Sri Aurobindo says “A Mantra is the highest and intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression. Although poetry is the mantra, only when it is the voice of inmost truth and is couched in the power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. Raja Rao's belief in the emergence of the word from absolute and its final merger into it, though basically platonic and Indian in origin seems to have been derived directly from Sri Aurobindo and K. Coomaraswamy.

Raja Rao in his article titled “BOOKS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED ME ”mentions Anand K. Coomaraswamy as the true representative of India and Indianness in the west. Yes it is worth mentioning here that Coomaraswamy has in his, scholastic analysis of spiritual significance of art and beauty. His essays on 'Figures of speech and Figure of thought', Literary Symbolism', 'Samvega-aesthetic shock', 'Hindu view of art', 'That Beauty is a state', 'The Dance of Shiva' must have profoundly influenced Raja Rao's own conception of art and artist. Besides the impact of saints, mystics and aestheticians Raja Rao has also been influenced by important works of authors, Indian and European. The combined impact of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Brihastha Ratnakara compiled by Vasudeva Sastry Panishikkar enlivened his mystic cast of mind.

Obviously the philosophical and literary influences which Raja Rao has assimilated have lent to him a quality of mind that distinguishes him from the other novelists and has also given to his style, a typical trait born of the combined forces of simple narrative and profound thinking equipped with the mental endowments of a philosopher and a realist. Raja Rao has been able to apply his metaphysical erudition and mystic insights to the interpretation of the reality of life in the art. The blend of metaphysical and realistic view of life has enabled him to depict the rope and the serpent together and also to juxtapose the realm of cat and the realm of shakespeare for a greater understanding of the either at a level at
which they interact.

The Serpent And the Rope published in 1960, established Raja Rao's reputation as a philosophically complex novelist. He holds that one can realm one's metaphysical entity by a keen perception of primordial Indian reality. As The Serpent and The Rope is deeply rooted in Indian philosophy, it depicts man's quest for self realization. The theme of the novel as Raja Rao observes is the futility and barrenness of man in human existence. When man has no deep quest and no thirst for the ultimate, man's life here is Samsara in an august mission to find the absolute.

Ramaswamy, the protagonist asserts that the world, whether real or unreal is a departure from Sankara's description of the world. The world of experience which is full of contradictions and is an object of knowledge cannot be described as unreal. Raja Rao's use of The Serpent and The Rope analogy is no doubt derived from Non Dualistic Philosophy of Sankara. Sankara states in 'Vivekachudamani' "The rope is supposed to be snake only so long as the mistake lasts and there is no more snake when illusion has vanished. It is due to nescience that the rope appears to be the snake. We see a serpent echos Sankara's pronouncement that man in the dark mistake a piece of rope for a snake and run away from it, frightened and troubling. The Dark is symbolic of ignorance (Avidya) and the world is the effect of Maya. Raja Rao agrees with Sankara that Maya conceals the real (rope)and projects the unreal(snake). Hence Raja Rao maintains that individuals see only with serpent's eyes.

Ramaswamy suffers from several human frailities such as sexual morbidity, craze for material advancement and sense of possessiveness etc., The novel appears to suggest that the canalisation of libido is the physiological need of man. The protagonist believes that most of the aesthetics devolop concupscience despite their lion cloth, kamandala and their stick or naked feet. He says that most of the monks who observe celibacy become ghosts in their next life.

The narrator observes that the problem of Ramaswamy is not for the psychoanalyst to explain but for the metaphysician to name. Raja Rao
therefore dwells upon metaphysics to bring out the conflict of the characters. In Cat and Shakesphere too the novelist metaphysically suggests the canalisation of libido. 'Ramakrishna pai's boils' which are symbolic of sexual repression are cured not by allopathic supression but by an effective method of the distillation of poison contained in them.

Here in The Serpent and the Rope Ramaswamy denounces Nazism primarily because he believes it must have been born of a he-principle. The Jews and Chinese win his applause as they uphold the utility of sex and accept the reality of the world. Since marriage and sex are highly acceptable in the Jewish society, The Jews in his opinion are 'great world builders'. Ramaswamy recounts how men in Cambridge prefer to marry jewesses for their openness in sex. He says savitri's Jewish friend who is free in sex appears so fascinating to an Englishman of the bluest blood that he intensely falls in love with her. Ramaswamy's recollection of Jewish boy's desire to have Jewish girls for pleasure conform sensuality.

The hero perceives truth not in vedantic metaphysics but in extra-marital relationship, the offshoot of the vama-marga Tantric system which comes closer to the liberal western idea of unification of the flesh and the spirit. He transfigures vedantic thought into Tantric truth in accordance with the flitting exigencies of his nature. Hence the juxtaposition of Vedanta and Tantra in The Serpent And The Rope.

Tantra has often been misunderstood as a system that implies a state of intellectual and moral degeneration. It is commonly assumed that occult power and sex are the primary concerns of Tantrism. But Tantra is more than a mysterious ritual of sexual love. According to swamy Sivananda ' Tantra explains the knowledge concerning the Tattva (Truth and Brahmin) and Mantra (mystic syllable). Heinrich Zimmer states that ' A Tantric yogi seeks to realise the Paramatman, the supreme being by withdrawing his mind from sense objects and practicing meditation in a fixed posture.

