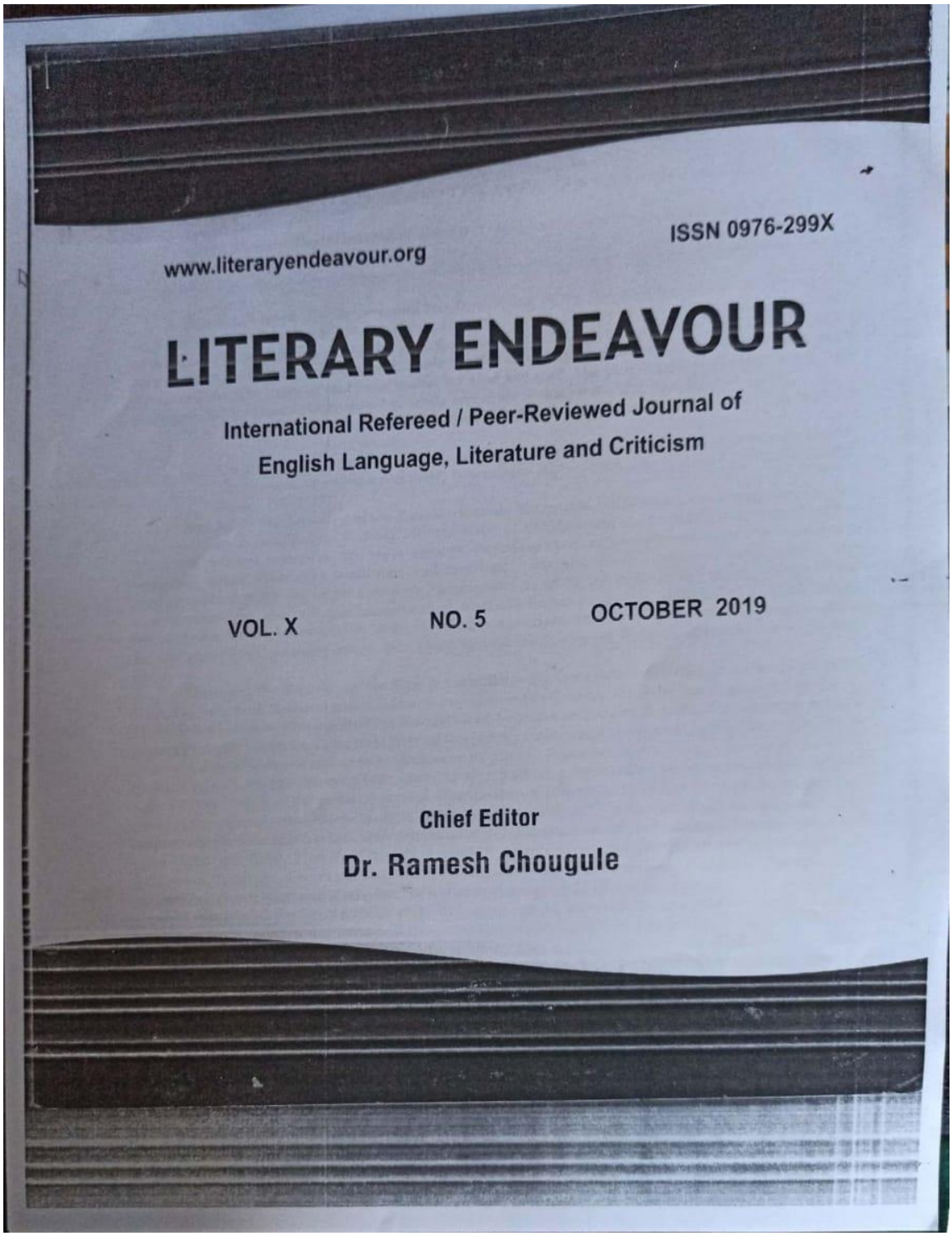
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# RAJA RAO'S *THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE* AS A METAPHYSICAL NOVEL

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Raja Rao's novel *The Serpent and the Rope* is one of the finest philosophical novels in Indian English fiction. This appeared 1960, and it received the Central Sahitya academy award in 1963. The title of the novel *The Serpent and the Rope* comes from Shankar's idiom. It tells that many people think that the rope is taken for serpent. Likewise, the limited self is often regarded as the individual soul. This is the aspect of God. The 'serpent' and 'rope' stands for God and soul. The title is very symbolic. This is from Rao's guru Sri Atmananda Guru from his words 'waves are nothing but water, so is the sea.'

