I am a man of silence. And words emerge from that silence with light, of light, and light is sacred. One wonders that there is the word at all--*Sabda*--and one asks oneself, where did it come from? How does it arise? I have asked this question for many, many years. I've asked it of linguists, I've asked it of poets, I've asked it of scholars. The word seems to come first as an impulsion from the nowhere, and then as a prehension, and it becomes less and less esoteric--till it begins to be concrete. And the concrete becoming ever more earthy, and the earthy communicated, as the common word, alas, seems to possess least of that original light.

The writer or poet is he who seeks back the common word to its origin of silence, in order that the manifested word become light. There was a great poet of the West, the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. He said objects come to you to be named. One of the ideas that has involved me deeply these many years is: where does the word dissolve and become meaning? Meaning itself, of course, is beyond the sound of the word, which comes to me only as an image in the brain, but *that* which sees the image in the brain (says our great sage of the sixth century, Sri Shankara) nobody has ever seen. Thus the word coming of light is seen eventually by light. That is, every word-image is seen by light, and that is its meaning. Therefore the effort of the writer, if he is sincere, is to forget himself in the process and go back to the light from which words come. Go back where? That is, those who read or those who hear must reach back to their own light. And that light I think is prayer.

My ancestors and, yes, the ancestors of some of you or of most of you who speak the English tongue, came from the same part of the world thousands of years ago. Was it from the Caucasus or the North Pole? One is not certain yet. They spoke a language close to my own language and close to your language. There is in America a remarkable dictionary called the *American Heritage Dictionary.* It offers almost a hundred pages (at the very end) of the Indo-European roots of many of our words. Most of you are of European origin. At least your thinking has been conditioned by European thought. There is thus a common way of thinking, an Indo-European way of thinking, between us, so that we are not so far from each other as we often think we are. And beyond the Indo-European way of thinking in Asia, Africa, Polynesia, is*that* same human light by which all words become meaning. Finally, there is only one meaning, not for every word, but for all words *where* the word, any word, from any language, dissolves into knowledge. It is only there at the dissolution of the sound of the word or of the image of the word that you say you understand. And *here* there is neither you nor I. That is what I have been trying to achieve. That I become no one, that no one shine but It.

...I want to say to you in utter honesty: I would like to be completely nameless, and just be that reality which is beyond all of us who hear me--that reality which evokes in me you, and I in each one listening to me this evening, that there be no one there but light. And it is of that reality that the sages have spoken. The sage is one, someone beyond the saint. He is no one. He is the real seer. In fact, we are all sages, but we don't recognize it. That is what the Indian tradition says. In the act of seeing--that is, of the seer, the seen, and the seeing--in seeing alone is there pure light. Where this comes from, nobody can name. I once asked Dr. Oppenheimer, the scientist, who told me his hands were soiled by the atom bomb: Have you ever seen an object? And he answered: Never. If a scientist like Dr. Oppenheimer says he has never seen an object--yet I am hearing him say what he has in all honesty declared--it is that level of knowledge I would like to reach from where I truly write. It is to that root of writing I pay homage. The Neustadt Prize is thus not given to me, but the That which is far beyond me, yet in me--because I alone know I am incapable of writing what people say I have written.  
  
*Raja Rao, June 4, 1988, Norman, Oklahoma*  
  
  
  
