the same event. But the vagueness is deliberate. Again the temporal and a-temporal merge together so that by one account the events are sequential, but by a different account they amount to one and the same event seen from a different angle. The first account is produced from an apparently dualistic or pluralistic world, the second account from the fact that the finite is only an appearance of the infinite which really is non-dualistic. The cat (which, like Shiva, stands at the threshold of birth and death) is related to Pai's crossing the wall, which is related in turn to Pai's ascent up the staircase to the top floor. In this way separate symbols converge and coalesce at the end of the novel into a single final meaning. In the same movement the dialectic

of Teacher/disciple (as with Usha and Shridhar earlier) dissolves into a single union, as the neighbour becomes none other than oneself: "I sing of man because he is my neighbour. After all, one's big neighbour is oneself. The neighbour's neighbour is always the Self" (p.93). But is complete freedom possible in this life? Pai reports: "To prove the world is, I built a house two stories high" (p.108). He still longs to build the final storey:

A third story was what I wanted to build, so that I could see up to the end of the sea. Govinand Nair laughed and said, "Mister, can you see the back of your head?" I said no. "To see the end of the sea is just like saying: I see the end of your nose. Can you see the end of my nose?" (p.111) Etc.

The third storey can only be completed when man is freed from his physical existence. Perfect freedom is only possible when the world dies. Knowing this Ramakrishna Pai is content to live in his house of two storeys:

I will never build a house three stories high. Have you ever seen a house so high? No, not in Trivandrum. In Trivandrum, the best houses, those of P. Govardhan Nair or of Jagadish Iyer, retired High Court judge, or even of Raja Rajendra Varma. His Highness' first cousin, are but two stories high. You can make nice curved stairways. You could make one in marble, or in polished wood (like in the Royal Guest House at Kanya-kumari), but you must always have the terrace open. That is what one calls the third floor. A house always opens into openness. Has anybody seen a house shut out? (p.116)

A number of conclusions emerge from this study. Raja Rao creates a world which symbolically closes in upon itself, 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, a 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 the 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, in the eye of the beholder, to the whole existential order.

CHAPTER V

RAJA RAO

Movement in Kanthapura

In his famous Foreword to Kanthapura Raja Rao speaks of the importance of movement in Indian life and in Indian story-telling:

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India which makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana 48,000. The Puranas are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us -- we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thought stops our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.¹

Of course we more usually associate "rush and tumble" with life in the industrialized West than with the villages of southern India. Nirad Chaudhuri also holds to a climatic theory to account for differences of racial identity; but Chaudhuri, on the other hand, seems to believe that it is something in the sun of India which accounts for a lack of activity rather than bustle. It is not the importance of movement alone which distinguishes Indian

¹Raja Rao, Kanthapura (New York : New Directions, 1967).

life from life in the West (Raja Rao is not speaking comparatively anyway) but rather the quality of this movement, a sense of continuity without the breaks, the pauses and hesitations which mark a more complex and less spiritually certain life in the West. The sweep of Indian life and art, all in the same direction, takes its impetus from an all-encompassing Indian tradition; this is a stream of many divergent courses all of which eventually converge again into a larger current.

No one can read Kanthapura without being struck by the strong sweep of the narrative which combines a sense of modernity with an equally strong sense of tradition. There is a curious but highly effective synthesis of simplicity and complexity in Raja Rao's style: a high-powered and complex technique is put to an unusual end -- to bring out the peculiar characteristics of the "primitive" oral story-telling style. Although it is possible to discuss the novel in traditional terms I feel that this particular quality of "modern traditionalism" has largely been overlooked by most critics. What I wish to emphasize in the following discussion is the cinematic sense of movement in Kanthapura or the "neo-" aspect of Rao's neo-Brahminism.

Popular Indian cinema has been able to capitalize on the epical properties of traditional myths and legends in an unusually successful way; there is something about these myths and legends

which lends itself to cinematic interpretation, and we may connect this quality with Raja Rao's statement in the Foreward. Film owes very little to a literary kind of punctuation; rather it is characterized by continuity of action, and by a strong sense of visual and temporal extension which minimizes the importance attached to boundaries and formal limitations. Historically, film has always found such epical subjects as crowd and battle scenes most conducive to its own aims, as well as a historically based or open-ended chronological plan.

But if there is a cinematic or modernistic extensiveness in the novel's time plan there is also a traditional circularity underlying the apparent temporal linearity. Raja Rao links the period of social strife recorded in Kanthapura with a sense of cosmic time, the cycle of destruction and renewal from a cosmic Source which is so important in all of Rao's novels. Whereas the other two works are concerned with the pilgrimage undertaken by particular individuals Kanthapura describes the pilgrimage undertaken by a whole village, a religious quest to drive the British from India. This pilgrimage is also told in the terms of death, destruction and eventual renewal, though the phases are more muted and less explicit than in the other novels. The cycle of life and of quest follows a pattern of "order-disorder-order," starting from the innocence of the child and ranging through the phases of adult con-

flict which are eventually resolved in mature enlightenment. The cycle of "order-disorder-order" is therefore the path from innocence to enlightenment. In the opening pages of Kanthapura life goes on as it has for centuries; the bullock carts move through the night passing through the village on their way to the market or to the sea. The narrator knows Kanthapura intimately; she can trace their route in her mind, the particular houses they pass, the particular corners they turn. Here is a technique known as "tracking" in the cinema which is used extensively in this novel, giving a powerful sense of physical location and spatial reality. The slow pace of the bullock carts in these opening pages reflects the tempo of life in these parts, a tempo which changes markedly with oncoming events. This walking-pace tempo is also reflected in the description of the village lay-out and its houses:

Our village had four-and-twenty houses. Not all were big like Postmaster Suryanarayana's double-storied house by the temple corner. But some were really not bad to look at. Our Patwari Nanjundia had a veranda with two rooms built on to the old house. He had even put glass panes to the windows, which even Postmaster Suryanarayana could not boast of. Then there were the Kannayya-house people, who had a high veranda, and though the house was I know not how many generations old, it was still fresh and new as though it had been built only yesterday. (p.3)

The passage of the bullock-carts to and from Kanthapura, taken together with the general geographical description of the place in the opening paragraph of the novel, suggest the narrator's awareness, or potential awareness, of the village in a much larger

geographical setting. And in this larger awareness there is a hint of the enlarging expansive motion which is to take place later in the novel. The fact that this initial phase of "order" or of peace and calm does not suggest frantic bustle in any obvious sense indicates that Rao is using the idea of "rush and tumble" in a special mental, psychological or spiritual sense despite the directness of his description used in the Foreword. This use of concrete imagery to describe less tangible states is, as we have already seen, typical of this author's manner and style. In a subtle sense there is movement or a powerful dynamic in his otherwise static descriptions of Nature, such as in the following piece describing dawn over the Ghats:

The day dawned over the Ghats, the day rose over the Blue Mountain, and churning through the grey, rapt valleys, swirled up and swam across the whole air. The day rose into the air and with it rose the dust of the morning, and the carts began to creak round the bulging rocks and the coppery peaks, and the sun fell into the river and pierced it to the pebbles, while the carts rolled on and on, fair carts of the Kanthapura fair.... (p.39)

There is no distinction here between animate and inanimate, natural law appearing to govern everyone and everything alike. And so the description continues, bringing together an assortment of details, like those paraded at the Kanthapura fair:

fair carts that came from Maddur and Tippur and Santur and Kuppur, with chillies and coconut, rice and ragi, cloth, tamarind, butter and oil, bangles and kumkum, little pictures of Rama and Krishna and Sankara and the Mahatma, little dolls for the youngest, little kites for the elder, and

little chess pieces for the old -- carts rolled by the Sampur knoll and down into the valley of the Tippur stream, then rose again and groaned round the Kenchamma hill, and going straight into the temple grove, one by one, with lolling bells and muffled bells, with horn-protectors in copper and back-protectors in lace, they all stood there in one moment of fitful peace; "Salutations to thee, Kenchamma, goddess supreme," -- and then the yokes began to shake and the bulls began to shiver and move, and when the yokes touched the earth, men came out one by one, travellers that had paid a four-anna bit or an eight-anna bit to sleep upon pungent tamarind and suffocating chillies, travellers who would take the Pappur carts to go to the Pappur mountains, the Sampur carts to go to the Sampur mountains, and some too that would tramp down the passes into the villages by the sea, or hurry on to Kanthapura as our Moorthy did this summer morning, Moorthy with a bundle of khadi on his back and a bundle of books in his arms. (p.39)

There is something almost Chaucerian in the sheer joy, the innocence and the all-inclusiveness of this description. It is a tableau of life-movement, a strangely closed kind of world in which objects, people, places, events are all shown to be interconnected, a picture illustrating the Hindu concept of cosmic flux and universal order -- a curious sort of "static dynamic."

Diminutive in this vast canvas, Moorthy is seen returning to Kanthapura. Again his route is tracked in detail by the narrator's camera-like eye:

He skirted the temple flower garden and, hurrying round Boranna's toddy booth and crossing the highway, he rushed up the village road to the panchayat mound, turned to the left, followed Bhatta's Devil's field, where Pariah Tippa was weeding, jumped across Seethamma's stile and went straight through the backyard. Maybe Ratna would be at the well, he thought. But Ratna was not there and the rope hung over the pulley, solemn and covered with flies; so he ran over the temple promontory and straight across the Brahmin

street corner to Rangamma's house, but, seeing that Rangamma had not yet returned from the river... (pp.39-40)

The centripetal movement from the outside moving inwards towards Kanthapura is repeated in the novel a number of times. Shortly after Moorthy's return to Kanthapura (from the city), there is a description of Cauveri coolies marching toward Kanthapura and the Skeffington Coffee Estate. We see a long line of marchers, an impersonal profile of all kinds of men in all kinds of conditions:

armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma temple, half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning coolies -- coolie after coolie passed by the Kenchamma temple, the maistri before them, while the children clung to their mothers' breasts, the old men to their sons' arms, and bundles hung over shoulder and arm and arm and shoulder and head; and they marched on past the Kenchamma temple and up to the Skeffington Coffee Estate -- coolies from below the Ghats, coolies, young men, old men, old women, children, baskets, bundles, pots, coolies passed on -- and winding through the twists of the Estate path ... (p.44)

The sentence from which this passage is taken continues on for a grand Faulknerian one and a half pages. It is a magnificent instance of the kind of flow Raja Rao spoke about, technique finding in such a scene its most natural material. And it is exactly the kind of scene I have called filmic, the kind of classical crowd shot found in an Eisenstein picture for example. As in the other descriptions, the scene here is all-inclusive, somehow taking in the vast medley of human types and conditions whose sum total is the whole of humanity. Shortly afterwards, we again

follow Moorthy's return to Kanthapura, this time watching his lantern as he moves in and out of vision, walking along a path leading to the Skeffington Coffee Estate (p.57). And the result of Moorthy's return at this point is the first outbreak of violence in Kanthapura.

And so the phase of order passes to disorder. The instrument of disorder, as in Narayan's novels, is seen to come from the outside, from beyond Kanthapura itself. And like Narayan's novels too, this external influence is shown to be ambiguously both good and evil, evil initially in the immediate prospect but leading to good in the final lasting result. The changing phase is recorded by a centripetal movement or a movement of convergence toward the village from the outside. From the start of the novel where this movement is suggested by the innocuous to and fro of the bullock waggons, subsequent repetitions of this inward motion become increasingly threatening to the original state of peace and order. The ripples grow larger as the frequency of interruptions increases, as the revenue people, the forces of colonial law and order and the "city-boys" invade the village.

The breakdown of original order is reflected by a vast acceleration of motion, of a disruptive to and fro, back and forth, between village and city. The kind of stable vantage-point used in the earlier description of particular streets and

houses no longer exists. Cars and trucks replace foot traffic, running replaces walking, diverse unpredictable movements replace deliberate direction, pain replaces peace, India replaces Kanthapura. But even on this large geographical scale the evil influence is seen to still come from without, from Britain which represents "avidya" where India represents "freedom of soul" (p.102). Although, in one sense, all of this disruption appears as a real threat to the whole life of Kanthapura, the novel makes it fairly clear that only externals are affected in the final result. First, there is the conviction of the villagers which remains sufficiently constant to place them above the ravages to life and property. The fight is directed against the forces of evil, and is regarded as a holy "pilgrimage" (p.119). By resisting evil, at whatever cost, success must follow -- such is the law of life, acclaimed by the sastras and affirmed by events in the novel.

The movement of the novel reflects the quest for liberation, the struggle for social freedoms in the guise of religious quest:

"And remember always, the path we follow is the path of the spirit, and with truth and nonviolence and love shall we add to the harmony of the world. For, brothers, we are not soldiers at arms, say I; we seek to be soldier saints." And just then Rangamma, who sat by the central pillar, unknowingly began to ring the gong, as though the curtain had fallen and the goddess beheld, and tears came to our eyes, and even our men felt there was something in the air, and they too looked unaware, and there was not a cough nor a sneeze but only the eyelashes quivered and closed...(p.126)

The path of the spirit refers to the pathway through life, samsara, which leads eventually to rebirth and spiritual improvement. It is the "inward turning" path, found within each individual as much as in the external world. That there is a geography, a place replete with fields, promontories, valleys and paths, within each person is a belief expressed a number of times in The Serpent and the Rope, and implied also in Kanthapura, for instance in the descriptive realism of Moorthy's hallucinations during the course of his fast:

Light seemed to rise from the far horizon, converge and creep over hills and fields and trees, and rising up the promontory, infuse itself through his very toes and finger tips and rise to the sun-centre of his heart. Etc. (p.63)

As in The Serpent and the Rope this kind of natural description carries religious overtones, and in the case of Moorthy's hallucinations (in the continuation of the above passage) natural description combines with a childhood vision of the god Krishna. The landscape across which the action occurs, a region watched over by the local tutelary goddess Kenchamma, is also the landscape of the spirit and of man's inner being. Hence the emphasis on centripetal inward-directed motion, the attempt to gain control over Kanthapura, and so over the human "sun-heart." In their occupation of the fields against the power of the authorities, the villagers symbolically occupy a sacred centre against the irrupting powers of darkness, the external foreign influ-

ences from the city and from abroad. The battles in the last part of the book are as much battles of the spirit, metaphysical battles, as they are circumstantial events.

Again in these last scenes it is a cinematic kind of visual experience which suggests the inner human experience. In each of these scenes there is a piling up of particular physical detail which imparts a strange light-headedness to the prose, a sense of disorientation which comes of strong emotional fervour, a kind of cataleptic state in which the physical and psychological worlds intermingle. It is difficult to quote for an accurate impression, since so much depends in these passages on the continuity of action and of feeling, the descriptions continuing on over many pages. But here is one typical segment:

Then the police inspector rushed at the coolies and whipped them till they began to search their way again among us, but we began to call out to them, "Oh don't go, brother! -- don't go, sister! -- oh, don't go, in the name of the Mahatma! -- oh, don't go in the name of Kenchamma!" and our men pulled the coolies down, and one after another the coolies fell over and they too blocked the way, and the police, feeling there was no way out, caught hold of us by the hair to lift us up, and we struggled and we would not rise; and when Rangamma was made to sit, the police inspector gave her such a kick in the back that she fell down unconscious, and Ratna cried out, "Oh, you dogs," and the police inspector spat in her face and gave her a slap that brought blood out of her mouth. But Moorthy said, "No swearing, please. Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" and we all cried out, "Jai Mahatma!" and such a crowd had now gathered around us that we felt a secret exaltation growing in us, and we shouted out, "Vandè Mataram!" -- and everybody cried, "Vadè[sic] Mataram!" and somebody remembered, "And at least a toddy leaf, sister," and we sang back, "And at least a toddy pot,

sister," while the rain poured on and on, a thunderless rain, and the streamlets began to trickle beneath us and our hair was caught in the mire and our hands and our backs and our mouths bled, and then, when we lifted ourselves up a little, we saw one, two, three coolies entering the toddy booth. And Moorthy shouted out again, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" and a blow gagged his mouth, and he could not shout again. And then Seetharam and old Nanjamma and all of us said, "He's fallen, Moorthy. He's dead, Moorthy. Oh, you butchers!" And we shouted, as though to defend him, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" and old Nanjamma cried, "Narayan! Narayan!" and what with the oaths and cires and the "Narayan! Narayan!" and the thuds of the lathi and the ringings of the cattle bells and the rain on the earth and the shouts of the market people and the kerosene tin that still beat, we all felt as though the mountains had split and the earth wailed, and the goddess danced over the corpse of the Red Demon. (pp.138-139)

The buoyancy of spirit communicated here is likened to the sense that "the goddess danced over the corpse of the Red Demon." The showers of lathi blows are scarcely distinguished from showers of rain, as though the whole of natural as well as supra-natural law were engaged in the struggle. The rich texture of the prose where action, speech, and sensory detail are all tightly interwoven gives a certain opacity to the whole experience, the opacity of an experience which has no further dimension beyond what is represented, the picture being complete and final in itself. Because of the underlying assumption on the part of the narrator (author?) that the physical and supra-physical levels of life are intricately connected and that, moreover, each level reflects the opposite level, the physical concrete correlatives to thought (that is, the details of the physical world) give a very close indication of the

strength, direction and quality of the thought itself. Hence the feeling of completeness, of thought captured in movement.

Because of this internal-external connection too, the narrator brings to the story an unusual combination of personal and impersonal vision. The difference between human vision and camera vision rests upon the phenomenon of human conditioning and human memory which enable the human eye to "interpret" physical reality in the light of past experiences and past memories, to see the lineaments of a person's face not according to the passing condition of the moment but according to a mental pictorial concept of that person established over a period of time and over a period of personal contact. The camera eye, by contrast, catches what is passing, what is transient. It gives the impersonal rendering of particular, perhaps even uncharacteristic, features seen at a given moment and seen with ruthless objectivity. Normally the two kinds of vision, the personal and the impersonal, tend to be opposed. But here where the (author's) structural referents in the story confirm the village narrator's own view of life, where there is little gap between subjective and objective experience, where there is little irony supervening between the narrator and the world she inhabits, the personal and the impersonal viewpoints tend to coincide. Meenakshi Mukherjee makes a point that the events described in Kanthapura would appear differently had they

been described by someone else other than the old woman narrator.³ This might only be true if the somebody else had been a foreigner, a non-traditional Indian, or an author quite unlike Raja Rao.

In the final chapter of the novel there is a return to something approaching the initial state of order, and registered in the old movement patterns. True, Kanthapura has been destroyed and its survivors now live in neighbouring Kashipura, but life here goes on in a way typical of the old order. There is a sense in which externals have been destroyed while a new and higher achievement has been realized. On the other hand, and this is how Raja Rao manages to include as well as exclude the sinister aspects of modernity within the compass of a traditional cycle, Kanthapura has fallen to land financiers and is already undergoing changes for the worse. From the point of view of the believer, traditional mores have been sustained and even strengthened under the stress of alien opposition, while to the outsider the wreckage of Kanthapura seems more ominous and perhaps more lasting -- for the former individual destruction is but a temporary phase, for the latter it is an ongoing process. Both views are partly true. But the novel does finally come down, I think, rather on the side of the believer, a fact which is reflected in the novel's traditional narrative construction.

³The Twice Born Fiction, p.38.

In Kanthapura, a metaphysic is realized not in the abstract but in the experience of physical life. The novel employs physical detail, but more strikingly physical detail in a state of flux, in order to suggest the movement of a pilgrimage toward a goal of self-recognition. In the later novels the search for enlightenment shifts away from such precipitate involvement in action, toward a more questioning attitude which tends, particularly in The Serpent and the Rope, to check the spontaneous inner dynamism and flow of this first novel.