M.K. Naik who has written a critical work on Raja Rao for Swayne Publishers, New York, observes that,

> The form of *The Serpent and the Rope* shows a successful blend of Indian and western modes. The inspiration for the novel partly comes from Rilke's book *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. (Naik 15)

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is variously interpreted. The western readers and critics view it as a conflict in immigrants. It deals with the issue of immigration. G. Ambika thinks migration has historical, political, economic and social reasons, including the issue of higher education in the western countries, better existential conditions and marriage. Here the author shows his own plights and predicaments through the major character Ramaswamy as an Indian migrant in France, Europe. What more Ramaswamy, also called as Rama for short, marries a French teacher; and worse than that he divorces her later after having bourn two children. He remains a bachelor and joins a Vedic guru's ashram in India for self-realization. So many events take place rapidly, disclosing the hazards of Hindu life in modern times.

The novel *The Serpent and the Rope* is a spiritual work. Here an Indian Brahmin settles down in the West. He faces both time and space. Ramaswamy is from South India. He is the descendant of a medieval Vedantin Vidyaranya (who inspired the foundation of Vijayanagar Empire in 1336). Ramaswamy is but a research scholar in France. Later he is married to a history teacher and intellectual called Madeleine. Their first child dies of ill-health and costs its shadow on its parents. Ramaswamy feels happy only when he visits his kindred in India. Ramaswamy later meets Savithri Rathod, a north Indian princess who is but engaged with a Pratap Singh of the political service. Ramaswamy's adherence to Indian heritage impresses her. Savithri likes Ramaswami immediately. So Ramaswamy after his visit to Savithri, feels that his marriage is inadequate. He feels that Savithri is an embodiment of Indian culture, while Madeleine is a stranger. Two other exiles join them. They are Georges, a white Russian convert to Catholicism and Lezo a Spanish follower of Buddhism. Lezo's belief in Buddhism arouses Madeleine's interest in Buddhism. Ramaswamy tells her Buddhism is not an old religion, but a historical thing, while Hinduism is eternal.

Later Madeleine bears another child. This time, we see Ramaswamy enlightening Savithri about Vedic religion. Somehow, the unhappy Ramaswamy stays with Savithri at Cambridge in England. The two Ramaswamy and Savithri are made close to each other. This is too strange but true. Back home, he finds Madeleine utterly unhappy. He regrets it. So, he plans to visit India in the name of his stepsister Saroja's marriage. Unfortunately, Madeleine's second child dies. One day, Savithri marries Pratap Singh, and this disheartens Ramaswamy. Maybe, he wanted to marry Savithri. Meanwhile, Ramaswamy has an affair with

So the idea of literature as anything but a spiritual experience or sadhana-a much better word-is outside my perspective. I really think that only through dedication to the absolute or metaphysical principle can one be fully creative. Literature as Sadhana is the best life for a writer. The Indian tradition which links the word with the absolute (subdabrahman) has clearly shown the various ways by which one can approach literature, without the confusions that arise in the mind of the Western writer viewing life as an intellectual adventure. Basically, the Indian outlook follows a deeply satisfying, richly rewarding and profoundly metaphysical path.

All this may sound terribly Indian, but it is not so really. Valery, Rilke, and Kafka, for instance, are as close to this view as Tagore in looking upon literature as *sadhana*. *(Mittapalli 118)*

Raja Rao himself surrendered to a guru in Kerala and the novel appeared after that in the 1960s. S.S. Agarwalla observes,

*The Serpent and the Rope*, therefore, contains the myths of Shiva, Parvathi and Nandi, Radha, Krishna and Durvasa, or the legends of Satyakama and Ramadevi, the princess of Avanti, of Jagannatha Bhatta and Shahjehan's daughter, or of Ishwara Bhatta's emphasising to his Brahma Bhatta the importance of retelling of Rama's story every Saturday, as well as the Chinese fable of Wang-Chu and Chang-fi, or the classical myths of Demster, Poseidon and Ulysses, or the tale of Tristan and Iseult. At some places the legend of one civilization is blended into that of another while at other places the mythical incident is related to the historical one. The love of Iseult for Tristan is analogous to that of Radha for Krishna or of Savithri for Satyavan. (Aggarwalla 125)

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