The earth's circumference may be but 24,830 miles, its age might be some four or five billion years--an incident, as geologists and astronomers believe--we may be just a spot in this ever expanding, ever exploding universe--time and circumstance may be irreversible, man and woman like light and night, yet there is a feeling, something is missing in this explanation, and that when you sit in front of a well-adorned and elegantly clad woman, young, innocent and round, were she your sister (it may well have been your your mother, your aunt, or maybe your niece), there's an area of awareness, a silken inner move that unveils a different dimension of knowledge, as if one's hands had eyes, one's ears could speak, one's legs smell, one's mind read itself--at once a seeming distance with oneself, a feel of nearness with one's being--somewhat uncomfortable but so exalting a situation, one wonders why this paradox should exist, except that, when rightly known, one, that is, when there is *no one,* this no one, who is One, knows there is neither seer nor seen, thinker nor thought, and it's this game that we would play with ourselves, and for then it would be real and could suddenly be heard as some distant music, a music like Krishna's flute which brought all the cows and gopis to the bank of the Yamuna, the cattle tearing away their tethers, the women running from their husbands, from their homes, for when that music comes to your inner ear, and you cognize there is none there but Krishna, he the music and the dance, the river and the woman, that it's all one melody, and is not even Krishna, when you see it properly, it's like isness turning on its self-pivot, singing. Yes, isness sings, the song, the woman, and the affirmation, and the man who is no man: Man. It's this transcendence from duality that makes life possible, and meaning self-evident. Thus our revolving earth, with its tigers and elephants in the forest, the rhino and the porcupine, the snake and the chital deer, the birth of the Ganga in the Himalaya, the arising of the Seine in the Massif Central, and the Rhone in the Jura mountains (with the Rhine), the sun in the sky, and the vast milky way, the Einsteinian curve of space, the delighting of time with itself--all, all is just one melody, a melody that nobody hears, for melody cannot hear itself, so created the hearer as its game-partner again for play. Thus play is life, and so the dance. You dance to annihilate space and time, and thiswise dissolved, you are pure happiness. Can you not see it there from Trocadero, down to the river, and then up, tier after tier to Montmartre, the mountain of the martyrs, from the deep curve of inner space, and in the time that has died at each beat of pulse. Are you there, man? No.  
  
*Raja Rao, in*The Chessmaster and His Moves, *New Delhi, Vision Books, 1988, p.505.*

**A Personal Tribute**

It was, I think, in 1983, a conference at the India International Centre in New Delhi, at which delegates from the West met some of the best minds in India... that I first met Raja Rao. One of our English delegates, Paul Sharrad, had been putting forward a Christian (Orthodox) statement. Raja Rao, hitherto silent, uncoiled himself and asked, "Will you please tell me what you mean by the word God?" At that moment I knew that I had reached India, and my heart said, "Home at last." Western answers were themselves questions.  
  
..."India," he said [later], "is not a nation, like France or Italy or Germany: India is a state of being..." India, Raja Rao implied, is open to whoever can attain it, and his words spoke to me like an invitaion. When, in his novel, *The Serpent and the Rope,* I read further, "India lies beyond sorrow," I understood that "India"--the eternal India, the India of the Imagination, that supreme civilization laden with the wisdom and the beauty of millennia--is the end to which those long journeys, lifetimes, all inevitabley lead: India is indeed "Home at last."  
  
At that time Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay--great patriot and friend of Gandhiji--was President of the India International Centre. ... from her I learned much about modern India. Who, I asked her, were the significant writers? She named only one, Raja Rao, as India's greatest novelist. ... I then read *The Serpent and the Rope,* and understood that Raja Rao is more than a novelist; he is a philosopher who uses the novel as a vehicle to explore profound themes and to illuminate his vision of the "India" of the mind. He is qualified to do so to a rare degree... In *The Serpent and the Rope* he compares "India" with Western Christendom at a very profound level. He later told me that at one time Catholic monasticism and Scholastic theology had so attracted him that he had seriously thought of entering a monastic order. Thus he came to understand Europe, not through England, but at a higher and more subtle intellectual level, mainly thorugh France and through the great Catholic theological tradition.  
  