CHAPTER VI

R.K. NARAYAN

Quest, Cyclic and Linear Dimensions in The Financial Expert, The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets

Any full account of projected identity in Narayan's novels (the following discussion makes no claim for completeness) would have to take into consideration a number of different areas of Narayan's work -- his comedy, his psychology, his realism and his detachment. As William Walsh, S.C. Harrex and other writers have shown,¹ the main interest in Narayan's novels centres on everyday life and particularly on everyday relationships in Narayan's semi-imaginary Malgudi. William Walsh has emphasized the significance of the joint family background in most of the novels, while Dr. Harrex has pointed to the typicality (representational realism) of many of Narayan's characters and events -- a

¹William Walsh, A Human Idiom (London : Chatto & Windus, 1964), p.131; S.C. Harrex in a paper "Eccentric Norms : Tradition and Comedy in the Fiction of R.K. Narayan," (an abbreviated form of this paper was delivered at the 28th International Congress of Orientalists at Canberra in January 1971); V.Y. Katak, "The Achievement of R.K. Narayan," in Indian Literature of the Past Fifty Years, 1917-67, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah, (University of Mysore, 1970). Others listed in Bibliography.

"comedy of manners" element which frequently involves a fair variety of the more minor characters. The ordinary reader, whether Indian or Western, reads and enjoys Narayan primarily for this vivid and generally humorous treatment of typical middle-class Indians in their typical middle-class South Indian setting.

But both of the above-mentioned critics and a number of others besides have also tried to account for a different side, the more religious or spiritual side, to his novels.² That Narayan writes from a deep consciousness and understanding of the Hindu tradition is evident, for instance, from his numerous remarks reported in the press and in various journals: "All imaginative writing in India has had its origin in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.... An author would pick up an incident or a character out of one or the other and create a new work with it";³

²In particular, S.C. Harrex, "R.K. Narayan's Grateful to Life and Death," The Literary Criterion, 8, No. 3 (Winter 1968), 52-64. Also Shirley Chew, "A Proper Detachment," Southern Review, 5, No. 2 (June 1972), 147-159. V.Y. Kantak has made mention of a "submerged layer of interest" in Narayan's novels which "takes the form of an incipient effort, a mere 'questing' to connect this life of conscious striving, the reckless thrashing about, with the achievement of a deeper rhythm that Indian tradition has always held to be the desirable goal." "The Achievement of R.K. Narayan," p.141.

³"The Fiction Writer in India : His Tradition and his Problems," The Atlantic Monthly, 192, No. 4 (Oct. 1953), 119. This idea, the essential Indianness of the main theme in Narayan's novels, was once again confirmed by the author at a public lecture delivered in Adelaide, Sth.Aust. on 16/3/74.

or again, "It is inevitable that a writer, though he may be a twentieth century product, should see the world and its affairs through the concepts of these myths and read their symbolism in modern terms";⁴ or his explanation that The Man-Eater of Malgudi is "mythology in modern dress";⁵ and so on. Although it is possible, and illuminating, to see a particular novel or character or incident within a novel in terms of one or another particular traditional prototype, I think we are justified if we talk about Narayan's "mythic sensibility"⁶ in a way that incorporates any or all specific instances of traditional significance in a larger overall vision. Narayan's mythic sensibility governs his habitual response to the world at large, and this as the result of his life-style and Indian conditioning.

The usefulness of a concept of "mythic sensibility" for our present purposes is that we may imagine his Malgudian microcosm shaped and structured by certain deep attitudes and assumptions. Consider, for example, Narayan's description of the role of the tale told by the village story-teller in Gods, Demons and Others:

⁴"Gods, Demons and Modern Times," The Literary Criterion, 10, No. 3 (Winter 1972), 47.

⁵Ibid., p.50.

⁶This will be considered further in a later chapter (see Chapter IX).

Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an underlining of the distinction between good and evil.... Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately, at least in a thousand or ten thousand years; if not in this world, at least in other worlds.... The strong man of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction. And however frightening a demon might seem, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities -- a profoundly happy and sustaining philosophy which unfailingly appeals to our people.... (pp.4-5)⁷

In the light of such remarks we can see how Edwin Gerow, for instance, is able to put forward a cosmic and cyclical theory to help explain the special course taken by a Narayan novel:

The settled order of the cosmos is, in the Indian view, the fundamental ontological fact: change itself is not seen for what it produces, for what new possibilities it suggests or creates -- as, in other words, a positive factor in being -- but much more negatively is a play of shadows within the stable whole which is creation.... The dramatic eventuation in this notion of realism, is not the plot, seen as a play of forces and suggesting or clarifying previously inexplicit or unrealized relationships, not the development of the story to a "conclusion," but is rather what one might call an "anti-plot": the reintegration of an original state -- dynamic to be sure, but stable -- which has for a time been threatened with dislocation. All that "happens" is that the miasma of confusion created by the demonic "irruption" is fully dissipated; all that can happen is what we began with: the stable cosmos.⁸

The point that Narayan adheres in his novels to a more or less traditional Indian formula in his moral and religious assumptions

⁷All page references refer to Indian Thought Publication editions except where otherwise stated.

⁸"The Quintessential Narayan," Literature East and West, 10, Nos. 1-2 (1966), 3-4.

has often been made in a general sort of way by a large number of critics and reviewers; while several writers, like Edwin Gerow, have tried to pin this down more precisely.

In the present discussion of identity I wish to mark out several specific areas for study. I have already indicated that here I am primarily interested in Narayan's projected Indian identity in terms of a particular kind of "mythic sensibility" or a general propensity to see things in a certain more or less fixed way.⁹ In an earlier chapter I discussed The Serpent and the Rope in terms of a fixed cosmic plan with its particular, and in one sense, almost mechanistic functional sequences; Narayan's novels also seem to obey a set of central organizing principles, despite the fact that they are not so explicit. This time the cosmic process is more nearly one of "Order-Disorder-Order"¹⁰ as stabili-

⁹I am speaking of the deeper and less immediate levels of Narayan's work. It has often been pointed out that life in Malgudi proceeds at several levels -- an immediate level of everyday life and activity, and a deeper "metaphysical" level which tends to remain partly hidden. Because Narayan writes from a sense of participation in his own tradition one often wonders to what extent these deeper issues are the result of rational analysis or awareness. As V.Y. Kantak has put it: "While the mingled mockery of the surface spectacle in which their entangling little souls get involved is satisfying in itself, we become aware of a submerged layer of interest of which the author seems hardly more aware than the characters themselves." "The Achievement of R.K. Narayan," p.141.

¹⁰Gerow's idea is taken up by Meenakshi Mukherjee who formulates it in this way. In The Twice Born Fiction, p.154.

ty gives way to chaos only to return to original calm once the instigator of chaos has been ousted from Malgudi. But the very process of eradication involves a "quest" which is, as in Rao's more patently metaphysical novels, both moral and "cosmic." At the same time, and because external "events" are closely connected with individual "personality" or "eccentricity"¹¹ the quest must be examined in the light of traditional background norms. In short, I want to examine this cyclic plan together with the concept of quest and Indian tradition.

In this chapter we shall look at three novels -- The Financial Expert, The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets -- which represent a solid core of achievement in Narayan's most mature period. We may well have added The Man-eater of Malgudi, but this novel has been omitted from consideration since a number of excellent critical accounts are already in existence.¹²

In The Financial Expert Margayya places money, which he believes "alone is important in this world" (p.17), above everything else in life. Money can give him the physical as well as

¹¹"Eccentricity" may be taken to mean, quite literally, a wandering away from standard modes and established norms. We shall see that Narayan's characters often blame fate for what may equally well be explained in more psychological terms of personal qualities, thereby equating man's internal and external worlds.

¹²Such as Harrex's account in "Eccentric Norms" and Gerow's account in "The Quintessential Narayan."

the psychological satisfaction he feels he needs. So he goes to the temple to make offerings to Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, hoping that he will be adequately rewarded for his pains. The priest offers him a choice between money and wisdom, the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswathi, and Margayya chooses the former. One of the first things he must do is to find a red lotus, and his search leads him to an out of the way shrine set within a wild garden. Here he meets Dr. Pal, a journalist but something else beside, who makes Margayya a gift of a very saleable sex-book. As Margayya grows wealthy on the proceeds of this book he becomes increasingly miserly, neglecting himself and his family. Dr. Pal again appears to help Margayya find new business premises, and to enter the business himself as Margayya's assistant. While Margayya starts to hoard his excess wealth Dr. Pal is operating behind his back, attempting to exert influence on Balu, his son. Margayya finally catches Pal in the act and Pal gets revenge by destroying Margayya's business and making him bankrupt. At the end of the book Margayya is back practically where he had started.

The quest theme of the novel appears in the form of a quest for riches, though the quest is never far from religion. In fact, religion is exploited by Margayya in the hope of financial reward. Margayya falls short of the mark, however, to the extent that he fails to follow the priest's advice to worship without ex-

pectation of reward. While attending to all the prescribed rites he is unable to go the whole way and to free his mind from what is, after all, the main motivating force behind his behaviour. Now although money-making is sanctioned in Hinduism as a necessary activity in life it is given a definite time and place in the overall life-scheme. It forms just part of a larger plan, and must be held in proper proportion to other equally important aims and ideals. Margayya, like so many other Narayan characters, has developed a lop-sided view of life where money has become the be-all and the end-all of every human activity. Wisdom and wealth, the story implies, are really twin aspects of the same truth just as Lakshmi and Saraswathi are but manifestations of the same God. Margayya's choice was exclusive instead of properly inclusive. He failed to realize that wisdom and wealth are equally necessary for lasting success.

The cyclic dimension of the novel is connected with the plot. The various forces acting on Margayya in his life influencing his choices and decisions are shown to be internal or external depending on the point of view. Dr. Pal is a journalist; yet to Margayya he becomes something more than a journalist, something resembling fate or destiny, something projected from his own mind. Pal exists in the story as man and also as symbol, depending on the point of view. So when, at the end of the novel,

Margayya finds himself back where he started one might blame destiny but one might equally blame Margayya's poor judgement since both amount to the same thing. Free choice and determinism are shown to be two aspects of the same natural law which governs animate and inanimate alike. In the present discussion I intend stressing the more symbolic aspects of the novels since this side is less obvious and needs bringing out.

Hence Balu comes to Margayya as though a gift from the gods, as a token in reply to Margayya's prayers. Balu seems to demonstrate the principle that the gods give according to man's deserts, Balu paying back his father in due for Margayya's mediocrity as man, husband and father. Dr. Pal too is an ambiguous figure with strong symbolic connections. He is a god-like man who, in the description of the lotus pool and garden, seems to emerge from the entwined undergrowth itself. The garden too belongs to a recurrent symbolic type in Narayan's novels.¹³ It is

¹³The jungle is "a life-force at work in never-ending transition of growth and decay." Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought, p.89. "Jungle" in the Indian context refers not simply to thick forest but more generally to any natural (as opposed to civilized) spot. The jungle garden is just one, possibly the most prominent, of a number of symbols habitually employed by Narayan. He has said: "I can't write a novel without Krishna, Ganesa, Hanuman, astrologers, pundits, temples, devadasis, or temple prostitutes...that has turned out to be my India." Ved Mehta, "The Train had just arrived at Malgudi Station," in John is easy to Please (London : Secker & Warburg, 1971), p.141.

described characteristically as a place overgrown with weeds and creepers, a home for cobras and other wild animals, and containing at its focus a crumbling shrine and lotus pond. The ambiguities in Dr. Pal seem to stem fundamentally from the ambiguities inherent in this sinister yet sacred place, a mixture of benevolence and malevolence. This compound symbol of temple and "jungle" is a good example of what the non-Indian reader may all too easily miss in Narayan's work. Read out of the Indian context, his novels stand or fall on the basis of their humour alone, which can generally only give partial support to this shift in weight. The dilapidated shrine or temple evokes, wherever it appears, a whole sense of cosmic order, a sense of the Absolute somehow subjected to the corrosive forces of a relativist and temporal world. But behind the appearance of decay, and evident in the luxuriant growth of the garden, there exists an invisible revitalizing force, a power of renewal which is felt at the end of each cycle. Thus when Dr. Pal emerges from Nature his presence suggests the ambiguous and contradictory qualities of life itself, but particularly the properties of good and evil which are both a necessary part of natural law.

From the beginning of their acquaintance Margayya is struck by the thought that "the man seemed to know everything that was going on everywhere" (p.106). Pal makes Margayya a gift of the sex-book for no apparent reason other than that Margayya may gain

the wealth he sought. With Pal in the business it seems that nothing can go wrong. However, for some inexplicable reason best known to chance, Pal's initial benevolence changes to malevolence. It is significant in this symbolic organization of forces that Pal now sides with Balu, ostensibly to get at Margayya's money through the greedy son. Their combined effect results in the cyclic form of the story. Margayya loses his business and his wealth, and is back at the beginning. The impetus behind this circular motion is symbolically the law of Karma. The end of the cycle is equivalent in Margayya to death and rebirth. Because the Hindu son is an extension of the father, it is either father or son who at the end of the novel must resurrect the original small-time business beneath the banyan tree.

There is also a linear dimension to the novel, and this has to do with the incongruity of old and new forms. For example, Margayya sits under a banyan tree to do his business, with his clients sitting about him in a semi-circle. The spot beneath the banyan tree is holy, a fit place for religious teaching or for meditation. Margayya and his band might easily be taken for a Guru among his devotees. His name suggests one who "showed the way" (p.1), while his display of authoritarianism, which is duly reflected in the humble faces of his admiring clients, suggest the presence of an omniscient and omnipotent god. The irony is

compounded by the existence of the modern Co-operative Mortgage Bank nearby. The bank was established to deal directly with the public so as to make middle-men like Margayya redundant. As it turns out, however, Margayya manages to make an adequate living out of the bank's existence by charging his clients for advice and assistance in using the bank. In the overall view Narayan here places several levels of modernity directly upon the face of religious tradition. Small-time business, the novel seems to imply, can be included within the general framework of Hindu life. But the sort of big concern like the bank, a foreign imposition and totally out of touch with the ordinary Indian, is unacceptable.

This ironic parallel between tradition and modernity goes right through the book. A modern business ideal, the cornerstone of which is big profit and impersonal dealings, is shown to be in competition with a traditional Hindu ideal of disinterested work. Dissatisfied with moderate gains, Margayya aims at huge profits without giving more than a thought to the immorality of his actions (neatly epitomized by the pornographic sex-book). We laugh at Margayya because of the absurdity in his behaviour. He does whatever the priest instructs -- everything, that is, except control his ambitions. He therefore cuts a comical figure sitting cross-legged in a loincloth and going through the motions of some ascetic-type ritual. The absurdity, and hence the humour, springs

from a disparity between intention and behaviour, from the gap existing between the ideal of reward and the ideal of disinterestedness.

The gap between intention and behaviour is also fundamental in The Guide. Raju exploits and manipulates people for personal gain by pretending to be other than what he is. The kind of immorality suggested by the link between money and pornography in The Financial Expert manifests itself in The Guide in the form of self-gratification. Lacking controls and restraints in his life, Raju lives to make money, enjoy sex, spend extravagantly and to dominate the lives of others. But in the desultory nature of his experiences there is the suggestion that he is generally dissatisfied with his life; so that his quest, if it can be so termed, is of a negative kind, generally undirected. One of the aims of the novel seems to be to demonstrate how something positive can come from something negative, or in more moralistic terms how good can be born of evil.

Toward the end of the novel Raju finds himself compelled to play the role of a holy man. As religious guide his behaviour is consistent with his earlier roles as tourist guide to Rosie and as guide or "Vadhyar" (p.203) in prison. Raju possesses a natural skill in the art of chicanery and bluff, to the extent that he is able to take most people in. On the other hand, he continues in

this holy role to provide a service which the public apparently needs. As in The Financial Expert, deeds seem to hold an importance of their own if they answer a human need. The exploitee, though at a relative disadvantage, still gains something if he is really in need. Thus Margayya's clients are left to their own (inadequate) devices when Margayya decides to change to a different business. And in The Guide Raju's tourist clients still clamour for his services long after he has disappeared from the railway platform.

But although deeds can hold their own importance, it is only when deeds are backed by genuine motives that a man may occasionally approach the greatness of a saint. And this is what happens with Raju. He is a hypocrite who has greatness thrust upon him. Being a divided man, his motives and deeds all in diverse directions, he possesses an inner self and an outer self which do not match. At the end of The Guide Raju finds himself trapped in a situation where he can no longer cheat. Through a series of mistakes Raju finds that the local villagers expect him to go on a fast to help break the drought. Early in the period of his fast he is able to sneak away into the temple's inner sanctum in order to eat secretly. But once the food has gone there remains no alternative other than to submit to the expectations of the villagers. It is this accident, brought about by

circumstances, which results in a genuine transformation of character. The symbolism in this episode is obvious but clever. The inner sanctum is the heart of the temple and can be associated (as it is, for instance, in Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare) with the human heart. While some secret place remains open to him, Raju continues in duplicity. When such retreat is impossible, when the heart has been laid open to public scrutiny, then duplicity must perforce end. Circumstances force the required reconciliation between the two halves, the internal and external aspects, of himself.

Those controls which Raju seldom experience in his life now put an end to his aimless drifting. He discovers a new source of strength in self-discipline, as is demonstrated when he decides to eradicate all thought of food from his mind:

This resolution gave him a peculiar strength. He developed on those lines: 'If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?' For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. (p.213)

This passage is the more significant in being one of the few instances where Narayan explains the implications with such clarity. The emphasis in this passage falls quite heavily on Raju's newly acquired integrity, his sense of whole-hearted commitment. The passage also gives an important link between whole-hearted commit-

ment and disinterested deeds, corroborating what I have said.

Only the integrated man can be fully committed, while disparity between motives and deeds is incompatible with genuine disinterestedness. This equation is important for understanding Raju's response to film-maker Malone at the end of the novel. Asked for permission to film the last stages of the fast, Raju tells Malone: "you may do your work" (p.217). Asked why he is fasting, Raju replies: "I am only doing what I have to do" (p.218), a reply which reflects Raju's new awareness of the link between self-integrity, necessity and destiny. When man, instead of submitting to destiny or natural law, attempts to gain control of it he turns against himself, splits himself, in the attempt.

Meenakshi Mukherjee has drawn attention to a regular pattern of Order-Disorder-Order in Narayan's novels. In The Financial Expert the middle phase of disorder was ushered in by Balu and Dr. Pal. In The Guide it is Rosie who serves the same, though rather less sinister, function. In one symbolic aspect Rosie is "a real snake-woman" (p.137), possessing the ambivalent properties of the serpent. In her malevolent aspect she is destructive, evil and immoral (this last quality being further established by her low caste dancing connection). But in her benevolent aspect she is seen to be close to the gods in her traditional occupation, and can awaken religious (as well as other) inclinations even in Raju.

In the overall scheme of the novel her influence, like that of Dr. Pal, is felt in a circular pattern of benevolence-malevolence-benevolence, matching the structural pattern of Order-Disorder-Order. Initially Rosie fulfils a need in Raju's life, later she is (in a strangely reciprocal sense) responsible for his imprisonment for forgery, while her final decision to return to her husband (corresponding with Pal's break from Margayya) seems to lead directly to Raju's triumphal ending. Of course, one can find the reasons for Raju's fate in the elements which constitute his personality, which is also true of Margayya. Again, there is no distinction made between free choice and determinism.

The final paragraph of the novel contains a number of symbols common to the theme of renewal. These final events all take place under the shadow of the temple, itself a symbol of cosmic totality and circularity. Raju stands in ^{a dry} the river (again a symbol of renewal) and is supported by his devotees "as if he were a baby" (my italics). The time is early morning, the most sacred moment of the day for Hindus, a threshold separating night from day, death from (re)birth. The scene seems lighted from some praeternatural source, for "a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings." The object of Raju's fast was to break the drought. Standing in the river, according with ritual, Raju spends his last breath in a prediction of rain. Has his fast broken the drought?

it is sometimes asked. The answer is not clear, but it is really unimportant. Raju's prediction refers not so much to the objective state of things as to his own subjective condition. The rain which ends the Indian drought is also a renewal symbol like the others in this passage. Raju's prediction is an affirmation of personal fulfilment, not a weather forecast. And his fulfilment corresponds with the end of another cycle.

In the linear perspective irony is connected with the title of "guide." At the start of the book Raju is a bogus guide. Or rather, he is someone himself in need of guidance; for I have argued that Raju needs the sort of discipline which only religious conviction (in the broadest possible sense) can provide. The novel's humour results mainly from the division between what Raju is, and what he is supposed to be. That is, it is connected with his duplicity. In its broadest form the division occurs between the traditional role of religious guide and the modern role of tourist office guide. As in The Financial Expert a modern business ideal seems to compete with an old religious ideal. And Raju enjoys liberation only through the relinquishment of this modern ideal.