K. C, Pandey however holds Kaulism, the Tantra propounded by Abhinava Gupta in the 10th century A.D is the means of acquiring Moksha (liberation) through bhoga (pleasure) of the world. Prof Woodrove also consider
Tantra, the appropriate treatment for those who long for drink or lust for women. He maintains that man caught to employ these very poisons... wine, women, fish, meat, mudra and accessories, to eradicate the poison in human system. Here I remind a famous Tyagaraja Swamy Kriti in Suddadhanyasi raga, it goes like this. "yentha nerchina yentha juusina yentha varalyna Kantha daasule” which mean ‘Even the greatest men are slaves of women’

The attainment of the occult, the worship of the Mother Goddess, the invocation of the God and Goddess in the aspect of a Father-Mother relationship, the experience of the man and woman are some of the characteristics that are common to the Hindu as well as Buddhist Tantric literature. However the worship of the naked women, which forms part of Pankatattva ritual is generally ascribed to Vamamaraga Tantra.

In The Serpent And the Rope, the Tantric elements are as important as the Vedantic strands woven in the novel. Th main characters are fascinated by occultic power. K.R. Ramaswamy observes that Black Virgin Saint Quen still cures dreadful diseases by three circumbulations with a stick of oak and recitation of mantras. Medeleine propitations Black Mandonna who answer all her questions. By meditations she acquires the power of curing diseases and working miracles. She cures the son of Madame Fellandier by just giving days during her meditations. Similarly, Ramaswamy under the influence of his grand father, Kittanna, dreams of miraculous performances.

“I can think that a building may just decide to fly or just Stalin may become a Saint or that all the Japanese have become Buddhist monks or that Mahatma Gandhi is walking with us now I sometimes feel I can make the railway line stand up or the elephant bear its youngone in twenty four days I can see an aeroplane float over a mountain and sit carefully on a peak or I could go to Fathefur-sikri and speak to the emperor Akbar It would be difficult for me not to think, when I am in Versailles, that I hear the uncouth voice of Roy Sobeil or in Meaux that Bossuet rubs his
snuff in the palm of his hand
as they still do in India and offers a
pinch to me
I can sneeze with it and hear
Bossuet make one more of his
funeral orations”

Ramaswamy falls in a magic reverie as he talks to the dead. He also thinks of eating those herbs yogis eat too satiate their hunger. After taking the herbs they do not need any food for six months. Such ideas of Tantric practices interspersed in the novel can be traced back to Vamamarga as well as Buddhist Tantra. The Hevajra Tantra specifically make mention of magical performances by Tantrists who by invoking the spirits can destroy enemie armies or bring about happiness and prosperity. The Tantric literature in fact centres around the Kadi and Hadi methods of worships. The commonly accepted orthodox view is that Kadi mantras are aimed at worldly or magical success. Hadi mantras on the other hand are said to attain nirvana.

The delienation of the Goddess's beauty in the novel is essentially drawn from Tantrism because the Tantric texts like Soundarya Lahari describes the physical perfection of the diety.

Ramaswamy's observation that women is the Earth, air, ether, sound is based on the description of the Mothe Goddess in Mahanirvana Tantra.

“The art air
Thou art the ether
Thou art Mahatattva”.

The Tantric idea of worship of male and female dieties is also projected in The Serpent and The Rope. The most through going Tantrists worship gods and their Shaktis together. In Tibetan Tantrism the representation is the method of heightening wisdom or realising emptiness or nirvana. Inspired by the Buddhist Tantrism, Ramaswamy often calls upon Siva and Parvati together. The song sung by Ramaswamy on the eve of Saroja's (his half sister) marriageis a monosyllabic pointer to the conjugal union of gods and goddesses as also of men and women.

“I am He
Thou art She
I am the harmony
Thou the words
I am the sky
Thou art Earth
Let us twain become One
Let us bring forth offspring”.

The delienation of the Goddess's beauty in the novel is essentially drawn from Tantrism because the Tantric texts like Soundarya Lahari describes the physical perfection of the diety.
This assertion alludes to the Hindu Tantric thought that Shiva is inseparable from Shakti. It affirms the fundamental principle of Tantric mode that upholds Shakti and Shiva as The Twin Bases of the Creation.

Raja Rao's principal characters idealise their beloveds and worship them as the emblem of Shakti or the female principle. Ramaswamy conveys the idea of quoting the famous saying of Yagnavalkya that “A Husband loves wife for the sake of the self in her”.

Shakta Tantra forbids us from harming women and enjoins on us to worship and honour them for they are the Earthly representatives of the Goddess Amba. This system calls women SHAKTIS and says, "To illtreat a Shakti that is woman is a crime. Thus Ramaswamy's extaltation of Savitri in The Serpent and The Rope and Pai's eulogy of Shanta in The Cat and The Shakespere are consonant with the principle of Shakta Tantra.