At the beginning of this [20th] century, the West knew little of Indian thought, with the exception of the Theosophical movement. Western confidence in its materialist science--whose impressive discoveries and inventions in the field of technology have been so prestigious--went unchallenged. No alternative was seriously considered. Raja Rao was therefore among the first to present the "India of the Imagination" to Western readers as a great civilization grounded in totally other premises than those of the West. To the Western mind it seems self-evident that reality is the world we perceive, an "object" external to the observer; to India, it is no less self-evident that the perceiving mind is the ground, and the reality not an "object" but a living experience. The difference, finally, is between a lifeless and a living world; the final result of the Western view is to reduce all life to mechanism devoid of meaning or value, to, ultimately, a nihil. The Vedic world is a living world, its gound sat-chit-ananda (being-consciousness-bliss) of essential existence. Deeply as he has respected Western spirituality, Raja Rao has never doubted the more fundamental understanding which underlies the Vedic tradition and is the inspiration of the philosophy and the arts of Indian civilization, flowering in sculpture and dance, mathematics and architecture, painting and music and poetry; all alike grounded in the sacred nature of things. ...  
  
*The Chessmaster and His Moves*... is a further exploration of the differences between the European and the Indian mind, the Indian and European attitudes to love. Raja Rao especially considers the other great spiritual tradition, that of the Jews. Raja Rao has made his home in Austin, Texas, and had in 1988 already married his present (American) wife, and has completed a further novel (not yet published) exploring the American experience. Yet as he explores the West, so at the same time he enters ever more deeply into the "India" which can only be the ultimate reality, both for the East and the West. He has long been a devotee of an Indian teacher of the purest Vedic tradition, visiting India every year and spending time at his [teacher's] ashram, with his wife, Susan. ...it has been his destiny to open up a profound insight into that eternal India, for many Western readers. In this his word stands in contrast to the many new Indian novelists who see India through Westernized eyes.  
  
At the beginning of this century, the West (with a few exceptions, like the American Transcendentalists, and later the Theosophical Society), never doubting the supremacy of Western civilization, poured missionaries into the most civilized land on earth, where they were tolerated, within a culture that knows no dogma. Now the tide is flowing the other way--the West looking to the East, to India and to Buddhist countries, for spiritual knowledge. Raja Rao would make no claim to be a spiritual teacher--he is, on the contrary, himself a devotee--but his novels are profound explorations of the interaction of the two contrasting civilizations from the standpoint of a follower of the Indian dharma, revealing the majestic grandeur of the universe which opens for whoever attains that "India" which is not a country but a state of being.