The Vendor of Sweets seems in many respects a later reworking of the plot of The Financial Expert. Jagan too is a businessman and a hoarder of excess profits, this time made by eva-

sion of tax. He too has a god-given son whose sole existence seems to be to plague his father in the manner of an avenging nemesis. Jagan too exploits religion for more commercial ends, giving him an aura of quaintly orthodox respectability. But there is one important difference between Jagan and Margayya, and this is one of degree rather than of type. Despite religious pretence Jagan is still close enough to the Gita and its ideals to be able to change his life when time and occasion demands. Jagan differs from Margayya to the extent that he has not made money a wholly exclusive aim, even while coming close to it. Jagan's quest gathers momentum in the final stages of the traditional four-stage life-plan. It is a quest based on this plan, on the assumption that life is a pilgrimage (an idea subscribed to, we remember, by Raja Rao's Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope) which is made up of successive stages. Although the main part of the story deals with the middle and last stages of Jagan's life, the earlier periods are filled in toward the end of the novel in a lengthy flashback (pp.154-80). The whole story revolves around Jagan's double life of business and religion.

The cyclic dimension in this novel may be explained in the terms already used. We again find the sort of shadowy symbolism I have described. Mali (the name implying evil) is another Balu, but perhaps more sinister. He seems to loom larger than human in

his father's life, like some kind of demon. As a matter of fact Jagan associates his son, at one point in the novel, with the multi-faceted god of the Gita (p.153), and later in the book with certain evil spirits lurking in his house (p.183). Mali is the spitting image of his father, particularly in certain aspects of his character, and one cannot but suspect some sort of divine punishment in Jagan's suffering. Following a sojourn in America Mali returns to Malgudi, but no longer as an Indian. He brings with him the poisons of an outside world, a syndrome of new-fangled inventions, cars, Western dress and Western behaviour, and even a Western de facto wife. Mali promises Malgudi big business, air-conditioned offices, and a general loosening up of the old traditional ways. Here in a word, direct from America, is that modern business ideal I have spoken about.

On Jagan, whose life swings precariously between two opposite ideals, Mali has the sort of beneficent-maleficent-beneficent effect noted before. As a boy Mali was a gift from the gods and hence a blessing. His maleficent influence is felt on his return from abroad, when he poses a direct threat not only to his father's money but also to the whole traditional fabric of Malgudi society. But just as good springs from evil, so this maleficent influence has the effect of driving Jagan out of business

and back to other more traditional ideals. But here I must re-iterate an earlier point. It is necessary to distinguish between the sort of business activity sanctioned in Hinduism and modern business which gauges man's whole life-activity in terms of profit or reward. In the traditional view money-making is regarded as a necessity, though just one facet of life's four-fold plan. Jagan's philosophy of life, his mixing of business with religion, may be contradictory, even downright hypocritical, but the fact remains that there is still more in his life than a single exclusive ambition. He can still, under sufficient pressure, make a change in his style of living, enter a new janma and retire to the forest. By contrast, Mali has lost all but the urge for big profit and easy living. Religion has ceased to exist in his life.

Mali is symbolically connected with, among other things, illicit profit. His connection with money started at the beginning of his life when Jagan paid for the baby with an equal weight of "gold, silver and corn" (p.179). As a boy Mali was quick to discover where his father hid his money, so that Jagan was forced to consider transferring his loot to another spot, significantly "behind the family gods in the Pooja [sic] Room" (p.55). This combination of cash and religion (the hoarded cash, we must notice, being illicit cash gained through tax-evasion) is

a consistent element in Narayan's work. When, later in the story, Mali presses his father to finance his monstrous business venture it is thus significant that Mali pursues his father through the house and right into "the privacy of his puja room" (p.88).

Mali's penetrability poses a threat not just to Jagan's money but also to his religion. Like Raju, Mali's power of insinuation into the private lives of others is a potential threat not only to individuals but also, by logical extension, to whole communities.

The long term effect of Mali on his father is, as I have said, to drive him away from business altogether. Jagan seems to read his own battle into the famous battle of Kurukshetra. He learns from the Gita that one must fight for a cause even if this means fighting against one's own cousins and brothers, and that no good has ever been achieved without a fight (p.103). And the fight, of course, is directed against evil. Jagan begins the fight with his own son and, to a lesser extent, with the self-termed "cousin" who has acted as Jagan's adviser and assistant.

About this time there comes another important influence. The hair-dyer cum stone-carver, with his religious fervour, seems to exert a counter influence to Mali's malevolence. On one hand this man's job is "to make people look young" (p.113), carrying vague overtones of the Vishnu-like role of preserver. But more important is the fact that, like Dr. Pal, this man is closely

linked in the story with a sacred garden. It is he who introduces Jagan to the place that is to become the latter's retreat, a spot similar to the one described in The Financial Expert, overgrown with weeds, the natural abode of snakes and monkeys, and containing both shrine and lotus pool (pp.115-19). In this remote spot the stone-carver looms larger than life in Jagan's sight. He looks "like a statue of many thousand years' antiquity" (p.118), and seems "no longer the tame hair-blackener of Kabir Street, but a sort of leader of the forces" (p.122). Despite the man's apparent benevolence he too irradiates contrary qualities, a demonic malevolence which is vaguely felt in these descriptions of him, but more so in Jagan's unreasonable fear that the man might want to kill him. Even so, Jagan can easily allay his fears with the thought that now "would be such a wonderful moment to die" (p.121-22). Jagan does die, figuratively. In these circumstances he experiences a vision of renewal:

The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur; this man from the previous millennium seemed to be the only object worth notice He suddenly realised how narrow his whole existence had been -- between Lawley Statue and the frying shop; Mali's antics seemed to matter naught. 'Am I on the verge of a new janma?' he wondered. Nothing seemed really to matter. 'Such things are common in ordinary existence and always passing,' he said aloud. (pp.118-20)

Here is another similar passage shortly afterwards:

An internal transformation had taken place; although he still cared for the shop and house, his latest contact had

affected him profoundly. The gods must have taken pity on his isolated, floundering condition and sent this white-bearded saviour.... He wondered if the bearded man might not be a visitation from another planet -- otherwise what had brought him into his shop exactly when he needed him? Who really needed help and from whom? (pp.127-28)

There are two points in this last passage. The question of who helps who I have previously touched on. The theme of "service" in Narayan's novels is really an aspect of the kind of influence I have been describing. Sometimes service, or proffered assistance, may be motivated by a genuine desire to help. But more usually it can be traced back, at one (symbolic) level, to destiny or necessity and, at another human level, to some profit motive such as in the case of Jagan's commercially dutiful "cousin" or in the case of Raju's desire to assist Rosie with her dancing career. The second point in this passage is the description of the stone-worker as "a visitation from another planet." Now it is only on the following page of the novel that Mali is described bursting in on Jagan "looking like an arrival from another planet" (p.129). Whether the juxtaposition is accidental or deliberate the connection between Mali and the stone-worker seems confirmed. Each represents, roughly speaking, the opposite world of, on one hand, big business and, on the other hand, religion. In one sense they seem to exist as projections of Jagan's own mind as, in this particular episode, he sits at his spinning-wheel trying to calm his own mental turmoil. They define his own

inner contradiction, the two competing ideals. At the same time the passage makes it clear that they are, in another sense, both avatars, god-given or god-inspired, who seem to have descended from the planets in order to give direction to Jagan's life. Together they stand for good and evil which is the sum total of life itself.

The cycle finishes with Jagan's vision of fulfilment as he withdraws from life. Renewal symbolism helps accentuate the cycle:

Through the open roof he could see the crescent moon passing behind the coconut trees, a couple of wispy white clouds racing across its face. 'Perhaps the monsoon will be breaking earlier this year?' he reflected. (p.129)

The open roofed house which permits the soul access to God, the new crescent moon, the coconut trees whose ritual significance is connected with fertility and growth, and the promise of early rains which, we remember, is so meaningful at the end of The Guide -- all serve the same end and point to the same place. Jagan retreats to "a kind of death" (p.184), the sacred garden being situated significantly "near the cremation ground" (p.191).

Again the irony of the novel arises from the apparent incompatibility of old and new. Jagan is money-maker and also religious counsellor, an expert in traditional dietary and yet a seller of sweets and toffees. Although Hinduism encompasses such contradictions Jagan is always in danger of going beyond allow-

able limits, as in the case of his tax-evasion. Like Raju, there is an area of secrecy in Jagan's dealings which can be dangerous. For Jagan's flaw is magnified in his son who is, as I have shown, closely linked with Jagan's hidden wealth. To the extent that Jagan tends to go beyond traditional warrants, so Narayan tends to go beyond humour to serious criticism.

I shall summarize in particular areas I have discussed.

1. These novels are all concerned with some kind of quest.

While the quest theme is, of course, common in one form or another to most national literatures the particular quality of the quest and accompanying symbolism in Narayan's novels stems from a kind of religio-philosophical thought which is characteristically Indian. In this quest life is regarded as the path of pilgrimage and truth the goal. But truth can mean different things to different people, and this is the proposition which Narayan explores. His stories indicate the success of those who attempt to live integrated, well-proportioned lives and the error of those who, through duplicity, attempt to make gains at the expense of others. His stories are essentially moral but not blatantly moralistic.¹⁴ On the contrary, the novels reflect a belief that good not just triumphs over evil but that good actually

¹⁴See discussion of allegory in Chapter IX.

emerges out of evil. Error arises when man makes a narrow exclusive type choice instead of submitting his life to the broad and often turbulent flow of destiny or natural law.

2. These novels reflect a cyclic order which has to do with birth, death and renewal. At one level the middle term in the pattern of Order-Disorder-Order is dramatized symbolically by particular characters representing either destiny or figurative projections of free choice, an ambiguity which emphasizes the necessity of personal integrity and wholeness. These dramatized "influences" are in themselves symbols of natural law. My point is that the middle term of Disorder arises not exactly from the irruption of individuals, but from the evil inherent in life itself. In this sense, Disorder may be used to designate the whole of man's physical life which stands as a barrier on the route of his pilgrimage between his birth and death.

3. These novels also reflect a linear dimension which is connected with Narayan's ironic technique. I have said that Narayan uses irony for humour as well as for social comment. I have shown that small scale incongruities are generally the butt of comic interest, while large scale duplicities bear the brunt of serious criticism. These two levels of irony may be clarified by an analogy. Imagine a split-image focussing system on a modern camera. You turn the lens one way and the picture is split into two overlapping

images; you turn the lens back again and the two separate images are again reconciled in a single sharp focus. Narayan throws the picture out of focus for ironic effect, and we see two aspects of an individual's life set up in parallel. What strikes the Western reader as odd is that at the end of a novel Narayan will then proceed to readjust the lens to a focus, thereby implicitly accepting the incongruities he drew attention to. Thus Margayya will return to the spot under the banyan tree and continue to live off the Co-operative Bank as before, while Jagan will return to the forest with a cheque-book and a back-door key safely in his pocket. This is the first level of irony which is resolved in a philosophical acceptance of life's necessities and imperfections. At the second level, Narayan introduces serious criticism by distorting or exaggerating the simple double image.¹⁵ This is achieved through the intervention of some extraneous influence which poses subversive to the present order. Such an influence is the modern business spirit and the sort of external or foreign morality which goes with it. Try to readjust the lens, and the two overlapping images no longer reconcile so easily since the mechanism itself has been damaged.

Thus at one extreme the philosophy of Hindu all-inclusiveness itself becomes partly exclusive. The law of survival demands

¹⁵V.Y. Kantak's opinion that we do not judge Narayan's characters and that "we are not invited to measure them against this or the other scale of values" is only partly true. "The Achievement of R.K. Narayan," p.137.

that Jagan leave Mali to sort out his own troubles, just as in Rao's novel the same law demanded Ramaswamy return to India -- in this sense a gesture of rejection.

CHAPTER VII

R.K. NARAYAN

. . . and in the Other Novels

Narayan's ten major novels fall into the following chronological order: Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1945) (the American edition is entitled Grateful to Life and Death), Mr. Sampath (1949) (the American edition is entitled The Printer of Malgudi), The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide (1958), The Man-eater of Malgudi (1961) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967). The Financial Expert, coming about mid-way in this chronology, may be considered to mark the beginning of Narayan's more mature writing; for this novel brings together the two themes of conduct and money for the first time. All the novels beforehand are concerned, more or less, with conduct, such as the problems of growing up in Malgudi (Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts), or such as the problems of living within the confines of a strict social code (The Dark Room), or else the problems of discovering alternative paths within the given system (The English Teacher, Mr. Sampath). Following The Financial Expert all the remaining novels, bar one, connect

the themes of money and conduct; with the exception of Waiting for the Mahatma (which really belongs to the earlier group) the following stories -- The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi, The Vendor of Sweets -- are all concerned with the effects of undeserved profit on the behaviour of some individual. In The Man-eater Vasu's aggressive, overbearing behaviour exceeds the worst in Raju's behaviour in the novel immediately before. In that Raju lives off somebody else's talents, and Jagan becomes rich through tax-evasion, and Vasu makes money by killing animals, all three are connected by a similar theme. Waiting for the Mahatma really belongs, as I have said, to the earlier novels; Ravi's unbridled passion in Mr. Sampath finds a continuation in Sriram's quest after Bharati. But Waiting for the Mahatma also extends the earlier situation in that Sriram's passion is now controlled by the events of a social revolution; the pressure of circumstances (over which he has no control) saves him from the malignant effects of his own emotions, contrasting him with Ravi.

Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts are stories about growing up in Malgudi, and although they lack something of the complexity of the later novels their young main characters come across with an unusual freshness and vigour -- qualities inevitably lost as the cost of ironic detachment in the later

works, but also as the author moves away from autobiography in the exploration of other lives. The Bachelor of Arts anticipates certain incidents in the later novels; for example, Chandran's love for an unattainable girl looks forward to similar difficulties involving Ravi and Sriram in Mr. Sampath and Waiting for the Mahatma, and Chandran's experiences as a wandering sanyasi compare with Raju's experiences in The Guide. Narayan draws attention to the fact that Chandran's role as sanyasi in The Bachelor of Arts is unusual or unorthodox:

He was different from the usual sanyasi. Others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose. Renunciation may be to them a means to attain peace itself. They are perhaps dead in time, but they do live in eternity. But Chandran's renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide. Suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma. Perhaps he lacked the barest physical courage that was necessary for it. He was a sanyasi because it pleased him to mortify his flesh. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny. (p.108)

This is an interesting explanation in that it illustrates several possible interpretations for one particular phenomenon -- in this case the phenomenon being Chandran in traditional ochre robes; one possible interpretation is that Chandran is a genuine sanyasi ("genuine" meaning "traditional"), while the other alternative is that Chandran is only "genuine" in a more modern (less traditional) sense, in the sense given above by the author. Narayan combines tradition and modernity by this double play on

well-established roles: sometimes modernity is sanctioned, as in the present case; at other times, noted in the previous chapter, this double play is either treated ironically or else is condemned as hypocrisy. Chandran is one of the earliest of Narayan's quest heroes, and like most of the others he manages to combine in his character aspects of tradition and of modernity, where modernity takes its basic direction and impetus from an established role and routine.

Earlier, we discussed the effects of allegorical or symbolic agents in Narayan's stories. In the early stories the same phenomena are also evident. In The Bachelor of Arts the main action is instigated by a chance occurrence, the entry of a girl into -- not really into the story, but into Chandran's mind and dreams. In The Dark Room and Mr. Sampath women characters play very clear roles as temptresses. In each of these novels the entry of such external characters brings about a period of disorder and complexity; but no matter what the exact symbolic label attached to these "agents" from outside, they really represent life itself, life that is activated by natural or cosmic law. If Woman is often cast in the role of temptress it is because, from a traditional dialectical point of view, Woman is naturally evil (she is a "natural" or cosmic manifestation of one side of the Absolute, Maya-Shakti), and hence she exists as the necessary complement to

Good. Woman, rakshasa, demon and others of the same ilk thus come to stand for the whole of life -- Good and Evil. That evil with its complex ramifications should come to mar the fair complexion of stable Malgudi life, appearing in a wide variety of forms, is a matter to be regarded as inevitable given the nature of man and the universe.

I said that The Financial Expert occupies a central chronological position in Narayan's career; also it occupies a corresponding technical centrality in a way that has to do with the development of ironic detachment. In the early novels irony is employed in particular instances and episodes. It is only in Mr. Sampath, the novel immediately prior to The Financial Expert, that Narayan hits on a more substantial basis for an ironic technique. Whereas The Dark Room explores two alternative ways of living (one connected with ordinary married life and the other with a life of religious dedication at a Hindu temple) and whereas The English Teacher similarly looks for an alternative in personal mystical experience, Mr. Sampath introduces a technique (seen most clearly in the film-script about "the burning of Kama") of highlighting present-day behaviour by contrasting present behaviour with corresponding situations taken from past tradition. We shall examine this more carefully a little later.

Of the novels coming after The Financial Expert I have al-

ready discussed The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets in terms of irony based on a linear time dimension, of past compared with present. The two novels not discussed -- Waiting for the Mahatma and The Man-eater of Malgudi -- seem to obey the general rule as I have described it in this linear dimension. In Waiting for the Mahatma a sense of past versus present is obliquely felt in the fact that Sriram spends so much of his time in monastic seclusion in a hideaway which serves as a local headquarters for the freedom movement campaign, a hideaway which was at one time a temple or shrine, and less obliquely in the gap existing between what the movement stands for (freedom from foreign rule, and hence an affirmation of traditional values) and what the movement means to Sriram (access to Bharati, a "modern" love relationship); once again the novel's humour springs from this dichotomy between old and new. In The Man-eater of Malgudi, Vasu's method of earning a living by taking the lives of animals goes one step further than the unscrupulous behaviour of Raju, the guide. Vasu is a demon, a rakshasa (at least, in the eyes of Nataraj and his fellow Malgudians), and is mysteriously connected with Mempi Forest and with the wild animals he kills. He epitomizes the evil which exists not just in the world at large but in man in particular, thereby linking (as in the other novels) an apparently external influence with man's instinctive or natural disposition. Vasu seizes on the modern western

science of taxidermy in blatant contempt of traditional Hindu sentiments. Traditional and modern values are contrasted in the balance of good and evil, in the elephant symbolizing good fortune and prosperity which Vasu wants to kill and in the "man-eater" himself. Evil is finally self-defeating, and Vasu is the instrument of his own destruction. In the next novel, The Vendor of Sweets, Mali is another such demon in disguise, responsible for his own downfall.

There are three novels prior to The Financial Expert which I have taken as the mid-point in Narayan's career -- The Dark Room, The English Teacher and Mr. Sampath -- which I have already touched on in discussion but which warrant further consideration, chiefly because they have received relatively little attention from other writers. The Dark Room, in particular, is an interesting though uneven work which is sometimes dismissed as unimportant. Certainly it has its flaws -- a certain rheumatic stiffness and inflexibility, a kind of muffled frankness in the presentation of husband-wife intimacy, a bookish kind of humour in the low-caste characters of Mari and Ponni, and so on. Still, there are a number of attractive and engaging features too -- the children whose squabbles paint a bright backdrop in contrast with the darker problems of husband and wife. Or just the fact that the heroine makes a pleasing change from the aggressive masculine

types in the later novels. If there is any truth in the proposition that tragedy has no place in a society bound by a strong socio-religious code of behaviour, then Narayan's novels nevertheless come very close to the tragic limit.¹ Savitri is a dutiful Hindu wife and in this role lies her dharma. When Ramani, her husband, diverts his attention to another woman there is little that a dutiful wife like Savitri can do. Savitri's plight borders on the tragic in that she is a victim of circumstance rather than a person of spotted character. Her only fault is that she refuses to acquiesce to a total reality -- to a reality which has its dark as well as bright side.