Raja Rao's belief that women is the source of sensous and aesthetic pleasure to man has Tantric contours. The narrator's appreciation of Saroja's beauty is based on Monistic Tantra school of Kaulism that upholds aesthetic richness of an object as the source of lending bliss to the perceiver. Raja Rao portrays women as mystery. Sita, one of the characters of his stories remarks that-Men can never understand Women. I present the same view in the lyrical grandeur of a popular Telugu film lyricist Veturi Sundara rammurti

“Bavi lothu inthani telusu
Nadhula lothu konthe telusu
adagunde lothu entho
lokamlo evariki telusu
e nimisham premistundo
e nimisham pagabaduthundo
eppudela Maruthundho
terlisina magavadu ledu”

Which mean

“One can estimate
the depth of a well
the depth of a river to some extent
but none in the world knows the
depth of a woman's heart
No man can understand when a
woman really loves or discards”

Raja Rao alludes to the Buddhist
Tantric mandalas in the novel. The construction of mandala is a ritual characteristic of Tantric philosophy. In the Tibetan Tantric lore, the entry into mandala means illumination. Ramaswamy expresses his desire to sit in meditation, draw the swastika on the wall, decorate the sanctuary with mandalas, light the sacrificial hearth and walk around Agni. His recollection of Mother Bhagirati’s Tantra ritual covering the threshold with red lead and drawing sacred designs before the main portals including pentagons of lotuses and many a mandala again reveals his desire to enter mandala.

Medeleine who in the beginning declares herself to be a Buddhist, later designs Tantric mandala and we find during incense everywhere. The Tantric mandala serves as a support for meditation and the Tantrist over it as a protection from mental distractions. As Savitri often closes her eyes gone absent minded and relapses into silence. She obviously shows her readiness for meditation or entrance into mandala.

Several characters in the novel attempt to enter the state of no-mind, which is from the nucleus of Tantric Sadhana. No-mind in Buddhist Tantrism signifies the expansion of mind to large immensity so as to acquire freedom and naturalism and at last the ultimate joy. To reach the state of no-mind one has to cleanse the arteries through devices like Pranayama, withdraw the mind from ordinary preoccupations and provide it with new directions. It is by acquiring the condition of no-mind that one can perceive the truth known as Isness in Tantra. Raja Rao upholds isness as truth which he believes in synonymous with I or bliss.

“Therefore what is truth, I asked
Isness is the truth, she answered.”

Since Isness in Tantric terminology is the state of intimacy and conclusiveness he equates with truth. In Tibetan Tantric tradition it is essentially required 'unless one sees Buddha in one's own mind nirvana is obscured.' Savitri strives to perceive The Buddha in her mind by attaining herself to her existence. She tends to transform the samsara into nirvana. The narrator thinks that Savitri has reached the transcendental plane and developed understanding of truth. She is perhaps indifferent to what happens to and around her. She is described as an immaculate person whose ability to discriminate and
appreciate has been perfected.

This outlook has been characterised by Buddhist Tantrism as the stage of nothingness in which all tendencies towards believing in the true existence of all sense objects have disappeared. Ramaswamy proclaims that man must absorb the woman into himself. He wants man and women to acquire the experience of androgyny as he emphasises on the interdependence of the male and the female for the attainment of wholeness. As woman requires man's worship for her recognition and fulfillment of Tantric androgyny by their absorption into man. This is the reason Savitri often expresses her desire for absorption. To be a woman, she knew was to be absorbed by man. It is Tantric.

Raja Rao seems to follow the outmost Tantric concepts which proclaim that salvation is the privilege of man alone and women can attain liberation only by pleasing her husband in body, word, and mind. The Mahanirvana Tantra says that, for women there is no necessity to go on a pilgrimage. Her husband is the place of pilgrimage as well as her spiritual teacher.

On the other side Raja Rao portrays extra-marital relationship based on Buddhist and Hindu Tantrism. The Hevajra Tantra states that the Siddhi (truth) may be attained in the company of women. As we analyse Ramaswamy's relationship with Savitri, who in comparison with Medeleine has greater understanding of Tantric discipline. The Tantric grandfather Kittana's advice to Ramaswamy -"Be what you are." presupposes the adoption of a natural and normal attitude to life. Such view of purity is enshrined in the Hevajra Tantra. Thus the self flagellation of the Tantric covert finds solace in liberation through the enjoyment of the world, the path stipulated in the Mahanirvana Tantra.

I conclude that the novel The Serpent and The Rope depicts predicament of modern man who lured by the worldly pleasures finds it hard to observe severe austerities and spiritual discipline of Vedanta. The novelist suggests that Truth can also be sought by following the Tantric discipline under the supervision and guidance of a Guru. Raja Rao's treatment of Tristan Iseult myth drawn from French culture, Radha-Krishna myth derived from Indian mythic tradition emphasise the theme of eternity as influence of Vedic Aestheticism on him, causes psychosomatic disorder in him. The
transmutation of Vedanta by deep recesses of human heart. As an imaginative writer, Raja Rao assimilates different standpoints to portray the development of his characters.

Works Cited