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| Breathing India In AmericaA Tribute to Raja Rao |
| by Francis C. Assisi[\*](http://www.beilharz.com/autores/rao/#Article) |
| *I alone know I am incapable of writing what people say I have written.* — Raja Rao  If I were asked who was the greatest Indian novelist of the 20th century, I would undoubtedly point to Raja Rao — who passed away Saturday July 8th 2006 in Austin, Texas, just two years short of the century mark.  Alone among all other writers of his time, including Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan, it was his destiny to unfold a profound insight for many readers into the eternal India. And in this, his works stand in contrast to the many new Indian novelists who see India through Western or Westernized eyes.  What makes Raja Rao’s unique is not just the highly innovative, experimental, and dynamic English prose style that he developed much before Salman Rushdie, but the deeply spiritual content of his works. His spirituality is not of a New Age feel good kind, but philosophically rigorous. He is a novelist of ideas, but the idea is always suggestive of something beyond itself, pointing, ultimately, to the Absolute.  As Professor Makarand Paranjape of Jawaharlal Nehru University tells us: »Raja Rao considered his writing a sadhana, a spiritual discipline. Reading him is also a sadhana. Like the great Russian writers Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, his fiction elevates the spirit, taking the reader to a higher plane of consciousness.«  In many ways he was the quintessential writer of the Great Indian Diaspora, a harbinger for the likes of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Bharati Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others who followed. His legacy lingers; but, sadly, few of the modern writers, who crowd the literary marketplace, are aware of or acknowledge this legacy. And long before writers such as Rushdie made it trendy, Rao was infusing unique Indian literary genres, including interior monologue, retrospective narrative and symbolism, into the narrative of English fiction.  In India Raja Rao would be, as he himself once put it, »somewhat important.« But he chose to live in a modest apartment on Pearl Street in Austin, Texas, where he was on the faculty at the University of Texas from 1966 to 1980. When he retired as professor emeritus, he continued to make his home in Austin — where both his sons were born. ...»India,« according to Raja Rao, »is not a nation, like France or Italy or Germany: India is a state of being...« On another occasion he wrote that India is »an idea, a metaphysic. My India I carried wheresoever I went …«  India, Raja Rao implied, is open to whoever can attain it, wherever they may be. And reading his works was an invitation to taste that eternal India — of the Mahabharatha and Ramayana, of the Upanishads, of Sankara, of Aurobindo, of Tagore, of Vivekananda, and of Gandhi. A PERSONAL DISCOVERY I found Raja Rao’s invitation to experience the eternal India, to enter that higher plane of consciousness, quite by accident.  Actually, while stranded in the great Chicago snowstorm of 1965. With the transportation system paralyzed in the ‘windy city’ that winter weekend, I had sought temporary refuge in a used bookstore. It was in that inclement weather that a kindly yarmulka-wearing gentleman, with a toothy smile, steered me towards »a new writer from your part of the world.«  Homesick, and ever on the lookout for new Indian writers, I was more than happy to exchange $1.95 for a used first edition of *The Serpent and the Rope*. And though I would immerse myself in the world of Raja Rao for the next two days, it wasn’t easy. Being in love, for the first time, helped. And so did the knowledge from a few years of French, as well as a token familiarity with Sanskrit.  Essentially, the novel portrayed the poignant meeting of the East and the West at the most intimate level, through the story of Rama, an Indian student, and Madeleine, a French girl, who meet at a French university shortly after World War II. Their union is the central theme of the book, and it is in telling this story that Rama reveals — with more profundity than most writers are able to suggest in a lifetime — the meaning of love and of loss and of return to the source.  I was fascinated by the symbols of illusion and reality, so cleverly used as metaphor for the meeting of East and West. Even as a student, the novel struck me as being semi-autobiographical. Nor was it easy reading, like the novels of R. K. Narayan or Khushwant Singh or even of G. V. Desani (the other Indian writer who had settled in Austin). The long, ambitious, and complex work recorded the disintegration of a marriage, mainly on philosophical grounds. The union floundered on the incompatibility of the Brahmin's Vedantic conviction that ‘Reality is my Self’ and the wife's Western belief — even though she had become a Buddhist — that the evidence of our senses is based on an objective reality outside ourselves.  Either the world is real and nothing else (and you are the world), or the self alone is real and the world is an illusion. In the imagery of the title, ‘The world is either unreal or real — the serpent or the rope.’ When we look out at the phenomenal world we see a universe of multitudinous objects. When we think all this is ‘real’, we are like men in the dark who mistake a rope for a serpent. The Guru comes with a lamp and shows us that it is only a rope after all.  