The cyclic order of the novel reflects, as usual, the all-inclusiveness of truth. With the intervention of an external force (Shanta Bai) Savitri is forced to make a choice which turns out to be no free choice at all. Having left her family the course of destiny appears to run counter to her hopes of finding some alternative independent kind of life. First, she is saved from suicide; second, her job at the temple shatters any illusion that an independent life is possible. If one is not depen-

¹I say "borders" deliberately since, as M.R. Anand (and others) have observed, "There could be no tragedy in ancient Indian drama, because the gods ultimately helped out the distressed characters." M.R. Anand, "Old Myth and New Myth : Recital versus Novel," in Indian Literature of the Past Fifty Years, 1917-67, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah, p.114. But Savitri's plight is almost tragic in the more modern psychological sense.

dent on a wage-earning husband then one is dependent on a boss or on a society or on an environment. Savitri finds herself answerable to a finical old priest, to bands of curious devotees, and to a sombre environment which it is her job to keep under control. The fact that her thoughts constantly return to her children reveals an inner compulsion, itself but an aspect of destiny, which finally leads her full circle back to her home. Dharma is linked with an inner drive, just as more generally in Narayan's world social conventions seem to satisfy an ontological need -- not imposed from without but representing a natural efflorescence of man's intrinsic needs and desires. And in the same way Narayan's symbolism subsists not as the result of an author's whim but in answer to human attitudes expressed in the novels by a particular character or by particular characters. The fact that destiny holds Savitri in thrall is reflected in the only kind of alternative job she can find. "Temple" and "home" seem to stand as complementary opposites encompassing the whole range of opportunities open to a woman like Savitri in Hindu society, and both functions -- the life as wife and mother, and the life of religious devotee -- are essentially religious in the Hindu sense. Life is a pilgrimage and whether the pilgrimage is undertaken at home or in the temple really makes little differ-

ence.²

I have said that Savitri refuses to submit to reality in its darker aspects. The novel is also interesting in the way a Hindu philosophy of dialectics is treated symbolically in terms of light and shade.³ Ramani's affair with Shanta Bai is connected with night and darkness, and as a consequence Savitri retreats from life into "the dark room." Darkness comes to stand for "evil" or "impracticability," since for the business of living both Savitri and Ramani must return to daylight. Both mean-

²It is interesting to note that "temple" (together with the usual temple-garden) and "home" correspond with what in Christian tradition are the symbols of "garden" and "city," the opposite realms of natural law and moral law, the law of beasts and the law of man. But in Hinduism where there is no distinction between man and the rest of Nature the same forces of natural law are seen to operate in both places. Instead of the Christian opposition of garden and city, both symbols are seen in Narayan's novels to complement one another. There are two nodal points in Narayan's Hindu landscape -- the social town-life of Malgudi and the personal contemplative life of the temple and temple-garden. In most of Narayan's novels one feels some dialectical tension, though never outright opposition, between these various aspects of the one life, which together constitute Wholeness.

³The contrast of day to night is a recurrent epistemological, analogical and imagistic figure in Indian expression. Consider the following example from Anand's The Power of Darkness (Bombay : Jaico, 1959) : "And, as the power of darkness blurs the outline of things around us, seeming to free us from the rule of daylight, but really consigning us to hell, when we ourselves beckon the god of the netherworld, Yama, and his doots, we have to close our eyes in order to explore our inner selves and rescue, from the silences, the strength to face a future which we cannot understand...." (p.107).

ings are implied in the incident when Ramani returns home one night to find his house plunged in darkness because his son and son's friend have tampered with the power supply. All useful activity is temporarily stopped, and the darkness seems to goad Ramani's conscience with the result that he can scarcely retain his anger. But darkness is also associated with "ignorance" and a benighted world. The occasion coincides with a festival of dolls, all arranged as though in caricature of the actual world: "Now all the dolls and toys were there, over five hundred of them, all in a jumble, like the creations of an eccentric god who had not yet created a world" (p.36).⁴ This make-believe world needs light to make it come alive, just like the actual world. In darkness the world remains unformed and unfulfilled.

The same kind of symbolism continues in the description of Savitri's new surroundings at the temple. She is shown a small rat-infested outhouse, a place where she is supposed to live, and another kind of dark room. This sort of symbolism, though most pronounced in the present novel, also occurs elsewhere in Nayarian's work -- for instance, in the following novel The English Teacher where a dark infectious privy is contrasted with a bright and well-ordered patient's room a little later, or in the

⁴R.K. Narayan, The Dark Room. (Delhi : Hind Pocket Books, 1972).

case of the temple's dark inner sanctum which I discussed in connection with Raju's duplicity in The Guide. In the present novel the contrast of light and dark is related directly to the ambiguity inherent in religious symbols. I have already spoken of the significance of the temple symbol in Narayan's novels. If Narayan is more directly interested in Hindu ethics than in religion as such (suggested in The Dark Room, in part, by Savitri's return home at the end of the novel), the religious temple symbol always stands prominently in the background as a reminder of Hinduism's primary invigorating source. The temple in this novel is only about fifty years old but it is already "discoloured by time and weather" (p.151). Over the portal "stood a mossy, discoloured peacock which once upon a time must have been as white as the plaster it was made of" (p.152). The colour white is the colour of divinity, the discolouration is the result of corrosive forces operating in a temporal and relativist world. The very fact of physical existence is responsible for the change from light to dark, and this change reflects a cosmic process of constant partial manifestation. Light and dark are thus seen to stand for spiritual and physical modalities.

This pair of primal opposites suggests the further whole dialectical nature of existence. The temple-garden contains the same ambiguities that we have seen associated with similar sym-

bols in other novels. It comes replete with unruly vegetation, a hint of serpents, a leaf-dropping mango tree (reminiscent of Raja Rao's spreading bilva tree encompassing sacred and profane worlds alike), and the little outhouse I have mentioned. Looking inside this small room Savitri sees "a gilded pedestal for carrying the image of the god in procession" mixed up with "two or three empty kerosene tins and some gunny sacks" (p.154). The spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the profane, light and dark, good and evil -- these are the opposites which constitute life, and which indicate the existence of a higher cosmic order. The cyclic pattern of Order-Disorder-Order is translated in The Dark Room into a corresponding pattern of light-dark-light, where Shanta Bai stands for discolouration, darkness and evil. Like Raja Rao, Narayan utilizes a cultural and traditional symbology for his own literary ends.

Savitri's search for an alternative way of life finishes when she finally submits to fate or destiny: "A wretched fate wouldn't let me drown first time.... This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for the fight. I am a bamboo pole..."(p.162). The bamboo pole is a particularly apt metaphor, coming directly after Savitri's experience with the old priest, because this is the very support used by the priest to hobble about the temple. The bamboo pole may bend but in this lies its real strength.

Although Savitri does not seem to fully realize it in these lines this is the kind of support she must be to her family. She must be sufficiently supple, so the implication goes, to support an additional load without snapping. This is the message repeated time and again in the later novels, underlining man's need to define a way of life, or a truth, which is inclusive rather than exclusive.

The English Teacher focuses attention on another alternative contrasting with the round of ordinary social life. S.C. Harrex, in "R.K. Narayan's Grateful to Life and Death" has discussed the novel as a yogic quest for liberation from the physical life. Although all of Narayan's novels centre around the theme of quest, or of liberation, The English Teacher deals with the theme more openly than elsewhere with little or no attempt at disguise. This, I think, is the chief importance of the novel. It gives an undisguised presentation of what is more often sugar-coated. C.D. Narasimhaiah has objected to the lack of irony in the novel: but although the first half does contain a good deal of whimsy (more whimsy than irony) Narayan's ironical technique never really gets going, is never really sustained, until Mr. Sampath and thereafter. Professor Narasimhaiah also suspects sensationalism in Narayan's use of the medium and seance,⁵

⁵Narasimhaiah makes these points in The Swan and the Eagle, pp.144-47.

though this charge is perhaps a little strange in view of Narayan's self-avowed seriousness in such matters.⁶ But there again, if the reader cannot accept these episodes in all seriousness he may still find them interesting as fantasy (not the only instance of fantasy in Narayan's novels if we remember Mali's automatic story-writing machine, or if we think of the manner of Vasu's death).

Actually, there is a good deal in the second half of The English Teacher which can be interpreted as reverie, of a kind the psychologist might find in Dickens's Great Expectations or Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. Consider, for instance, the strange appearances and disappearances of the boy emissary sent by the medium to find Krishnan and to conduct him to his house on the outskirts of town. After an initial surprise appearance the boy soon seems to fade from the mind (Krishnan had arranged to meet him a little later in a given spot) as though he were little more than a dream image; meanwhile, the dreamer tries frantically to renew his vision, and hence the strange "mental" quality about his search:

"Boy, Boy," I cried; not having asked him his name. Birds twittered on the trees, passers-by moved about, and my voice cried to the evening "Boy, Boy." What a fool I was not to

⁶Narayan believes "it is no problem at all to contact people in the life beyond." "R.K. Narayan in Two Indian Interviews," Books Abroad (Summer 1965), 293. He also believes in "automatic writing," according to Ved Mehta's report (in "The Train had just arrived at Malgudi Station," John is Easy to Please, p.147).

have asked his name or precise directions!
 "Boy, Boy," I shouted like a madman and passers-by looked at me curiously. I searched about frantically, and in the end saw the fellow coming up a path across the fields. "Sorry to be late, excuse me, sir." (pp.121-22)

The boy reappears with little more reason or explanation than a White Rabbit. Similarly, in the ensuing encounters with the medium there is an almost surrealistic quality about the meetings, exaggerated by the sort of "garden" symbolism found in most of Narayan's novels (e.g. "it is a place which belongs to Eternity" (p.126)). Soon all explanatory (temporal and spatial) descriptions fall away as Krishnan's experiences are increasingly internalized. The fact that he can later dispense with the medium altogether suggests the introverted nature of the whole episode. In any case, the importance of the story lies in Krishnan's inner struggle rather than on the attendant circumstances. Here is a school-master who rejects his own status and past, thereby rejecting Western type education in order to undergo a different sort of educational experience where he has to start from the beginning.

In this emphasis on a kind of experience or "education" which is uniquely Indian The English Teacher comes closest to The Serpent and the Rope. Even the large cosmic motion, the basic pulse in Nature and in human behaviour, is suggested in some of Narayan's (or rather Krishnan's) speculations, such as the follow-

ing:

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends.... We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. The fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false. (p.203)

This is precisely Ramaswamy's conclusion, too, that man is ultimately alone and that the total truth about the world is to be seen in this one fact.⁷ In all Narayan's novels the cosmic pulse is connected with the law of Nature or destiny. Man cannot and should not try to avoid whatever is in store; fatalism is naturalism. Man fights evil because it is his dharma, not because he can possibly win of his own accord; for in the final analysis even the battlefield is illusion -- there is no battle to be either lost or won.

The subject of self-discipline and restraint also takes the main place in Mr. Sampath. The blurb note (on the Indian Thought Publication edition) calls Mr. Sampath "one of the author's most amusing books," but then it is equally one of Narayan's most unusual books; for it is rare to find such a multiplicity of

⁷Ramaswamy concludes: "Man is isolate -- and in his singleness is the unanimity of the whole." (p.306)

characters all sharing a major part in the action. Srinivas is roughly the equivalent to Krishnan of the previous novel; both have one preoccupation: an over-riding concern with the metaphysical question of man's purpose and direction. Then there is Ravi whose idolatrous brand of female worship brings him to the verge of insanity. Then there is Sampath himself whose film activities are described as the strange rites of some "new religion" where the camera itself represents some "new god" (pp.132-33). Sampath's new metaphysic and Ravi's idolatry are contrasted in the novel with Srinivas's speculative philosophy.

In Mr. Sampath Srinivas's speculations are contained in his paper The Banner, more a metaphysical tract than a reader's digest. Srinivas, and by extension Narayan, goes out of his way to make unpalatable truths palatable, to sugar the bitter pill:

He had tried to summarize, in terms of modern living, some of the messages he had imbibed from the Upanishads on the conduct of life, a restatement of subjective value in relation to a social outlook.... He felt that this was rather a heavy theme for a weekly reading public, and he was doing his best to word it in an easy manner, in terms of actual experience. (pp.30-31)

Here is the most revealing passage of all, since it refers directly to the thematic undercurrent underlying all immediate interests of time and place. Man's quest in pursuit of Truth is described in traditional terms as a conflict between man's internal and external worlds (the same conflict that engaged Raju

in The Guide where it was reflected in an internal/external type of symbolism):

The Banner has nothing special to note about any war, past or future. It is only concerned with the war that is always going on -- between man's inside and outside. Till the forces are equalized the struggle will always go on. (p.6)

The novel Mr. Sampath compares and contrasts a number of different lives and life-styles. In Srinivas's desire to improve society via The Banner we become aware of his didactic intention, an intention which may well apply to Narayan himself.⁸ In a later chapter we shall take a further look at this instructive or allegorical element in Narayan's writing.

⁸Narayan confirmed this probability in a personal interview in Adelaide, Sth Australia on 15/3/74.

CHAPTER VIII
MULK RAJ ANAND

The Power of Darkness in Anand's Novels

Ved Mehta reports that Narayan's views on education, such as expressed by Krishnan in The English Teacher, were influenced largely by Tagore's essays and experiments in education.¹ Raja Rao too, in a short story like "Javni" (in The Cow of the Barri-cades) reminds us of the debt which most Indian novelists have incurred as regards Tagore; in "Javni" the Tagorean element is suggested in the way human emotion is seen to triumph over all other social and political considerations. And Anand, particularly in his Homage to Tagore,² praises the Bengali with little reserve. He hails Tagore as "the first novelist of India" (p.22), the first novelist to adapt a Western or psychological approach to Indian subjects. The fact that all three writers draw, in various ways, from the many facets of Tagore's oeuvre suggest that here we may find a bridge or implicit connection between the apparently di-

¹Ved Mehta, John is easy to Please, p.141.

²M.R. Anand, Homage to Tagore (Lahore : Sangam, 1946).

verse interests of Rao and Anand.

Tagore is an important source. In one direction his works look toward the advanced metaphysics of Raja Rao; and in the opposite direction toward the humanism of Mulk Raj Anand. In the first case, Tagore's symbolism adumbrates a similar though more concentrated symbolism in Rao's novels where traditionally derived symbols are used to define ordinary life and everyday experience. In Tagore's short story "Subha,"³ for example, a girl's incipient womanhood is described as "a new inexpressible consciousness like a tide from the central places of the sea, when the moon is full" (p.151), reminding us of similar symbols used by Raja Rao in his description of Saroja in The Serpent and the Rope (discussed on p.18). Or else in Gora the Gourmohan Babu likens India to a place in the heart or mind (Gora, p.17), comparable with Ramaswamy's definition of India as "an idea, a metaphysic." India is also conceived as a home-port somewhere on the Other Shore to be finally reached by boat (p.18), again reminding us of Rao's river symbolism. And so on.

In the second case, it is Tagore's continual preoccupation with the "sensitive human heart, throbbing with pain and desire" ("My Fair Neighbour" in Mashi p.219) which links him most forcibly with the work of Anand. Tagore, says Anand, is the first to create

³R. Tagore, "Subha," in Mashi and Other Stories (Madras : Macmillan, 1971).

"an emotive prose style, by the amalgamation of the literary language and common speech" (Homage to Tagore, p.22), an ever-present aim in Anand's writing too. But even more important than the discovery of an "emotive" technique, Anand hails Tagore's religious unorthodoxy, his catholic use of the word "spiritual" for instance, in a way which included even Russian socialism -- "spiritual," that is, in the sense of whatever moves the spirit. This movement of spirit is given the word "revolution" in numerous essays and addresses. Tagore spoke frequently of the need for Indians to liberate themselves from dead habits and customs, from institutionalized religion and from the stock response. In "The Religion of an Artist" Tagore affirms the truth of the artist's imaginative vision without making distinction between the poetic and the religious impulse. In the West this transition from religion to poetry is of course clearly seen in the poetry of the Romantics and in the speculations of Matthew Arnold. The attraction of Western Romanticism is as strong in Tagore as it is in Anand; both writers are steeped in European as well as Indian thought and both attempt to blend these diverse traditions into a modern literary form of distinctly Indian character. The Indian preoccupation with Self and with personal fulfilment is congenial to the Romanticist.

Romanticism...with its strains of emotionalism, its dreams, its aspirations, its melancholy, appealed highly to the Indians, and the Indians, especially Tagore, had a great deal to add of Indian colour and Indian feelings to

the wider palette of romanticism.⁴

In the Tagore manner,⁵ Anand moves almost imperceptibly back and forth between metaphysic and imagination; although often vocal in challenging the Indian mystical tradition, he just as often seems to slide back into this tradition himself.

While we are here establishing a bridge between the metaphysical attitude of Rao and the humanistic attitude of Anand there is a further factor which concerns both writers. In The Serpent and the Rope Ramaswamy admits to only two philosophical attitudes to life -- the Hindu and the Marxist, and these are dialectically opposed: "Either you believe the world exists and so -- you. Or you believe that you exist -- and so the world" (p.337). On the basis of a "world view," an interest in the whole man in his many connections, we can point to a shared heroic or epic element in the works of both novelists. Both Rao and Anand are visionaries; their vision is one of perfectability, a condition in which the whole man exists in harmony, or rather in

⁴H.M. Williams, Studies in Modern Indian Fiction in English, Vol. 1 (Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1973), Introduction, xvii.

⁵H.M. Williams, taking an historical view, argues that Anand spearheads a new generation of young "realist" writers who challenge Tagore's mystical vision (Studies in Modern Indian Fiction, p.21). I would argue, however, that Anand agrees with Tagore in a more essential way than is at first apparent. Perhaps a better example of the younger generation realist challenging Tagorean mysticism would be someone like the Bengali Manik Bannerjee.

conjunction with, the operative universe. Although they are opposed in one respect, in that the Hindu assumes the priority of mind over matter while the Marxist the direct reverse, both take the tangible world as their starting point and thence progress through a more or less common system of dialectics.⁶

Let us commence this discussion of identity by considering the way Anand differs from Rao and Narayan. Whereas these latter authors draw their inspiration directly from established Hindu sources, Anand draws on the Indian past only in an indirect way; he is more intent to reappraise the beliefs and the values of the past in the light of modern practical needs. The problem of an Indian identity becomes a social, political and economic problem, as can be seen in his essay "Is there a Contemporary Indian Civilization?" Indian civilization and identity depend on national foreign policy and on balance of payments as much as on historical determinants. Ramaswamy might reject the existence of the Board of Trade but for Anand such an institution is crucial. Narayan usually fits somewhere in between; Margayya plays ducks and drakes with the Co-Operative Mortgage Bank, thereby humourously illustrating a clash between these two poles of tradition

⁶The transition from a Hindu to a Marxist system of dialects is roughly equivalent to the transition in thought from Hegel to Feuerbach, where religion is reduced to a matter of human and social relationships.

and modernity. Anand sees a good deal in Hinduism which requires change in order to bring the past into line with the present. Compared with the tendency to passivity in Rao and Narayan, Anand's characters often demonstrate a more dynamic principle; they are less patient, at times even aggressive.

But this dynamism too is only a tendency in Anand's novels. William Walsh has noted a certain flaw in Anand's characters:

A certain passivity on the part of characters, apt no doubt when they are the victims of circumstances, which they so frequently are, but out of place in those parts of his work where the individual should be more energetically active in the working out of his own nature.⁷

Anand's younger characters like Lal Singh and Ananta are frequently undecided, while an older character like Dr. Shankar betrays something of the passivity of Tagore's Paresh Babu. Moreover, C.D. Narasimhaiah has observed a tendency in Anand (specifically in connection with Munoo's death in Coolie) "perpetuating the fatalism of the past against which he has clearly set himself strongly in novel after novel."⁸ We shall thus observe certain inconsistencies in Anand's work as we proceed, inconsistencies arising from a fundamental clash between the competing demands of traditional and modern attitudes, registered also at a more immediate

⁷W. Walsh, Commonwealth Literature (Oxford : Oxford Uni. Press, 1973), p.8.

⁸C.D. Narasimhaiah, The Swan and the Eagle, p.128.

or stylistic level as a clash between a sometimes belligerent tone and a philosophical stance of self-effacement issuing from a doctrine of bhakti-yoga, of devotion to man and his cause.