Roaming at large through world history and among the religions, philosophies, and literatures of Europe and Asia, the demands that Raja Rao made with *The Serpent And the Rope* was intellectually stimulating; the language, interspersed with French and Sanskrit, was iridescent, vibrant. It took several readings over the course of a year to help me understand the depth of the story.  When, in *The Serpent And the Rope*, I read further, »India lies beyond sorrow,« I understood that »India« — the eternal India, the India of the Imagination, that supreme civilization laden with the wisdom and the beauty of millennia — is the end to which those long journeys, lifetimes, all inevitably lead: India is indeed »Home at last.«  In his short biography, Professor Makarand Paranjape writes: »Although Rao lived abroad, he never ceased to be an Indian in temperament and sensibility. In fact, his awareness of Indian culture grew even though he could not settle down permanently in India. He became a compulsive visitor, returning to India again and again for spiritual and cultural nourishment; indeed, in a sense, Rao never completely left India.«  As Raja Rao put it in *The Meaning of India*, India was not a »desa« but a »darsana« — a metaphysic. That is to say that the idea of India was as important and powerful as the reality of India.  I can say personally that I carried that idea, nurtured it for more than three decades in America, and finally returned to the source, to the Mother that is India.  As Indiaphile writer Kathleen Raine observes: »At the beginning of this [20th] century, the West knew little of Indian thought … Western confidence in its materialist science — whose impressive discoveries and inventions in the field of technology have been so prestigious — went unchallenged. No alternative was seriously considered. Raja Rao was therefore among the first to present the »India of the Imagination« to Western readers as a great civilization grounded in totally other premises than those of the West.  »To the Western mind it seems self-evident that reality is the world we perceive, an »object« external to the observer; to India, it is no less self-evident that the perceiving mind is the ground, and the reality not an »object« but a living experience. The difference, finally, is between a lifeless and a living world; the final result of the Western view is to reduce all life to mechanism devoid of meaning or value, to, ultimately, a nihil.  »The Vedic world, on the other hand, is a living world grounded in Sat-Chit-Ananda (being-consciousness-bliss) of essential existence. Deeply as he has respected Western spirituality, Raja Rao has never doubted the more fundamental understanding which underlies the Vedic tradition and is the inspiration of the philosophy and the arts of Indian civilization, flowering in sculpture and dance, mathematics and architecture, painting and music and poetry; all alike grounded in the sacred nature of things. ...«  In a 1988 speech at the University of Oklahoma, after receiving the prestigious Newstadt Prize in literature, Raja Rao claimed: »I am a man of silence. And words emerge from that silence with light, of light, and light is sacred…« He went on: »...I want to say to you in utter honesty: I would like to be completely nameless, and just be that reality which is beyond all of us who hear me — that reality which evokes in me you, and I in each one listening to me this evening, that there be no one there but light. And it is of that reality that the sages have spoken. The sage is one, someone beyond the saint. He is no one. He is the real seer. In fact, we are all sages, but we don't recognize it. That is what the Indian tradition says. In the act of seeing — that is, of the seer, the seen, and the seeing — in seeing alone is there pure light. Where this comes from, nobody can name … It is to that root of writing I pay homage. The Neustadt Prize (the literary award he won in 1988) is thus not given to me, but to the That which is far beyond me, yet in me — because I alone know I am incapable of writing what people say I have written.«  Raja Rao's first novel, *Kanthapura*, about a village in South India affected by the spirit of Gandhi, was published in the United States in 1938, and republished by New Directions Press in 1960. *The Serpent and the Rope* too was published in the U.S. in 1960. Other works include a collection of stories written earlier, *The Cow of the Barricades*, but published in 1947; *The Cat and Shakespeare* in 1965; *Comrade Kirillov*in 1976; *The Chessmaster and His Moves* in 1988. A year later, *On the Ganga Ghat*was published in India, and, in 1996, *The Meaning of India*. In the years since, Rao had been working on a sequel to this last novel, which again has Indian Vedantic philosophy at its core.  It is apparent to any student of Raja Rao’s writings that he has defined the major theme of all his fiction as the search for the truth; as man's search for ultimate values. It is a search that consumed much of his life in France, India, and America. Thus, it is appropriate that today there exists a »Raja Rao Award« to recognize writers and scholars who have made an »Outstanding Contribution to the Literature and Culture of the South Asian diaspora«. Instituted by the Samvad India Foundation, based in New Delhi, the Managing Committee of the award is soliciting donations to build a corpus fund for the Prize. A QUESTION OF LANGUAGE AND STYLE »The telling has not been easy«, Rao writes in his 1937 introduction to the classic*Kanthapura*. That’s because, as he explains, »one has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word alien, yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up — like Sanskrit or Persian was before — but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be a distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.  »After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that 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 thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our storytelling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story.« BIOGRAPHY Raja Rao was born in an ancient and respected Brahmin family in Hassan, Karnataka, on 8 November 1908. The eldest son in a family of two brothers and seven sisters, he was the center of the family, always treated as if he was destined for great things. His father taught Kannada at Nizam’s College in Hyderabad. When he was only four, his mother died. This was one of the most important events in his life; indeed, the absence of the mother and the sense of being an orphan recur in his fiction.  Rao was educated at Muslim schools. He studied at the Madarsa-i-Aliya, then the most famous school in the state, where the aristocracy of Hyderabad sent their children and was perhaps, the only Hindu boy in his class. He was then sent to the Aligarh Muslim University. Aligarh proved to be crucial in shaping Rao’s intellectual growth, even as his literary sensibility was awakened. In 1927, at the age of 19, Rao returned to Hyderabad to enroll as a student for the BA at Nizam’s College. Two years later, he graduated, having majored in English and History.  In 1929, two other important events occurred in Rao’s life. First, he won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad for study abroad. This marked the beginning of another phase in his life. He left India for the first time in his life to study at the University of Montpellier in France. Secondly, in that same year, Rao married Camille Mouly who taught French at Montpellier. Camille was undoubtedly the most important influence on Rao’s life during the next ten years; she not only encouraged him to write, but supported him financially for several years.  In 1931, his early Kannada writing began to appear in the journal Jaya Karnataka. For the next two years, Rao researched the influence of India on Irish literature at the Sorbonne. His first short stories were published in journal such as Asia (New York) and Cahiers du Sud (Paris). In 1933, Rao abandoned research to devote himself completely to writing.  In 1933, he visited Pandit Taranath’s ashram in his quest for self-realization. In 1938, his masterpiece, *Kanthapura*, although written earlier, was published from London. One year later Rao’s marriage disintegrated; he found himself back in India, his spiritual search renewed. He even appeared to give up writing to seek the truth. In the next few years, Rao visited a number of ashrams and religious teachers, notably Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, Narayana Maharaj of Kedgaon and Mahatama Gandhi at Sevagram.  Around this time, Rao also became a public figure in India, active in several social and political causes. Finally, in 1943, Rao’s quest appears to have been fulfilled when he met his spiritual preceptor in Atmananda Guru of Trivandrum. Rao’s life altered radically after this. He even thought of settling down in Trivandrum, near his Guru’s ashram, returned to France after his Guru’s demise.  In 1960, twenty-two years after *Kanthapura*, Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* was published. *The Cat and Shakespeare* followed in 1965. About ten years later, *Comrade Kirillov* was published in English. From 1965 until his retirement, Rao was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. In that same year, 1965, he married dancer and stage actress Catherine Jones. They had one son, Christopher Rama.  From 1965 to 1983 Rao lectured on Indian philosophy at the University of Texas, Austin. His courses on Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian philosophy, and The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle were highly regarded by both students as well as faculty. At the time of his death he was Professor Emeritus at UT.  http://www.beilharz.com/autores/rao/raowsusan.jpgTeaching one semester a year, Rao divided his time between the United States, France and India. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married Susan. Even in his nineties Rao was still working hard on his unfinished works. He acknowledged that he has to complete the last ten pages of a new novel he wrote in 1993 and is reported to have begun a new novel. He has hopes of writing his last novel in Kannada. NATIONALISM Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel Kanthapura was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small village in Karnataka. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. The narrator is an old woman. She tells how the community obtains from daily life, with its millennia-old worship of the local deity, the strength to stand against the British Raj. In the character of the young Moorthy, who comes back from the city, Rao portrays an idealist and supporter of ahimsa and satyagraha, who wants to cross the traditional barriers of caste. The work was highly praised by the English writer E. M.. Forster whose masterwork A Passage to India (1924) criticized British imperialism.  There is this apocryphal story of a meeting between Forster and Rao. In the latter half of 1945, Forster came to India for the third and last time. Raja was also in Bombay. Forster asked a common friend, »Where is Raja Rao ... Where is he hiding?« Raja recalls in an essay: »The same evening I wrote a letter to Forster ... I have abandoned literature for good — and gone over to metaphysics; I am not a writer any more, I do not know on what grounds I could come to see you. Forster immediately sent me a reply: `You have, you say, abandoned literature for metaphysical inquiry. I have abandoned literature for nothing at all. So please let us meet.'«  Rao has confessed: »I am no scholar. I am a creative writer. I love to play with ideas. It is like a chess game with horses, elephants, chamberlains and kings which might fight with one another. The game is not for winning. It is for rasa-delight.«  Critics have noted that Rao's characters are invariably in search of self on various levels. More often than not they must contend with change arising from the pressure of events or the challenge of understanding the ethos of another culture. Rao's themes include the metaphysical apprehension of God, the nature of death, immortality, illusion and reality, duality and nonduality, good and evil, existence and destiny, Karma and Dharma; the quest for self-knowledge, the place of the guru, the influence of religion and social concepts and patterns and prejudices on individual and group behavior; the ideal and meaning of love and marriage, the impact of tradition on the individual and collective life and the meaning of India's real and symbolic content, and the historical or contemporary meeting of East and West in religious, political, and psychological terms. The list is by no means exhaustive. Neither does it suggest the way themes conflate, complement, or construct oppositions depicted through the increasing psychological authority of the characters from the early short stories, through Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope, and the Cat and Shakespeare, to the firm, monumental authority of The Chessmaster and His Moves.  This listing belies Rao's achievement of bringing into the life of each character and his or her relationships the extraordinarily complex worlds they each occupy — Indian, French, Greek, Hebraic, African, Chinese — and which overlap and contain, in a single moment, the mundane and the metaphysical. That is a major achievement, as is Rao's remarkably successful reorientation of a language and his assembling of a narrative mode to articulate life against the larger movements of personality, situation, and environment. INDIA IS MY HOME Today, if you happen to visit the Perry Castaneda Library at the University of Texas, you will discover a special collection of works by and about the Indo-American writer/philosopher which take up two shelves. And Rao, whose third wife Susan was a University of Texas student in the '70s, has claimed in an interview that though he lives in Austin he has in fact never left India. »India is my home; there is no question.«  In fact India is everywhere. »Look at my house,« he said, glancing at an Indian picture. »Look inside my books in my room. It's all very Indian.« And when asked by an interviewer if he writes to translate India for the West, as some critics have suggested, Rao replies: »No. I just do it for myself. I make no concession to the West. Right, Susan?« And his wife of 12 years laughs. »Oh, absolutely. In no way, at any time.«  In that 1997 interview with Anne Morris of the Austin American-Statesman, Rao acknowledged that he had found answers to his philosophical searching through meditation and long study with his guru, Sri Atmananda, in Trivandrum, India. He confessed that he often saw the West in a state of great gestation. »The West has not reached its destiny,« he said.  But he recalled that, »In the '60s and '70s the search for values was very remarkable. I was really thinking America would be the greatest nation ... but the pragmatic American, I think, has not got time for India.« PUBLICATION PROJECT Currently there is an ongoing project — The Raja Rao Publication project — at the University of Texas which is working to make all of his writings, especially those still unpublished, available to readers around the world who are interested in his fiction and thought. Sponsored by the Linguistics Research Center at UT, the task of the project is to organize, edit, and secure publication for Raja Rao's unpublished novels, short stories, poetry, essays, correspondence and class notes for courses taught at UT.  We are told by David Iglehart, Editor-in-Chief for the publication project that the second book in Raja Rao's trilogy based upon *The Chessmaster and His Moves* has been edited and is in press. The third book is complete and will be edited and published soon.  Iglehart, a student of Raja Rao, holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, and served as a teaching assistant for Raja Rao in the 1970s. His doctoral dissertation, »A Comparative Study of the Rasa Theory of Aesthetics« was under Raja Rao's supervision. He resides in Austin, Texas, where he teaches, writes, and has been a regular visitor to the Raja Rao house.  