Thus although Anand is a "revolutionary" writer, insisting on the need for a new system of social order, his concept of "revolution" is closer to that of Tagore than to more contemporary Indian radicals. When Anand speaks of change he seldom means a wholesale throw-out. True, he is opposed to the old concepts of dharma and karma, the former because of its caste associations and the latter because it seems to be incompatible with the notion of a well organized state. But Tagore also rejected literal interpretations of Hindu doctrine and yet retained dharma to mean simply "duty," as Anand might also have done. For despite Anand's rejection of the word his moral attitude implicitly speaks of duty just as forcibly as any Hindu advocate of morality preceding him. Anand may throw out words which he believes carry disreputable associations, but the underlying concepts he will often either preserve or else modify in the light of his understanding of present conditions. "Revolution" in the Tagorean sense, as observed by Anand, has a conservative as well as "progressive" aim in that it seeks to revitalize cultural roots in danger of being forgotten under the influence of deadening custom. A sense of Indian identity will accompany the resurgence of all that is best in Indian

tradition. In his essay on Indian theatre he states his belief that cultural emancipation demands that we "begin almost at the beginning and come full circle if we are to build up an indigenous tradition rooted in the soil and in the consciousness of our people."⁹

In the previous chapters we have examined the novels of Raja Rao and Narayan largely in terms of the quest for perfectibility. We may now turn to similar features in Anand's work. Jack Lindsay has noted that Anand "has rediscovered the Indian epical tale in terms of the contemporary struggle."¹⁰ Anand's books are, like those of the other two writers, also concerned with the human struggle and with the goal of human perfectibility. Take Lal Singh in The Sword and the Sickle, for example:

He had been in revolt against the limitations of his own nature as well as against the prejudices of religion in Nandpur and he had sought to perfect himself in the face of evil though he had suffered. He had struggled, and always would go on struggling to remove his own ignorance and all the defects in his own nature.¹¹

Human perfectibility is, of course, not the prerogative of Hinduism alone; it is an axiom underlying Christianity, Romanticism,

⁹The Indian Theatre (London : Dennis Dobson, 1950), p.21.

¹⁰J. Lindsay, The Elephant and the Lotus (Bombay : Kutub Popular, 1965), p.17.

¹¹M.R. Anand, The Sword and the Sickle (Bombay : Kutub Popular, 1955), p.247.

Marxism and other creeds. However, one is ever aware in Hinduism of the accent on self-discipline which tends to distinguish it from the opposite tendency toward self-indulgence which is stronger in Romanticism; it can equally be distinguished from empirical Socialism and from doctrinal Christianity. In other words, one has to examine the particular colours in order to appreciate the resulting overall hue. It should also be noted that Anand is fairly indiscriminate in his remarks about Indian identity vis-a-vis human identity. The quest is primarily an Indian phenomenon which tends in the direction of universal relevance. It is interesting that when he attempts to illustrate the universality of the themes he has used in his novels, he does so by comparing them with Indian classics like the Mahabharata -- that is, by comparison with Indian rather than Western or world literature.¹²

In this chapter I wish to argue a rather complicated proposition: that Anand's Socialist ardour takes its primary impetus from a "religious" or "metaphysical" attitude which is Hindu but also evangelical in the Western manner; and that at a less conscious level Anand is often in danger of identifying himself with those aspects of Indian life he would ostensibly change or eradicate. The net result of the interaction between these two

¹²M.R. Anand, "Old Myth and New Myth: Recital versus Novel," pp.112-13.

levels is inconsistency on one hand, and on the other a compelling sense of Indian identity. In actual fact I am more interested in the way Indianness enters Anand's novels willy-nilly than in the more obvious proselytizing aspect of his work, and the greater part of the following discussion shall be devoted to a darker substratum of thought in his novels.

Relatively speaking, it is not difficult to demonstrate the truth of the first half of the above proposition -- that all the ardour of religious thought and feeling seems to appear in Anand in a substitute form. From a large number of possible examples I select just a few, first from The Sword and the Sickle and second from certain unspecified letters quoted by Margaret Berry in her study of Anand. All these passages are useful in that they help dispel many of the popular and often over-simplified notions concerning Anand's writing. First, two passages from The Sword and the Sickle:

For bitter, like the hunger of the empty belly, and sweet is the ache of the stricken soul which makes a God of reason, which denies power, spits on glory, eschews all contact with wealth, which even turns cold and loveless from mother, wife and brother, and strives towards the perfection of a new way of living, a way of giving oneself in a new manner, which seeks to be a light, a flame, which strives to mould life according to a new conception of human truth and justice, to a new ideal of thought and beauty.... (p.389)

As the bhagats, the devoted ones in the past, those who practised the "at your service" ideal of our religion, so we have to give, give, give of ourselves. For he who gives himself to the service of others is blessed, is enriched.... (p.392)

Here we find the revolutionary message couched in a curiously archaic sermon-like form. There is an almost holy-roller urgency in the piling up of exhortatory phrases. There is evinced in this form of Westernized Hinduism a concept of perfectibility which goes beyond any mere rational idealism;¹³ Anand's "utilitarian" ideal has a pronounced metaphysical edge. Two additional passages help us position Anand more accurately within the Indo-English tradition:

Naturally, as an Indian born to the tradition of Hindu society I have an almost biological, pathological and deliberately metaphysical attitude towards life. So my books are not realistic in the ordinary sense of European realism, but a species of Indian expressionism, by which I mean that during every generation, for thousands of years, the creative men of India have tried to stage the body-soul drama in the imaginative literature which concerns man's destiny.

I hold the view that my novels are expressionistic in the manner of the old Indian fiction -- staging the body-soul drama as in the past, only in dealing with contemporary characters and now in mythological apperception from the new truths of Freud, which had, of course, been anticipated in the branches of tantric philosophy.¹⁴

Although perhaps we do not often find Anand speaking of his own Indian identity so unequivocally, it is this sense of Indianness

¹³On numerous occasions (as in the passages quoted below) Anand has stated that "expressionism" rather than realism is his habitual stylistic mode, a species of writing which goes beyond or transcends the world of mere facts.

¹⁴Quoted by Margaret Berry in Mulk Raj Anand : The Man and the Novelist (Amsterdam : Oriental Press, 1971), pp.34-35. Entered as "Letters, unpublished correspondence written between September 20, 1967, and April 30, 1968. Thirteen items."

which I now wish to explore a little further, particularly in the more contradictory aspect I have noted.

I stated in the Introduction that we are not so much interested in a writer's identity as in his implied identity or the sense of identity which he projects through his art or artifice. In the case of Anand, however, there is a good deal of biographical evidence to which we can refer. Critics have so far largely overlooked the relevance of Anand's autobiographical novels to his other novels. Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968) and an article entitled "About the Lost Child and other Allegories"¹⁵ give a clue to the relation of author and character in many of the other books. This evidence, if taken in conjunction with an unbiased reading of these novels, indicates a serious inadequacy in the current popular attitude that his novels represent "the naturalistic projection of social reality, utterly devoid of either any sentimental attachment to the past, or any nostalgic longing for the effete tradition."¹⁶ Although such a generalization does of course contain its share of truth Anand's creative writing is far more complex than such remarks would suggest. One thing which becomes very clear when we compare the autobiographical novels

¹⁵In Indian Literature, 13, No. 1 (1970), 26-32.

¹⁶A.V. Krishna Rao, The Indo-Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition (Mysore : Rao Raghavan, 1972), p.28.

with the others is the pronounced autobiographical element in many of the heroes, and the extent to which Anand shares the moods and superstitions of his numerous moody characters. In this way Anand is vulnerable to his own censure.¹⁷ The certain passivity to which William Walsh referred, and the fatalism which Professor Narasimhaiah remarked, issue from this sense of identification. Characters like De la Havre, Nur and Maqbool feel the same pain and despair of life as does Krishan, Anand's self-personification. Lal Singh's nostalgia as well as his guilt and the intellectual struggles between the claims of Good and Evil, present and past, parents and society, etc., may be traced to their source in the autobiographical hero. And above all, the twin poles of optimism and pessimism, a peculiar unresolved dialectic in Anand's work, have their spiritual source in the author's own reported life.

We can make a brief summary of some of the influences which seem to have affected Anand's attitude as a novelist. First there is the geographical factor, the Punjab region where Anand grew up, midway between the loneliness of the snowy places to the

¹⁷Anand advocates a philosophy of bhakti-yoga, devotion to man and his cause. Bhakti itself contains, of course, an irrational element since it is "a revolt against the idea of inequality inherent in caste as well as against the intellectualism of the traditional paths to salvation (moksha)."
M.N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1969), p.76.

north and the bustling overcrowded places to the south:

Beyond the primitive landscape of the hills and mountains, beyond Peshawar where I was born and the Khyber Pass where father had been, in my cosmogony of that time ruled the Badshah of Kabul, to whose kingdom of Afghanistan we were connected by the metalled Grand Trunk Road. At the base of this road, before the big railway bridge, across the Lunda by the timber yards, the mushroom misery of the urban areas betrayed the breath of another world which was to make permanent dents on my memory.¹⁸

The "road" and the "broad river of life" are the two dominant symbols to emerge from Seven Summers, used interchangeably to denote the path of life's journey or of man's quest. They are also the dominant symbols of Anand's other novels, as in the novelette entitled The Road (1961) or else in the Ganges symbol in The Sword and the Sickle or in the opening river imagery of The Big Heart (1945), and so on. At best the road leads toward a better future, connecting the isolated individual with his fellows in a common brotherhood; at worst, as in Death of a Hero (1963) it ends in certain death (despite the glory of sacrifice). The earliest memories of men, carts and animals on the Nowshera cantonment road in Seven Summers seem to have influenced the nature of the road/river quest symbol in many of Anand's novels.

More important than mere geography were the people in young Krishan's life. A deep source of confusion in the boy's attitude

¹⁸ M.R. Anand, Seven Summers (Delhi : Hind Pocket Books, 1972), p.232.

to life arose from the conflicting outlooks of his parents, from his mother's mixture of warm understanding, petty vituperativeness, religion and superstition, and from his father's mixture of hearty rational scepticism, two-sided hypocrisy, cowardice and flashes of brutality. The author concedes that when once his father had thrashed him for stealing a mango,

It may be that the violent thrashing which I received then made me hate him for ever on one side of my nature and largely transformed me into the uncompromising rebel that I became, gave the spoilt, self-willed child in me the impetus of an over-developed sense of grievance and misery. (Seven Summers, p.125)

Certainly there is something pathological, one feels, in Anand's desire for change and his pleas for brotherly love. On the other hand, and one of the most striking aspects of the author's history, we notice the effect on him of his mother's superstitious beliefs and her stories. One loses track of the large number of nightmares and visions of horror the boy experiences in his early years as the direct result of these beliefs, and later the feverish fits of depression which were diagnosed as of "spiritual" rather than physical origin.¹⁹ The fear and pessimism associated with certain traumatic events in his life, such as an accident when he was hit on the head by a stone, an attack of typhoid fever when older, a caning he received at the hands of the military for

¹⁹ M.R. Anand, Morning Face (Bombay : Kutub Popular, 1968), p.504.

breaking curfew at about the same time, the physical violence suffered both at home and at school -- all of these, and other things beside, had a profound effect on the boy's outlook. At a later date while a student in London the boy experienced crucial mental struggles, which Anand has also described:

I was, alternately, in ecstasy and torment -- never in equilibrium.... Between the pull towards the God-Man and the Man-God, I plunged headlong, and with ardent passion, into the area of the Man-God, where I might find nobility and grace and tenderness, in spite of all the sordidness of life, in the creative arts.²⁰

The confession is worth bearing in mind, since it covers the ground I wish to look at more closely. There is in Anand's novels a conflict not a balance between "ecstasy and torment," between optimism and pessimism, and it is this curious opposition which accounts for a certain inconsequentiality in the conclusions of his novels, for a promise of hope where the tale has been one of sorrow and woe.

It seems to me that one misses the sensitive pulse beat in Anand's writing if one regards Anand simply as a hard-shelled revolutionary with no mind for sentimentality or nostalgia. For despite the over resilient optimism in the novels, the weight in the balance between ecstasy and agony falls quite clearly on the side of the latter. Looking back over Anand's career to the de-

²⁰"About the Lost Child and other Allegories," p.32.

featist ending of Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) and to a still darker mood in Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts (1938) and later still to Death of a Hero one may detect a deepening gloom in the proportion that Anand's political preoccupation gives way to admit a greater psychological interest. Again, the seeds of this gloom were sown long before in the author's childhood and in his allegory of the Lost Child, a piece composed prior to the first novel to serve as a personal catharsis. In the Lament or in The Indian Prince (1953) there is the feeling that human interest has almost usurped Anand's more usual socio-economic interest despite the explicit and implicit connections between the plight of these characters and their particular social conditions. Even in the dozen years which elapsed between the two prefaces of Anand's Apology for Heroism (1945-57) the author indicates his growing disillusionment in the face of man's increased potential for self-destruction. But whatever the exact causes of this trend the point is that Anand's Indian upbringing has an important bearing on his adult outlook. It is not that this particular sort of optimistic/pessimistic character is particularly Indian in any formulaic sense, but rather that certain attitudes, particularly the more superstitious sort taken largely from Krishan's mother in the autobiographies, seem to be intricately connected with flights of fancy and imagination in the novels. Anand, the rationalist, who

has advocated the need to "make a God of reason" (The Sword and the Sickle, p.389) is in one respect still the boy Krishan of the autobiographies who felt himself "smashed up by...desire, smashed up by...dreams" (Morning Face, p.569). When we examine Anand's novels, and especially the novel most often regarded as a straightforward optimistic expression of revolution, The Sword and the Sickle, in this new light we shall better understand the obverse side of Anand's nature, "the other pole of the vitality I exuded" (Seven Summers, p.28), as the author himself puts it.

Consider Lal Singh's feelings in relation to the past. Thoughts about the past were certainly "shameful and humiliating" (The Sword and the Sickle, p.66); on the other hand he can speak in retrospect of "a brave poverty" now superceded by "a rich life" (p.44), but more than this he is haunted by a sense of betrayal, a sense that he has betrayed his parents and their order by his own past and also his present actions. He is troubled by whispers:

...he couldn't help casting a backward glance on himself, as if, turning downcast from his high enterprise, he heard whispers from the survivals of all the secret, hidden impulses of his past, which seemed to say, 'not so fast, my friend, not so fast; do not betray us....' (p.110)

Lalu's attitude toward the customs and habits of his elders has softened from an earlier hard hostility. Although he still disapproves of the "pessimistic faith in renewal, in the going back to God, who seemed to the devout the beginning as well as the ulti-

mate end of the journey" (p.68) he is by temperament not very far removed from this same sort of pessimism himself. Witness the numerous gloomy descriptions in the novel whenever, as the author says, Lalu is on the point of "reverting to the pessimism of his own ancestors" (p.241). This indecision between old and new, the past and the future, arises (in part) from a greater extension of sympathy in Anand's later works. In The Indian Prince Dr. Shankar's dilemma illustrates the difficulty of reconciling sympathy (humanism) with reason: his sense of humanity demands his loyalty and support of Victor, the maharajah, though against his own better judgement. The doctor admits his own weakness -- his inability to place the suffering of the ordinary people above his sympathy for the maharajah.

The same ambivalence toward past and present is visible in The Big Heart. Like Lalu Ananta is haunted by guilt for past disobedience; in fact his revolutionary zeal stems from the knowledge of his own imperfections and the imperfections of others:

...he felt he saw a certain contempt for himself, for the devilish, disobedient son he had been to his stepmother. And arising from that contempt he felt the emergence in his bones of a boundless monster's energy to undo the harm he may have done, and to gather all the thathiars around him by curbing that pride in his own nature which he could see in their stubbornness.²¹

²¹M.R. Anand, The Big Heart (Bombay : Kutub Popular, n.d.), p.60.

Purun Singh pinpoints the central problem of the novel when he speaks of "the despair of those who do not know whether to take the plunge into the dark whirl or run back to the shores of the past and sit brooding on the white lotuses in the ponds of this ancient city" (p.77). The poet then goes on to say that man must use his will to smother his fears; on the other hand "we have to think of our stubborn elders" who "are quite wise in their orthodoxy" (p.78). The poet, in his wisdom, espies truth on all sides.

Ananta's indecision is even greater:

I admit I am not as sure of my thoughts as Purun Bhagat.
For sometimes I feel that I too believe in the faith in
which the thathiars believe, and at other times I feel I
could change the whole world. (p.84)

Or again "With half of me I too feel I am doomed, and with the other half I feel I could fight to avert the disaster" (p.136). And like Lalu Ananta is also a pilgrim, taking a path which is "a long pilgrimage...to oneself and others" (p.61), a route which is "a way among the thorny paths of the tiger-infested jungle of this world" (p.132).

In the psychological character studies of these later novels Anand displays a level of tolerance and of compassion which contrasts with the summary dismissal of all hypocrites and their hypocrisy in the earlier stories. In The Indian Prince Dr. Shankar comes close to "substituting psychology for mo-

rality"²² and it is worth speculating to what extent the author is himself in a similar danger. Not that Anand's view of Indian poverty or that his ideology radically alters. It is rather that his vision of the human condition in all its complexities grows in dimensions and tends to qualify the earlier and simpler ideological explanations. In The Sword and the Sickle, and more devastatingly in The Big Heart, an over-simplified political line (exemplified by the radical students Razwi and Satyapal) is shown to have serious attendant dangers. In terms of literary quality this larger humanistic approach to social issues is conducive to "image-making" rather than the making of mere verbal formulas. Because it is the image-maker rather than the essayist who holds the upper hand in these novels they mark a significant advance over Coolie (1936) and Untouchable (1935).

What does this image-making consist of? Anand's world vision is strikingly dualistic: there is a bright heaven opposed to a dark hell. The bright heaven belongs to an imagined future time, the dark hell belongs to the world of poverty and disease which presently exists. Anand has sometimes been compared with Dickens; apart from certain obvious similarities such as a highly developed social conscience and a stylistic grandiloquence

²²M.R. Anand, The Private Life of an Indian Prince (London : Bodley Head, 1970), p.145.

there also exists the substratum of a darker mood which rises to break through the open surface of the narrative in shadowy symbolic form. The dream device in The Big Heart illustrates this sort of stratified consciousness. Margaret Berry sees in this use of dream symbolism images of India's plight:

The dream device...is effectively used in The Big Heart. The usual images for India's plight are there: the dead mother burning on the cremation grounds; the foster mother (England) standing by; the loved one summoning; the railway station; the clock tower; masked figures with bloody hands, pursuing the dreamer; the goddess Kali, trident in hand, dancing on a heap of massacred men and shrieking for revenge. Ananta's dream foreshadows the tragedy of the workers' revolt and his own death. By its recurrence throughout the novel, it intensifies the foreboding and pessimism which make this novel contrast so strongly with the crassly joyous assurances of The Sword and the Sickle.²³

Possibly this symbolism does, as is suggested, bear directly on the question of India's social poverty, though I think that the similarities between both of these novels are not fully appreciated by this critic. More definitely, the mood and tone of passages such as the one above is consistent with the mood and tone of similar passages in the Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts and in The Sword and the Sickle. The dominant mood in each case is one of gloom, pessimism and death -- in direct contrast to the more obvious and brighter statements of revolution.

The dark mood of the Lament seems to follow as a conse-

²³M. Berry, M.R. Anand, p.95.

quence of the despair sounded in Two Leaves and a Bud. Although Nur analyses his own problem in terms of poverty and neglect the direction of his thoughts is nevertheless equally determined by another factor which has no direct bearing on this social theme -- to the stories remembered from his childhood and "the terror of ginns and bhuts and churels and other denizens of the nether worlds over which, the Koran said, presided His Satanic Majesty, the Devil."²⁴ In the Lament with its insistence on oppressive Indian daylight and heat one feels that Nur's enemy is too vast and unfathomable to be reducible to any verbal formula such as "poverty" or "reality;" his enemy is life itself in all its complexities and contradictions. In The Sword and the Sickle we find similar passages of an associative and symbolic nature. With the heart of traditional Indian religion absent in Anand's writing there nevertheless remains a potent aura of the super-natural, an all-pervading superstition which while reminiscent of the old religious symbolic forms seems to lack the clear definition of these forms. The Big Heart starts with water imagery -- the old and supposedly clear waters of ancient times contrasted with the dark polluted waters of more recent times. In The Sword and the Sickle the river Ganges becomes the central symbol. At one level the Ganges

²⁴M.R. Anand, Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts (Delhi : Hind Pocket Books. 1967), p.30.

seems to stand for the associative mechanism of the unconscious mind (similar to Coleridge's Aeolian harp); the river occupies a dominant position in all of the more thoughtful reflective passages in the novel, and at this level the river forms a part of the jungle landscape through which it flows, the jungle being itself a figure for man's confusion. But this level merges into deeper layers of meaning which are Indian at their source. The river is a major symbol of birth, death and regeneration in the novel. It is not quite a metaphysical entity it is yet a symbol of heightened consciousness which seems to border on the metaphysical. As a feminine symbol the river is frequently linked with femininity, especially with Maya, Lalu's mistress and wife. There are a number of passages which indicate this connection, beside conveying the particular mood I have described. The first describes Lalu returning to the house by the river where he expects to find Maya waiting for him:

'Maya,' he called from the stairs leading to the terrace overlooking the swollen Ganges, where she was in the habit of sitting down to get the full benefit of the cool air in the increasing heat of the summer.... But there was no response. He was in a panic. He had left her alone so much in this wing of the house, deserted except for Bhogat Mai, the old, toothless, shrivelled up ragged witch-woman servant of the Queen-mother, who lived in a small room by the gates under the tamarind tree, and the place was said to be haunted by the ghosts of all the dead who burnt on the black stone on the foundations of which the first robber chief of Rajgarh had built this house. Not that he believed in evil spirits, but all the elements, the leonine river swirling past the bend, the miles of sandy deserted beds from which

the Ganges had changed its course, glistening like a vast horror in the torrid glare, the dense vegetation of distant forests, the grotesque idols in the temple nearby, and all the dead tyrants of the past, who had fought each other for the possession of this land, and the wills of their present successors who held sway, combined to produce an uncanny air of doom over this ancient land, to infuse terror into the soul.... (p.147-8)

The intensity of this dark fear and the frequency with which similar passages recur in the course of the novel tend to belie the author's statement that Lalu was not superstitious. In this passage a large number of symbolic fragments are consolidated in a large composite symbol, an evocative piece which appears to have been dredged up from the hidden depths of the unconscious. The stream of consciousness connects Maya, the Ganges, decrepit royalty, ghosts, grotesque deities, a haunted house with foundations in past misdeeds, dense vegetation of forests, etc., -- all adding up to "an uncanny air of doom."

Another passage connecting Maya with the river occurs shortly afterward when Lalu goes along on the royal shooting trip down the Ganges:

Lalu was sad to think of Maya sitting caged in the river house as he walked down the steps of the temple ghats....

And, sailing down the Ganges from Rajgarh ghats, sailing through the mist of the morning which was only slightly disturbed by the sun, sailing down the Ganges which was placid and slow to the touch of the oars on the early summer morning like a pregnant woman swollen with content; sailing past the village temples where the priests had just struck up the bells and cymbals and drums and conchshells to awaken the Deity, or perhaps themselves, from sleep; sailing under the shadow of the river house; sailing past the sands on which the dead were

burnt and from which the ferry boat plied to Nasirabad across the river, and where peasant women were bathing with flimsy garments sticking to their forms; sailing along with the two princes and their courtiers and the guest from Allahabad, -- sailing down thus seemed to soothe the strain and stress of the last few days' activity in Lalu's soul. (p.163)

Here is a similar formulation though perhaps not quite so fearful. Maya, Ganges, mists, deities, the dead -- are all a part of the same larger composite symbol. In this passage there is an even greater stress on the connection of the river and Maya. The river is "like a pregnant woman" anticipating Maya's pregnancy and insisting on Maya's femininity. Again, there are "peasant women... bathing with flimsy garments sticking to their forms." And in the middle of this description the boat passes "under the shadow of the river house" where Maya sits "caged." She is nebulous like the mist over the Ganges which the sun has yet to pierce. Elsewhere in the novel she appears in a similar symbolic garb -- "Maya," signifying all that is illusory and "false": their first reunion takes place in semi-darkness (p.68); she is described variously as "his chief weakness, the reflection of the desire to which he had returned from the dreams of the days of disintegration" (p.229-30); when pregnant she is like a holy matron (p.346-7); or else she is both Goddess and harlot and thus a traditional symbol of femininity (p.389).

Again, there is the description of the march to Allahabad which ends abortively in a man's death and in a trip down the

Ganges. The party of corpse-bearers sets out in the hope that their efforts may stimulate the workings of official justice -- described in terms of the sun's rays struggling to pierce "the narrow oppression of mist" (p.177). But the party soon encounters the landlord's agent and his guard dogs, and after a fight in which the dogs are killed, they are forced to try a short cut through a strip of jungle. The nightmarish description of their scramble through the jungle becomes another symbolic tableau:

But soon Lalu knew why it was forbidden to go to the forest. It was a deliberately preserved festering jungle across the countryside, holding good cultivable land for miles in the grip of all the ceaseless fermentation of insidious, claw-like vegetation, in which birds, beasts, insects and wild bushes grew bloated, lengthened out and decayed, till the hand of man could not reclaim it. About half a furlong from where the green darkness began, beyond the ruins of some dilapidated mausoleums, neglected and overgrown with moss, tall grass and the off-shoots of trees which clamped them to the earth like the long finger-nails of malevolent spirits, stood a modern hunting-lodge, with a garden around it, its European-style gabled roof resisting the pressure of broken Mughal domes, and spreading the oppression of that discreet opulence which is the peculiar terror brought to India by the English. (p.183)

The mixture of decaying royalty and decaying vegetation has here been carried over from the earlier passage describing the river house by the Ganges. But in addition the "insidious, claw-like vegetation," the hint of "birds, beasts, insects," the "dilapidated mausoleums," the "malevolent spirits," the impossible combination of European and Mughal styles in the architecture of the hunting-lodge -- all add up to "the peculiar terror brought to

India by the English" and the same "uncanny air of doom" evoked earlier.

It is worth noticing the difference between Anand's conception of jungle and Narayan's. Whereas Narayan's jungle-gardens are a more traditional mixture of benovolent-malevolent properties Anand's superstitious or quasi-religious descriptions relate the terrors of the jungle to social injustice -- in this case the landlord's deliberate preservation of jungle on valuable arable land. The terror implicit in the above description erupts into reality when one of their number is shot by the estate manager. The morbidity often intrinsic to Anand's descriptions of evil and poverty here seems to rise to the surface in the grotesque description of corpses rolling down the ghats, and of the mingling odours of decaying vegetation and human flesh (p.185). This whole fearful jungle episode then becomes for Lalu the subject of reflection as the band of men drift down the Ganges in a boat. Here Lalu is seen as a man who is internally divided:

torn between his two selves, between the adolescent who had been bred in a world which believed in another kind of love, in a tenderness towards father, mother, husband, wife, and to an inbred sense of devotion to God, to an inherited belief in another and blessed land and an equality which only death conferred, and the revolutionary who had become an outcast, wedded to politics, eschewing all contact with religion, spitting on God, and turning, cold and loveless from the memory of dead ancestors, and from his living wife, towards the abstraction of equality, vaguely apprehended, to the service of men whose potentialities were yet unknown, towards comrades whose friendship, being based on the forceful wills and

superior reasoning powers of the leaders, was so simple and easy as to be elusive and rarely visible.... (p.194)

Here, perhaps, is the most direct statement of Lalu's plight. In the mounting tension of his mind all the tokens of an inimical past and of an uncompromisingly harsh present overtake him in a swoon of nervous exhaustion:

For hours they could see nothing except the dark lines of turbid vegetation, interspersed by the gaunt, black outline of a ruined Mughal fortress, or an old, dilapidated pleasure palace or mausoleum, falling in the verdurous abysses, standing sheer on a rock, steadily shorn of its grandeur by the passing centuries, of history, through the forest growths that were obliterating the work of human hands, through the jackals which howled, and the wild beasts and reptiles which prowled, and the insects which sang the eternal monotony of a timeless chant.

As he sat thus in the night, in one of those spells which were necessary to rest the aching muscles, to restore the breathing and moisten the throat, Lalu saw the sudden glint of something and, even in spite of himself, his soul seemed to surrender to the elements, his heart beat violently, his hands trembled, his face burnt, his ears listened like those of an animal at bay.... Overwhelmed with terror, and in a sweat, he fell back in a swoon. (p.195-6)

The strange "glint of something" remains an enigmatical, almost epiphinal, experience which lies far beyond the limits of any rationalist's explanation of human behaviour. Lalu surrenders up his soul ("soul" is one of Anand's favourite words) to the natural forces which he feels, like his ancestors, to be far mightier than himself. Actually, the faintness which comes from protracted periods of fear is described at various points in the author's autobiographical Morning Face. Even more than Lalu, Krishan is sus-

ceptible to fits of irrational panic often symptomized as dizziness or fever.

The sort of descriptive passages I have been discussing also occur, though generally with less frequency than in The Sword and the Sickle, in most of the other novels of about this period. The jungle symbol in Two Leaves is associated in Laila's mind with hobgoblins and becomes further associated, on her encounter with the python, with a horrible suffocating kind of death. The horror of the jungle in Two Leaves becomes the pestilential world of the Lament, a world of sewage, rats, death and disease, of uncompromising heat and savage oppression. In The Sword and the Sickle and The Big Heart a similar kind of imagery is linked with social injustice and poverty, while in The Indian Prince the jungle symbol is used to denote the rottenness in the State of Sham Pur. Characters like Nur, Lalu, Ananta and Victor are all victims, to varying degrees, of their Indian background -- either its poverty or its superstition. The suffocating duststorm in The Sword and the Sickle which seems to blow from across the crematorium ground where Lalu's parents were burnt and which overtakes him and cuts him off from his friends in the palace illustrates, symbolically, the predicament of Anand's characters, caught out between a haunting past and a grim future.

Margaret Berry puts the case for Anand's attack on tradi-

tional religion and his substitution of a new religion, bhakti-yoga, "a new value system supplanting 'superstitious' personal devotion to God by rational devotion to man."²⁵ What is not made clear is the exact relation of this new religion to the old -- that is, its relation as experience rather than as theory. It is true that Anand's novels are full of indictments against the old beliefs in karma and dharma; the uneducated poor are restricted by superstition and ignorance, the educated rich exploit religion to their own advantage. This is part of the philosophical or ideological schema underlying most of the novels and one which determines types and stereotypes, castes and categories, against which the action occurs. But the question of an alternative religion remains. We have seen some of the problems standing in the way of characters like Lal Singh and Ananta which prevent their complete personal commitment to their given cause. The problems which fall into this personal category are the most serious of all, far more important than mere situational difficulties. Lalu and Ananta are engaged, as I have said, in a war against themselves, against their own personal limitations, as much as against external evils. Like Krishan in Morning Face theirs is a human struggle rather than a mere socio-political struggle. Because the internal war is never

²⁵M. Berry, M.R. Anand, p.72.

won (there are no perfect people in Anand's novels -- even the poet Purun Singh is cold and aloof, while Dr. Shankar is a weakling by his own confession), so neither is the external war against social injustice. Because of the difficulty involved in shaking off old metaphysical and superstitious attitudes which are engendered as a part of their Indian upbringing so the new religion of service and devotion to man never quite manages to free itself from the ingrained beliefs of the past. Although this new religion is supposed to arise from the old religious impulse, giving birth to a new form, there is a sense in which the new is still submerged in the old in a way that makes clear differentiation difficult.

Take the question of fate or destiny.²⁶ In the opening pages of The Sword and the Sickle Lalu is seen as a man who is pursued as well as a man pursuing. Time and again he is described as a man in pursuit of his destiny; though, as we have seen, he is also haunted by whispers from the past. Now Anand makes a distinction in this novel between two kinds of fate, a new fate which is really the effect of social conditions and an old fate which is

²⁶Anand defines "the novel" in terms of man's destiny: "the novel states the problems of men's destiny: it does not solve them, as did the old epic and bardic recital: there is another form available for philosophy -- the moral tract, the dissertation and even the loose reflection." "Old Myth and New Myth: Recital versus Novel," p.120. One might add that Anand only partly fulfils this prescription for the novel.

really a belief in some higher order of divinity. Lal Singh finds himself confronted by

a new Fate which no one seemed to understand, far less invoke, but which was somehow connected with the war to which he had been and against which everyone was fighting. It was a Fate which was completely unlike the old Fate, Kismet, or God; though it was as cruel a Nemesis as the ancient Fate, and equally unknowable! It was a Fate which seemed to him to have been working before the war, the incomprehensible Destiny which had something to do with the school he went to, with the macadamized roads.... It was the pitiless Fate which, like Kali, the old Goddess of Destruction, had shouted for blood.... He would look for it, he would track it down, the oppressor that drowned the agonies of the people -- he would know it and seek to master it!.... (p.67)

The fact is that he never really does get to know it or master it. It could be argued that this is the effect of truthful characterization given Lal's background; on the other hand it can be equally argued that despite Anand's stand of authorial omniscience there seldom emerges, in this or any other novel, a clear 'centre of consciousness' a clear or final answer to the complex problems raised. Anand's most clear-headed characters, like the communist leader Sarshar or like Dr. Shankar, are generally deficient in some particular aspect of their character or their behaviour. It is worth noting in the above passage that although the new fate is seen as "completely unlike the old Fate, Kismet or God" the rest of the passage does not really explain where this difference lies; instead there is an emphasis on the similarity of the effects, to the extent that the new fate is described by an analogy with the old. Although Anand's charac-

ters frequently exhibit many of the old habits and customs the author himself deprecates, he is just as frequently found borrowing such beliefs himself, especially for the purpose of analogy or ornamentation, as in the passage above or, for example, in his numerous descriptions of the coming of the rain, described as Indra's advancing army. While it is possible to distinguish a revolutionary rationale in Anand's novels, the author's poetic or imaginative faculty tends to disguise this rationale in old clothes, while at the deeper levels even this rationale is blurred by hesitancy and doubt.

One senses, as I have said, a deepening pessimism in the novels starting from Two Leaves through The Sword and the Sickle, The Big Heart to The Indian Prince. The message of hope and renewal in the final pages of The Sword and the Sickle, a message only partly persuasive in view of all the adversities described in the novel, is rendered even more feeble in The Big Heart where the poet is faced with the almost impossible task of trying to explain the significance of Ananta's struggles and his final failure. Even more artificial is Dr. Shankar's avowed intention at the end of The Indian Prince to make amends for the past by opening a dispensary in a Sham Pur village. Maqbool, the poet and symbol of bhakti in Death of a Hero, must return to face almost certain death on the rather flimsy pretext of obstructing

the enemy; the emphasis is clearly on the personal trial, on man's ability to rise above himself through his imaginative commitment to an ideal. The story is intended to show how men grow through suffering and persistent struggle: "We will have to suffer, and suffer...that is how men grow -- become men;"²⁷ but actually it shows that "often in human life, stupidity wins and decency is on the losing side" (p.125). The whole focus in these novels is elsewhere -- on the hesitancy and uncertainty of the heroes, on the brutal death of Ananta and Maqbool, and on the madness of the Indian prince. The curiously optimistic/pessimistic, human/superhuman contradictions I have been discussing are finally contained in a credo which smacks of Indian all-inclusiveness, as enunciated by Anand in a discussion of the hero:

It must be remembered that the literature of each age becomes significant through the confrontation of the hero of the opposing death forces and by showing through his struggle, even if he fails, the possibilities of a nobler, bolder and near superhuman destiny -- the affirmation of life itself against death in all forms. (my italics)²⁸

A principle based on unending struggle is basically a pessimistic principle; and the "superhuman destiny" to be achieved only either in the imagination or by dint of sacrifice and suffering, as

²⁷M.R. Anand, Death of a Hero (Delhi : Hind Pocket Books, 1968), p.95.

²⁸From "Old Myth and New Myth : Recital versus Novel," p.111.

in the case of *Maqbool*, is equally limited. Here, one feels, is the traditional Hindu pessimism regarding the despair in this life and optimism for the next²⁹ merely put into different clothes.

In The Serpent and the Rope Raja Rao ascribes traditional symbolic characteristics to each of the main protagonists; the man-woman relationship was seen to be of a special Indian kind which enjoins the dominance of the male and the submissiveness of the female. Several critics have observed the adherence among Indian and Indo-English writers to symbolic archetypal characters, particularly where the heroine is concerned. "The distinction, especially in the case of women, between the real and ideal is almost obliterated."³⁰ We may note that Narayan and Anand follow this convention, despite the latter's ambition to reverse many conventional stock responses to tradition. While Anand tries to elevate his untouchable heroes (like Bakha and Bikhu) to a level traditionally reserved for princes he also relies, to some degree, on the various qualities of character he would con-

²⁹"Indian religiosity," Betty Heimann writes, "is a continuous endeavour towards, a seeking after, the for ever hidden and for ever unobtainable 'It'.... It is belief in continuous promise, but equally a despair at ever attaining the goal." Facets of Indian Thought, pp.63-64.

³⁰M. Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction, p.165.

demn. The "folk-poetic" property of many of his characters depends on their religious or superstitious attitudes and beliefs; had Anand drawn most of his characters like Dr. Shankar in The Indian Prince or Colonel Mahindra in The Old Woman and the Cow (1961) the novels might have suffered from lack of life-blood and gusto; as a writer Anand depends on what the revolutionary in him would change. Here, I believe, one discerns a source of tension and of ambivalence in Anand's work. It is a strange thing, for instance, that Anand's representation of a rebellious wife, Gauri, in The Old Woman and the Cow, a fairly late novel, tends to be less psychologically convincing than the corresponding case of Savitri in Narayan's Dark Room; somehow Anand's heroine comes even closer to the traditional womanly archetype than Narayan's. The point is that although Gauri is shown, in Anand's novel, to change from a docile cow-like creature to a self-possessed thinking woman by the end of the story the change occurs rather swiftly (one might even say arbitrarily) in the final pages of the novel: one's lasting impression of Gauri is not that of the self-willed woman who challenges her husband's valour (as she does in the final pages of the book) but rather that of the docile woman, the possessor of what Anand lyrically refers to as a "simple truth," a sort of innate wisdom which seems to transcend all of the more rational and moral criteria:

Down at the roots of her being, where all the prayers and teachings of religion had bred in her, reverence for many of the things she knew to be lies, her simple truth yielded to an unjudging sentimentality....³¹

Gauri exhibits a constancy, a sense of her wifely duties, an amazing sense of propriety (all the more amazing in view of the major influences in her life -- her immoral mother Laxmi and self-proclaimed father, Amru) and, in fact, everything which could be desired in a good Hindu wife. Unlike Narayan's Savitri, Gauri shows no great bitterness in the face of her husband's shortcomings -- rather she tries to view the matter calmly and objectively. Actually, there is a good deal of authorial sympathy in this novel. Despite the faults of Panchi, Laxmi, Amru or the old Seth Jai Ram Das who attempts to buy Gauri from her home the real villain of the piece is other than human -- the brutalizing Indian summer heat; so often in Anand one feels that it is not simply a matter of resolving a plot but of answering a more profound and complex question concerning the meaning and purpose of life itself. In The Old Woman and the Cow Anand bases a novel loosely on the traditional Sita-myth. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that Anand uses the myth in order to eventually refute it as inadequate.³² Although this explanation is

³¹M.R. Anand, The Old Woman and the Cow (Bombay : Kutub Popular, 1960), p.137.

³²The Twice Born Fiction, p.164.

in one sense quite true there is also a less obvious sense in which Anand is inextricably committed to the myth -- to the extent that it resists complete demolition in the final resolution of the novel; for Anand depends as a writer on a way of life which he would in many ways censure, the element of myth and superstition which is hardly compatible with the law of reason.

Anand has spoken of "the great weight of the past on the Indian conscience" as a result of the way in which "the old India has survived to the present day, though in a somewhat broken state."³³ He has, in the same place enunciated the kind of qualities which have been historically determined in the Indian character: qualities he calls "universalism," "intolerant-tolerance" and "compassion." He talks readily of a special "Indian temperament" conditioned by the past.³⁴ So that on one hand his writing reflects a sense of Indian identity as a conscious attempt to recognize his Indian roots; while on the other hand he makes the claim for a deeper universal significance which in more important moments transcends all national boundaries -- here the poet speaks not just for India but for the whole of mankind.³⁵ Although the

³³ M.R. Anand, Is there a Contemporary Indian Civilization? (Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1963), p.80.

³⁴ Ibid, p.92.

³⁵ M.R. Anand, "Is Universal Criticism Possible?" Literary Criterion, 7, No. 1 (Winter 1965), pp.68-75.

poetic imagination may well render what is universal through what is more specifically Indian, one leaves Anand with an uncomfortable awareness of the kind of problems pointed out. He fights for individual human rights, for freedom from foreign rule and from general oppression whatever the source, and to this end he is partisan, provocative and sometimes petulant. But this measure of petulance does not easily combine with the proposed doctrine of bhakti where a Tagorean combination of firmness and gentleness might have seemed more appropriate. Consequently the stress in his novels tends to fall on a note of rejection rather than of conciliation. The technical problems Anand faces as a novelist seem merely to reflect the difficulties inherent in his general attitude: he would be a realist but also an idealist, he would be impartial and objective but would also register a sense of commitment, he would present a doctrine certified by reason while both author and characters remain partly bound by unreason, he would appear in his novels as the omniscient speaker or, as it has been called, the author's 'other self' despite the fact that this literary self all too often merges with the real man, the autobiographical Anand.

While a poet's argument with himself may, as Yeats once pointed out, conduce to poetry, and in Anand's novels such an argument conduces to moments of high creativity, it is perhaps

this last mentioned technical point above all others, the tendency in his novels to merge the real author in the implied author, which must qualify our praise of Anand as a successful novelist.

CHAPTER IX

SOME COMPARISONS IN THE NOVELS OF RAO, NARAYAN AND ANAND

1) General Approach

I have suggested that the usual way of labelling these three authors (as metaphysician, satirist and social realist) is at best only partly valid in view of the allegorical seriousness in Narayan and the near metaphysic in Anand. We have dealt mainly with the subject of national or Indian identity, and we have seen that all three writers share a certain common ground at deeper levels of their work. In a different kind of study it might be possible to show how, deeper still, each author tends toward a universality of character and event which transcends identity. In part, this has already been implied: the preoccupation with Good and Evil is perhaps the single most important example. All three tend to share a large cosmic identity: Raja Rao's concept of "India" extends to include the whole world and universe, Narayan's Malgudian microcosm seems to reflect human idiosyncrasy the world over and even beyond (as suggested in the playful banter in The English Teacher between Krishna and the denizens of the spirit world), while Anand's doctrine of human-

ism is specifically designed to nullify temporal and spatial distinctions.

But when we attend the "upper levels" of these novels we become more aware of the differences between the novelists. The previous chapters have suggested a general gradation of attitudes among the three authors ranging from a dominant traditionalism in Rao to an emerging secularism in Narayan to a Marxian objectivity in Anand. If we select a number of different issues we find this relationship to be fairly stable. Even though at the deeper and less conscious levels we find equivocation and sometimes outright contradiction, the upper levels betray less uncertainty.

Let me illustrate. Consider the attitude in respect of the family relationship. Raja Rao of course captures the traditional Indian ideal of the sacrosanct home and of the holy family bonds. In The Serpent and the Rope Ramaswamy's Indian family (with Little Mother as its sustaining principle) is contrasted with Ramaswamy's attempted family life with Madeleine; in Narayan's novels the family is the base from which character study proceeds,¹ even though the traditional ideal seems to be in the process of decay (Narayan's ambivalent attitude toward

¹William Walsh, A Human Idiom, p.131.

children,² for example, is seen by comparing the god-like children of The English Teacher and perhaps also of The Dark Room with the behaviour of the sons in any of the "father and son" novels); in Anand the theme of the rebellious child (stemming, as we have seen, from the author's own childhood experiences) recurs in a number of his novels.

Or else consider the attitude toward asceticism, which is really an aspect of the quest theme discussed. Although Ramaswamy and Ramakrishna Pai reject asceticism on the grounds that this also involves a rejection of the feminine principle, there nevertheless exists in these novels a profound awareness of the need for mental and emotional self-discipline. Narayan's characters like Raju and Mali get into trouble because they seem to have lost all concept of such discipline. Raju's salvation at the end of The Guide lies in his rediscovery of what had been lost. Anand rejects the old spiritual solution to the problems of human behaviour, ostensibly on the grounds that this sort of

²The traditional Indian attitude towards children is of course that "children are creative when they follow their instinctive impulse, unhampered by cold, restrictive reasoning" and that "they are nearer to the grasp of the eternal riddle of interrelated growth and decay than the adults who ponder on fixed purposes and results." Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought, p.93. In a personal interview in Adelaide (15/3/74) Narayan suggested that it is possible to regard children in two different ways -- idealistically and factually.

discipline lies beyond the capabilities of the majority of people;³ on the other hand he seems to substitute in its place a doctrine of bhakti-yoga which entails devotion to important human needs and ideals.

Or else the topic of Satyagraha. In Kanthapura Gandhi is the religio-political cynosure who appears in spirit though not in flesh; but in Untouchable, The Sword and the Sickle and also in Waiting for the Mahatma Gandhi appears in person. In Rao's book he is associated with mountain symbolism, since the mountain penetrates the upper lofty levels of human aspiration. Narayan's novel has been misread by some as an irreverent side-swipe at Gandhi; if irreverent at all, the swipe is rather directed at certain self-professed "Gandhi-men" who acted without understanding their own minds and motives. Contrasting with Anand's portrayal of a rather cold and stuffily self-righteous (though awe-inspiring) individual, Narayan's Gandhi is more nearly a Father-figure. Thus in Rao's novel Gandhi remains as an ideal; in

³Berry, M.R. Anand, p.23. It should be noted that the problem of asceticism versus experience is very complex, and never easily resolved. Traditionally, the problem is resolved by the fourfold plan of life which relegates participation and withdrawal to separate successive phases in the life cycle. But so often in these novels we observe an individual attempting in his own way to reconcile the virtually irreconcilable! Sudhin Ghose in The Vermilion Boat sees this problem as the cause of fundamental personal difficulties in the lives of most Indians.

Narayan's novel he is a Father-figure, warm and human; while in Anand's novels he is rather cold and remote. Again, in Rao's novel politics and religion overlap; in Narayan's novel too politics and religion (or rather, "purpose in life") overlap (though the principle reason for this overlap seems to Sriram as Mr. Average, to have been lost and forgotten); while in Anand's novels politics and religion are in one sense completely incompatible where the old "orthodox" views are concerned, but in another more personal "religious" sense they are deliberately drawn together again.

Finally, the attitude toward the West. Rao's Ramaswamy tries to interpret the West in terms of ancient India; the flaw inherent in this reasoning is revealed in the irreconcilable positions of Ramaswamy and Madeleine. Likewise, Krishnan in The English Teacher and Mali in The Vendor of Sweets suggest or stand for criticisms of the British style of life and education. Anand, while condemning the white man's past history in India, believes that only a synthesis of the best from both cultures will begin to answer India's problems.

The point of these comparisons is to indicate more specifically the relative positioning of Rao, Narayan and Anand in general matters apart from a sense of Indian identity. In almost every case we notice that Rao takes the traditional view,

Anand the anti-traditional view, and Narayan a transitional view somewhere in between.

2) Style

In this movement upward from the literary deeps into the literary shallows we eventually have to consider the relative styles of these writers. I think that perhaps the most remarkable and surprising aspect of this subject is the fact that style does not seem to follow the same direction as indicated in the above comparisons; or at least, the picture is far more complex. In Rao's novels simplicity is overlain by technical sophistication;⁴ in Narayan's novels we encounter a rather flat journalistic prose style⁵ instead of the sparkle we generally as-

⁴Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction distinguishes between the modern novelist's technique of "showing" and the older novelist's technique of "telling", though he describes these as tendencies rather than as clear-cut distinctions. In terms of "telling" and "showing", of authorial intrusion and authorial self-effacement, Raja Rao is clearly more "modern" than Narayan or Anand.

⁵This remark is not meant to be seriously deprecative -- though William Walsh does perhaps go too far when he refers to Narayan's language as "beautifully adapted to communicate a different, and Indian sensibility." (A Human Idiom, p.129). Ved Mehta refers to Narayan's "unpretentious, almost unliterary novels" (John is easy to Please, p.136) and I think this comes nearer the mark. V.Y. Kantak speaks of Narayan's "meagre means, scanty resource, thinness of tone -- but great power" ("The Achievement of R.K. Narayan," p.133). Narayan has described himself as a hurried writer with "little sense of style" (John is easy to Please, p.159).

sociate with satire; and in Anand's novels we frequently find a gospel of revolution couched in a most "reactionary" kind of language.

I referred earlier to the fact that these novels all manage to combine elements of realism with elements of (metaphysical) idealism. Despite Raja Rao's major preoccupations his novels abound in detail -- that is, particularized and concrete detail. Kanthapura is in one sense a tour de force of literary realism. In the introductory pages of this novel the reader is told everything he might possibly wish to know about the village of Kanthapura -- its geographical, historical, meteorological, horticultural and other habitual conditions. The pages are full of proper nouns, the names of people, places and events; this in conjunction with the narrator's elliptical and uncompromising story-telling manner lend a persuasive sense of realism and tangibility. Rao's other novels are also instinct with tangible life; even where "things" are symbols there is little appreciable lessening of their visual impact as "things."

Narayan's use of particular detail is often puzzling. One sometimes wonders at the precise purpose behind Narayan's microscopic photographic descriptions. Consider this passage describing Krishnan's grooming routine taken from The English Teacher:

I had to wait in the bathroom passage for some time, all the cubicles were engaged. Behind the doors, to the tune of falling water a couple of boys were humming popular film songs. I paced the passage with the towel round my neck. It was a semidark, damp place, with a glass tile giving it its sole lighting. "I shall soon be rid of this nuisance," I reflected, "when I have a home of my own. Hostel bathrooms are hell on earth.... [God said to his assistants, 'Take this man away to hell', and they brought him down to the hostel bathroom passage, and God said, 'torture him', and they opened the room and pushed him in.... No, no, at this moment the angels said 'the room is engaged'.... God waited as long as a god can wait and asked 'Have you finished' and they replied 'still engaged', and in due course they could not see where their victim was, for grass had grown and covered him completely while he waited outside the bathroom door. This promises to be a good poem. Must write it some day...."] At this moment a door opened and someone came out dripping. It was a student of the second-year class. He asked agitatedly: "Sir, have I kept you waiting long?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, but how could you come out before finishing that masterpiece of a song?" The other held the door ostentatiously open and I passed in.

I was back in my room. I applied a little hair-cream, stood before the small looking glass hanging by the nail on the wall, and tried to comb. The looking glass was in the southern wall and I could hardly see my face. "Nuisance," I muttered, picked up the glass, and looked for a place to hang it on -- not a place. Light at the window struck me in the face and dazzled. "The room is full of windows," I muttered. "These petty annoyances of life will vanish when I have a home of my own. My dear wife will see that the proper light comes at the proper angle." I finally put the looking glass down on the table. It had a stand which would not support it. I picked up Taine's History of Literature and leaned the glass against it. "Taine every time," I muttered and combed my hair back, interrupting the operation for a moment to watch the spray from the comb wet-dotting the covers of books and notebooks on the table. I paused for a moment gazing at my face in the glass. "This is how, I suppose, I appear to that girl and the little one. Yet they have confidence that I shall be able to look after them and run a home!" (pp.19-20)

In an obvious way many of the details described in this relate

to Krishnan's transformation from a man worried by pettiness (like having to wait at the bathroom, or having to prop up the mirror) to a man quite beyond such limitations. Even so, the author's eagle eye follows and records each move and each utterance in a surprising degree of detail. What we get is the exact sequence of events -- the bathing, the combing, the observation in the mirror, the under-the-breath mutters, the pauses -- in fact everything, as though all of these details are meant to be equally important. The peculiar linear and non-composite nature of Narayan's writing of the kind witnessed here is equally evident in the larger design of his books which tend to read almost like a single protracted chapter on a given subject. The danger inherent in this approach is that where humour fails to keep the action alive (as perhaps in this very case) this deliberate rendition of life's trivia is likely to ensnare the author into triviality himself.⁶

Another feature of Narayan's style in this passage is its directness, the brevity of sentence units, the relative lack

⁶Whereas William Walsh in *A Human Idiom*, p.136, speaks of the "permanence of objects" in Narayan's descriptions, V.Y. Kantak in "The Achievement of Narayan" p.134-5, sees R.K. Narayan's use of detail as "a peculiar piety towards existence." I suggest that there are several or more orders of "objectivization" ranging from abstract symbol to relatively insignificant concrete detail.

of subordinate clauses, and so on. In a way this reductive simplicity bears something akin to the kind of "primitivism" I have spoken about in connection with Rao's novels. The ritualistic repetitiveness of fullstops and capital letters together with these other features tends at times to resemble similar effects in Rao's prose, such as the description in Kanthapura of coolies marching toward the Skeffington Coffee estate (partly quoted on p.102). Angus Fletcher, in a study of allegorical prose style, uses the word "parataxis" to designate features similar to the ones I have described, and "hypotaxis" to designate the opposite kind of style characterized in the extreme by Henry James and dependent on syntactic complexities.⁷ Anand is of course closer to the hypotactic style in view of the architectonic complexity and the self-conscious formalism (as distinct from ritualism) of his usual prose.

⁷Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (New York : Cornell University Press, 1964), p.162. It is noteworthy that C.M. Bowra discusses similar paratactic effects in his book Primitive Song, (London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), and Paul Ricoeur in The Symbolism of Evil refers to the fact that "according to the phenomenology of religion...ritual action and mythical language taken together point beyond themselves to a model, an archetype, which they imitate or repeat" p.166. In view of this last observation parataxis might perhaps be regarded as the stylistic reflection of the kind of yantric model we have discussed.

3) Myth

In her chapter "Myth as Technique"⁸ Meenakshi Mukherjee discusses the Indo-English novelist's use of myth and archetype, a subject which has direct bearing on the question of identity. She finds that there are at least three ways in which writers utilize traditional Indian sources. First, a novelist may consciously or unconsciously draw on a particular (generally well-known) motif or legend and use this either as a structural parallel to his own story or else for the purpose of digression and extension; or else he may rely on a combination of both methods. Then there are "certain archetypal figures, situations and relationships that recur in novel after novel."⁹ And again there are descriptions of "rites and rituals which strictly speaking do not form part of myth but provide a frame of reference."¹⁰ She concludes, however, that the "weaving in of myths, legends and rituals, will not by itself give a novel a special stature unless there is an underlying design holding together all the digressions"¹¹ and she quotes David McMutchion's criticism of

⁸In The Twice Born Fiction, pp.132-67.

⁹Ibid., p.137.

¹⁰Ibid., p.139. The abstract myth values implicit in the yantra model would fall into this category.

¹¹Ibid., p.139.

Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope where he complains that Rao either does not or cannot control his material.

If Raja Rao uses myth for digressional extensions and if "the structural unity of The Serpent and the Rope is based more on a philosophical concept than on a mythical parallel"¹² then it is necessary to show what this underlying concept or "basic form," consists of. Apart from the Rama-Sita and Radha-Krishna motifs (along with other interpolated tales) and apart from the all-pervading sense of ritual and ceremony, there is an underlying cosmic plan which may be regarded as a diagrammatic or concretized version of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy.¹³ The yantra, discussed in the first chapter, corresponds in essence with Mark Schorer's definition of myth as "a large, controlling image which gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary

¹²The Twice Born Fiction, p.150.

¹³Harry Slochower writes, "the myth addresses itself to the problem of identity, asking "who am I?" And it proceeds to examine three questions that are organically related: "Where do I come from?", "Where am I bound?". and "What must I do now to get there?" In mythic language, the problems deal with Creation, with Destiny and with the Quest.... Every epoch has its own myth which provides the center of its life, gives the tone, manner and rhythm to its existence, permeates its institutions and thought, its art, science, religion, politics, its psychology and its folkways -- that is, the myth organizes the values of its epoch." Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1970), pp.15-17. For the present purpose I am substituting the word "nation or "culture" for Slochower's "epoch."

life."¹⁴ The notion of "myth" is generally associated with pre-history or with "beginnings," though used in the above sense it has a wider range of reference encompassing the experience of any age, or of all ages, where a hypothetical model serves as an organizing concept and helps explain human (and/or supra-human) behaviour. Schorer's definition of myth suggests a magnitude of vision perhaps bordering on the cosmic, and it is just such a larger and all-encompassing concept of "myth" which I feel is needed when we attempt to discuss Indian identity. We are not so much concerned about individual myths as particular motifs but rather about an individual's wholeness of response to the world about him.¹⁵ All three of our novelists -- Rao, Narayan and Anand -- draw on some such basic myth, on some "large controlling image," which gives character and direction to their work.

Raja Rao's assumption (suggested in the attitude of his

¹⁴Mark Schorer, William Blake (New York : Henry Holt & Co., 1946), p.27.

¹⁵Myth exists, as Paul Ricoeur says, "at a lower level than any narration or gnosis." But underlying myth is a symbolic mode which is no more than a "consciousness of self." The Symbolism of Evil, pp.6-9. It is this kind of radical symbol that I have in mind, a symbol reflecting the awareness of oneself in relation to the world about one. This connection of radical symbol and the concept of myth seems to be suggested in Northrop Frye's definition of myth as "fictions and metaphors that identify aspects of human personality with the natural environment." A Study of English Romanticism (New York : Random House, 1968), p.4. Myth is a "bridge" in the yantric sense.

narrators) of a particular sort of universe which, quite apart from the presence or absence of specific myths and legends, lends a distinctive sense of national or cultural identity to his works. Of course the exact nature of the concept differs slightly from novel to novel on account of the different narrator-types. In Kanthapura the narrator is an elderly Indian villager who responds to the circumscribed but integrated life style of her village with a "primitive" immediacy, simplicity and wholeness. The integrity of her world depends on the fact that symbols (of the Goddess, of Moorthy, etc.,) do mean what they appear to mean rather than hold some obscure ulterior meaning to be deduced from some other more potent level of reality.¹⁶ But the latter is more nearly the case with Ramaswamy in The Serpent and the Rope; for it is clear that in Ramaswamy's personal life (before the start of events described fully in the novel) he had rebelled against, or cast aside, the strict injunctions of Brahminism not to go across the black waters and not to marry a foreigner. Ramaswamy is a man in search of a tradition he was at one time on the point of relinquishing. He must try to rediscover what the grandmother in Kanthapura has

¹⁶ Hence her world is "mythic" rather than "allegorical;" in myth theme and plot tend to coincide, in allegory they tend to diverge.

always known, but the task is made extra difficult because of his greater intellectuality which allows him the more freedom for doubt. Symbols in Ramaswamy's life take on a greater intensity than they do for the grandmother since they have to do more work to bridge the sacred-secular division which characterizes Ramaswamy's lapse from the "mythic" wholeness typical of the villagers of Kanthapura.¹⁷ The primitive Truth is sought at a higher level of consciousness. In The Cat and Shakespeare various symbols are consciously abstracted and intensified even further; and yet they are paradoxically also more imminently capable of reabsorption back into the primitive source of their origin. Whereas much of Ramaswamy's more devotional energy seems to be dissipated by virtue of the extensiveness of his search, and in the vast range of material which comes under his scrutiny, it is the intensive viewpoint of the narrators of Kanthapura and The Cat and Shakespeare which seems to be the more effective in view of the stated goals. Perhaps in an approximate way Raja Rao's three novels mark the three stages in the evolution and involution of human consciousness, a complete round in the passage away from and back to God. At any rate the various levels of

¹⁷P. Lal thus distinguishes between classical and romantic modes: "while romantic literature is a search for myth, classical is an embodiment of it." From "Search for Values in Literature," Studies in Australian and Indian Literature, p.137.

consciousness in the three works occupy a world similarly conceived in all cases -- though conceived in different degrees or in different phases.

In Raja Rao's world images are not neutral objects or "things" but are symbols of some hidden Reality; with the novels of Narayan and Anand there is a movement toward an increasing neutrality of objects, to the extent that in Anand's works "reality" tends to correspond with the world of socio-economics. In Rao's novels we find symbols instead of "things," in Anand's work we more generally find "things" than symbols; and in Narayan's novels we find an equal mixture of the two. Narayan's symbolic archetypes continually raise their heads above his large level areas of neutral prose. The transformation of symbols into "things" signifies a certain de-sacralizing process in Narayan's novels in contrast to Rao's; on the other hand Narayan's fictive world clearly owes more to the influence of the Vedas with their gods, demons and others than to the Upanishads where the accent falls on a mystical non-dualism. Even so, the apparent dualism or pluralism of Narayan is deceptive, and in important moments like at the end of The English Teacher the ordinary world of separate distinct entities is seen to give way to an ultimate spiritual union as "the boundaries of...personalities suddenly dissolve[d]" (p.213). Turning to Anand one finds that despite the almost Balzacian reliance on objects as objects, Anand

strives for an imaginative realism or "expressionism" which is beyond mere photographic representation. His attempt to seek a synthesis of mind and matter, of body and soul, can be viewed in the light of Hindu traditionalism and also in the light of nineteenth century Western thought. Although the yantra, regarded as a mythic model, is not the determining plan in the works of Narayan and Anand the picture it represents is still to some degree adumbrated in the symbolism and cyclic progressions of Narayan's novels as in the expansive world (or larger) view of Anand; Anand seems to do little more than substitute or re-cast an alternative model and aetiology for the old one using a very similar mould in the process.¹⁸

I have said that the theme of religious quest (using "religious" in the broadest sense possible) is common to these three authors and in this preoccupation they fit squarely into the Indian metaphysical tradition. The quest for the Absolute, epitomized variously in the Buddha-myth or in the Rama-myth or else in the maithuna, belongs to an unbroken Indian tradition, though this tradition acquired additional momentum in the recent period of so-called Hindu Renaissance, and also an additional element of

¹⁸To borrow Paul Ricoeur's terms in The Symbolism of Evil, p.162, Anand "demythologizes" rather than "demythizes" the past: that is, he rejects the "false logos" (the old aetiology) in order to rediscover the underlying informing mythic experience -- and thereby creates a new logos or rationale of his own.

complexity in still more recent times as modern politics became inextricably bound up with religion in theory as in practice. Something of this complexity is evident in The Serpent and the Rope where, as we saw in the first chapter, Rao has utilized a complex symbolic formula in order to link personal identity with Brahminism or communal identity; then Brahminism with Brahman and the Self giving cosmic identity; and then the concept of Brahman and Self with the concept of "India" giving national identity. For Narayan the realization of one's personal identity means a harmonious relationship with one's fellows, giving a sense of communal identity; and Narayan's Malgudian community, iconographically crowned by the symbol of the temple, suggests the link with an Absolute or cosmic identity; in a more oblique way Narayan's Krishnan (in The English Teacher) seems to believe that the proper Indian Truth is something quite different from the sort of truths proliferated by Western education in India, and in this knowledge lies Krishnan's awareness of his national identity. In Anand's novels the search for self-perfection tends to be equated with social, political and economic questions; hence in a rough sense personal identity is equated with social, political and economic identities which themselves constitute a national identity; Anand's accent on a philosophy of humanism, of devotion to man, leads to a communal identity

which tends towards universality, or cosmic identity. The only real difference between Anand and the other two lies in the fact that in Anand's novels cosmic identity tends to be imaginative-metaphysical instead of more simply metaphysical.

4) Myth as Allegory

Myth becomes allegory when two conditions are fulfilled: when the highly integrated mythic vision has suffered some degree of disintegration such that it becomes possible to differentiate between separate levels or layers of meaning and significance; and when a mythic model serves expressly for instructional or educative purposes. The world of Kanthapura is highly mythical; in it there exists little distinction between "real" and "ideal." The world of The Serpent and the Rope, by contrast, shows a significant cleavage between separate biographical and metaphysical levels. The Cat and Shakespeare has the mythic tightness and integrity of Kanthapura rather than of The Serpent and the Rope, suggesting that Ramakrishna Pai tends to be closer than Ramaswamy to his goal of union with "God" in the overall view of the two books. To the extent that the yantra plan is held up as an example indicating the proper path to be followed, it serves something like an allegorical function. But because in the Indian situation religious aspiration and progress seem to depend more on internal realization than on external coercion

the "instructional" element is not quite so obvious.

A plainer kind of allegory can be seen in Narayan's novels. Although we usually think of Narayan's novels in terms of irony, allegory is really just the obverse side of the same coin. In Mr. Sampath,¹⁹ for example, Ravi is overcome by his love for a glamorous filmstar. The story is about the making of a film which is based on a traditional "burning of Kama" myth, a tale of temptation adapted for popular Indian movie-goer consumption. At a critical point in a described film rehearsal when the god Shiva is supposed to show his inner resistance to the female temptress by scorching her with the wisdom of his third eye, the real life Ravi in a similar situation cannot find the required inner fortitude and breaks out on a wild animal-like rampage which wrecks the film-studio. On examination of this situation it becomes clear that Ravi's lovelorn behaviour is a parody of the "burning of Kama" story; or in other words the plot of Narayan's novel gains its full meaning and its significance from the theme enacted in the film rehearsal. The novel's plot and its informing theme run a parallel course throughout the book; in this sense of moving in the same though parallel direction (Ravi's madness at the end of the nov-

¹⁹I offer this explanation bearing in mind William Walsh's criticism of Mr. Sampath as a novel "both uncertain in intention and queerly hump-backed in shape" (A Human Idiom, p.129).

el is a lesson against unbridled passion) the plot stands in allegorical relation to theme. However, the movement is not quite so simple as this, and not all just in one direction. For we have to remember that Ravi actually failed to do what the myth prescribes, which is to exert his own will and reason against destructive passion. There is thus also a counter movement against the congruity suggested by allegory: at the supreme moment in the traditional story when Shiva's virtuous behaviour is meant as a lofty example to people such as Ravi, Ravi suddenly behaves like a wild uncontrollable animal. And herein lies the irony and the humour of the situation. In fact, the humour tends to blot out all seriousness, as happens so often in Narayan. This ironical/allegorical scheme as outlined above can be reduced to a set of algebraic symbols: on one hand level A of the novel (plot) moves in the direction of, and is congruous with, level B of the novel (theme); on the other hand level A moves in a counter-direction to, and is incongruous with, level B. In the first case we have allegory, in the second case irony. The fact that both allegory and irony depend on the same or similar scaffold of parallels probably accounts for the often ambiguous tone of Narayan's stories; for sometimes we suspect seriousness behind obvious satire, and at other times we suspect an element of comedy where all seems otherwise quite seri-

ous.²⁰

Anand, in a late novel The Old Woman and the Cow, also inverts a traditional myth in order to expose its inadequacies; but whereas Ravi is seemingly punished with madness Anand's Gauri is applauded (by the author) for her courage. Because Anand refuses to follow certain traditional assumptions there can be no firm underlying allegorical plan. On the other hand I have argued that Anand does in fact rely on a large Hindu-like vision of the world, but it is a view where the old terms have simply been redefined. The very fact that Anand needs to use a traditional myth in order to invert it is an indication of a projected Indian identity. Moreover, it is this inversion, this counter-movement in the face of tradition, which creates a new kind of allegory -- a kind which might be called "allegory of rebellion" (like "The Lost Child") with its own path and its own values.²¹

On the subject of allegory it should be noted that there

²⁰As William Walsh puts it: "The serious and the comic flow in and out of one another throughout in an intricate, inseparable alliance." A Human Idiom, pp.133-34. William Walsh sees in Narayan's novels "an irony of recognition, not an irony of correction" (p.135); I believe both recognition and correction are involved.

²¹Perhaps "fable" would be a more precise description of Anand's stories in view of the less pronounced symbolism.

are certain other features in all of these novels which are often associated with the allegorical mode in Western fiction and art. I have spoken of the quest theme; the temptation theme in Mr. Sampath is also found in various forms in The Bachelor of Arts, The Dark Room, Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi and The Vendor of Sweets. In all of these novels it is the attraction of one of the central characters for a woman (often of low class or caste) which sets into motion a whole stream of subsequent events. At first glance The English Teacher looks like a special case since the female "temptress" is Krishnan's legitimate wife, and whose death sparks off his spiritual quest. But two points must be remembered: first, the symbolic agents of fate, destiny and disorder in Narayan's novels are frequently women; second, "woman" is often associated with "evil" in the more metaphysical than moral sense of Maya (as she is in Raja Rao's novels, and even in Anand's The Sword and the Sickle). Thus "woman" as symbol of evil is really just a part of a larger overall pattern of dialectical organization -- seen in all of the novels discussed as an opposition of Good and Evil, Ignorance and Enlightenment, etc.

One of the features of allegory is the psychomachia; and this is quite prominent in the work of Narayan and Rao. In both these authors a feeling of the internalization of apparently external events is heightened by the customary use of a first person narrative technique. In The Vendor of Sweets, for example, Jagan finds himself con-

fronted by two individuals one of whom is his uncontrollable son Mali (personifying Evil) and the other the stonemason (personifying Good). The two figures occur to him almost simultaneously in a moment of great personal mental confusion while he sits spinning. It is difficult to distinguish between these apparitions as facts (given by the author) and fictions whose symbolic value is invented and projected by Jagan.²²

²²Harry Slochower distinguishes Oriental mythology from Western mythopoesis in terms of cyclic return and cyclic progression respectively: "In primitive and Oriental mythology, rebirth generally constitutes return to the identical earlier form, an analogy to the never-varying order of the seasonal changes. In Western mythopoesis, rebirth depends on the extent to which the quest results in the hero's own questioning of his deviation. The furies which pursue Orestes, Oedipus and Dante, Don Quixote and Ahab are, in this sense, self-inflicted punishments. This self-questioning holds the promise of the hero's transformation.... Through it, he comes to recognize the symbolic values which are present in the very tradition he has violated. He is thereby moved to recast the function of his demon and realign himself with the wider interests of his group. In this way, he can become a culture hero. He now sees his supra-individual relation as complementing and fulfilling his individuality. Reintegration lies beyond individual autonomy. Return is not to the earlier starting point, for the hero's rebellion has re-created the authoritarian mode, has quickened and transformed its earlier sluggishness. In this sense, the culture hero acts for the others, becomes the instrument of social salvation, and his sacrifice makes him a blessed figure" (*Mythopoesis*, p.24). While Rao and Narayan have more to do with cyclic return and Anand with cyclic progression (creating a new substitute myth), it can be seen that even Rao and Narayan partake of Western mythopoesis: for instance, the furies which pursue Narayan's Jagan are also partly internalized, partly "self-inflicted punishments." Actually, such elements are also common to Hinduism, though it is true that the internal complexities of the human mind are not given the same sort of exclusive emphasis as tends to be the case in the more "psychological" West.

From a traditional Indian point of view there is perhaps nothing to choose between what might be regarded as separate aspects of the same and single truth. For I have suggested (in the case of Ramaswamy, for instance) that "human-ness" and symbolic value are not necessarily exclusive. One of the lessons inculcated by Narayan's stories is that life overflows into all categories, into Good as well as into Evil, and that exclusive choice is accordingly unrealistic. The internal truth is thus complementary to the external truth and the concept of psychomachia must be adjusted to account for both at once. One of the striking features of The Serpent and the Rope is the way in which the narrative reflects an equilibrium of subject and object in accordance with the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

The question of "destiny" is one which distinguishes Narayan from Anand. In Narayan's novels we find an almost imperceptible line dividing psychological probability from allegorical necessity. The "old Fate" as Anand often calls it, is seen in Narayan's novels at the level of symbolic personification, but also at the level of characterization since most of his characters seem to be driven by some "daemon" whether internal or external. The passivity of the hero (noted in connection with Ramaswamy in an earlier chapter) has to do with this daemonic compulsion which tends to nullify the effort of free

will and free choice. The dominance of necessity over probability is illustrated in The Guide where Raju, following a life of picaresque drifting, finds himself one day mistaken for a holy man as he takes refuge in a temple after being released from gaol. After a number of further mistakes he finds himself in a situation where he must commit himself to a social cause; in other words, he must become the real "guide" he had always only pretended to be. The novel represents a triumph of the improbable possibility over the probable impossibility, and hence demonstrates the operation of an external causality.²³ On the other hand, it is possible that the Indian might find Raju's transformation more plausible than a Westerner; and in this case it would be clear that some allowance has to be made for a meta-psychological syndrome which is not found in the West.

Although Anand takes pains to refute the concept of an external causality, we have seen the residual shades of an Indian fatalism in most of his novels. In Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare the question of causality is the butt of parody:

²³ Thus Edwin Gerow says: "The curse, the error, the trick of fate is the only dramatic device which the Indian storyteller can come up with as an operational explanation of this relation. The story thus is not "plot" or development, but merely complication -- infinite protraction of error -- until such time as the curse is lifted and the characters rediscover themselves in their true and original light." "The Quintessential Narayan," p.7.

how can one event be described in terms of another if all events are symbolic and take place in illo tempore, so that "before" and "after" lose their meaning? Ramaswamy too is very much the passive pawn of circumstance even though (or perhaps because) The Serpent and the Rope is based on biography. Some of the major events of the novel -- his father's death, the coronation, his sister's marriage -- are fortuitous and unforeseen. The question thus posed is, 'If these novels are in so many ways associated with allegory why is the didactic or instructional element not more pronounced?'

The question has already been answered in this discussion: we are dealing with an Indian rather than a Western allegory. The quest, the psychomachia of conflicting moral or cosmic opposites, the external kind of fate -- all these are perhaps common to a greater or less degree in both East and West. What is different is the tone of disinterestedness, the freedom from threats and coercion, the broad expansiveness of viewpoint; what is interesting (by contrast with the usual Western novel) is the way extremes of tradition and modernity co-exist without conflict.

In fact, we have been discussing novels containing all kinds of extremes -- extremes of realism and idealism, indulgence and asceticism, object and symbol, as well as the moral and cosmic opposites previously mentioned. It is the synthesis, or at-

tempted synthesis, of all these elements and of all the various aspects of identity discussed which results in a special kind of fiction worthy, I believe, of serious attention.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction I raised the question of criteria in connection with the study of Indo-English fiction. In a way I have perhaps evaded the central implication in my generalization that this area of fiction may, if one so wishes, be appraised in terms of an essential Indianness or non-Indianness. This is because I have obviously selected authors whose works have lent themselves to my special purpose. In this study I have examined a number of novels in some detail and my findings are not necessarily transferable to other works unmentioned.

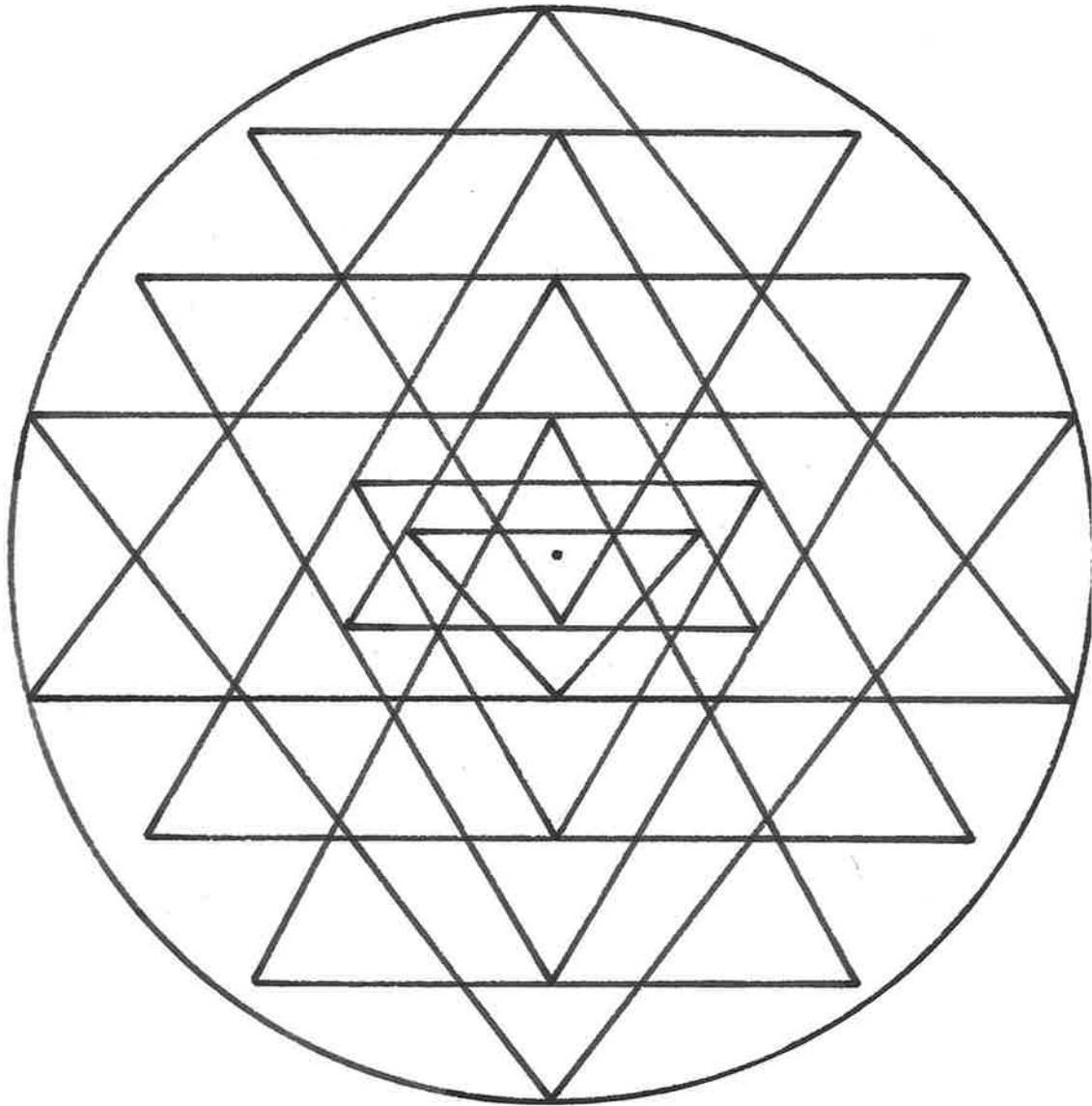
But what about these other authors? Could one distinguish an Indian consciousness in the novels of Kamala Markandaya absent in the novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala, for instance? I must admit that at this stage I do not know, though I tend to think that a carefully designed investigation along similar lines would help clarify the position, perhaps to the point of an affirmative answer. But the fact does remain that there will still exist a sizable body of writing, not only in English but also in the regional languages, where any firm answers to such a question will be almost impossible. Between the two extremes of Indian and Western conception there is room for an infinite number of varying combinations and conceptual shades.

I stress the point that I have deliberately restricted my scope to an examination of particular authors, particular works, and examined from a particular point of view. I feel that what I have said will supplement rather than contradict what many other writers have said before me. There still remains a lot of interesting work to be done. My own method might be extended to include additional authors like Markandaya, Jhabvala, Rajan, etc. I see plenty of room for comparisons of a more direct East-West kind, such as between the authors discussed in this study and writers like Kipling and Forster. All such "cross-cultural" work would help establish clearer boundaries and clearer criteria. There again, the whole question of "identity" can be taken in a number of various ways, of which national consciousness and individualism are but two. Consciousness of region, of class (or caste), or of unique contemporary affairs or events would all have to be included under the heading of "aspects" in a comprehensive account.

In the foregoing chapters I have dwelt on a number of structural and symbolic components of the selected novels, since here, in these formal elements, I feel one might trace an otherwise undefinable aura of Indianness at its source; and one might at the same time provide grounds for distinction between genuine and gratuitous nationalism. Hence I hope that my account of Raja Rao and

R.K. Narayan might illustrate their profound reliance on standards and values that are distinctly Indian in origin. And in the case of Mulk Raj Anand, I hope that those who have charged this writer with ersatz Indianness might have second thoughts about this aspect of Anand's identity.

If so, my goals will have been largely achieved.



The Mandala. [after cover of G. Tucci's The Theory and Practice of the Mandala, (London : Rider & Co., 1969.)]

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