Four years ago, in his capacity as editor in chief of the Raja Rao Publication project, Iglehart wrote the following letter to friends of Raja Rao.  »Dear Friends,  Raja Rao is ninety-four, and his face shines without any trace of sadness. After many difficulties with his health, he has a new clarity and the frequent desire to summarize his ideas on life, art, philosophy, and the variety, continuity, and depth of Indian experience.  The task before us is formidable. Raja Rao’s wife, Susan, has filled half a room with boxes of his highly creative, insightful manuscripts, the outpouring of a lifetime. This includes four unpublished novels, stacks of short stories, hundreds of articles and essays, interviews, poetry in French, class notes, informal notes, plans for scholarly projects, and correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Octavio Paz, and André Malraux.  My own interest in Raja Rao is longstanding. I studied with him for many years as an undergraduate and graduate student at The University of Texas, and I remember the excitement of his lectures and long walks with him that guided my career and life in many ways. Under his direction I received a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature with a concentration in Sanskrit and Indian theories of art.  As a part of the Raja Rao Publication Project, I have edited *The Daughter of the Mountain*, which is the second volume of his trilogy based on *The Chessmaster and His Moves*. The manuscript for this second book consists of over 750 typed pages — many are covered densely with his hand-written notes.  Dr. Winfred Lehmann at The University of Texas and I estimate that the task of organizing Raja Rao’s papers and seeing them into print will require a three-year editing project. Raja Rao has often said that for a good project help will come. The Raja Rao Publication Project is only partially funded at this time. Any help coming from those who have benefited from the work of this great man will enable his work to live in the hearts of generations of readers and thinkers.«  Writer Makarand Paranjape (Professor of English, Centre for Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature, and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University), who examined the unpublished manuscripts, has this to say: »All of it is vintage Raja Rao, going into the very depths of the human condition. The very first lines of the text leapt out to clutch you by the throat, as it were …«  Paranjape adds: »As I held the box (of Raja Rao’s unpublished manuscripts), I felt that I was in possession of a great treasure from one of the world’s greatest living writers. My feeling was confirmed when I started reading the text.« PARANJAPE'S PORTRAIT OF RAJA RAO For the last time, in November 2005, after a visit with Raja Rao, Professor Paranjape observed:  »I am not sure I’ll see Raja Rao again. Rao, who turns 97, is not the man he once was. The last time I met him, in America, he could not remember the names of his own books, among them such acclaimed works as Kanthapura and The Serpent And The Rope, which brought him international renown years ago.  »His short-term memory was almost gone. He thought I was a literary agent who had come to take a look at his unpublished work. His third wife, Susan, many years younger to him, is an American woman who has tended to him more devotedly than any Indian wife possibly could. She made us some excellent pumpkin soup. Her kitchen, in Raja Rao’s small apartment on Pearl Street, Austin, Texas, always smelled of herbs. Everything served at her table was organically grown and, of course, vegetarian.  »I had, as a matter of fact, come to look at Raja Rao’s unpublished manuscripts. There were dozens of them, with scribbles in Raja Rao’s own hand in the margins...Now I’m not sure if these works will ever be published. Who else but Raja Rao can approve and oversee their final versions?  »Raja Rao has always been small and frail. Yet, there is nothing small or frail about his life. If his story were to be told in celluloid, it would be a 70-mm film, with an international star cast. It would show a handsome young Brahmin arriving in Paris in the late 1920s, marrying a French professor much older than him, giving up his PhD to pursue a writing career.  »Later, the marriage would break up and Raja Rao would return to India to look for a guru. After a decisive event in which, as he put it, he prostrated before Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, weeping till the floor was bathed in his tears, Raja Rao finally turned further southwards, to the ashram of Atmananda Guru in Kerala.  »After an unsuccessful marriage with Catherine Jones, a dancer and an actress, from which a son, Christopher Rama, was born, Raja Rao met Susan, once again in his guru’s ashram.« It is an even more moving portrait that Paranjape gives us of the penultimate time he visited Raja Rao.  »It is around ten in the morning in Austin, Texas. We walk up the stairs, to visit Raja Rao in the wood-paneled bedroom upstairs. We have left our shoes below because most conspicuous in this comfortable room is not the frail man in bed, but his most impressive-looking Guru, Atmananda, seated in full majesty above his bed in a white mundu, bare-chested, looking impassively, but with such great authority and gravity straight at you as you enter the room. On the side wall is a small »mandir« or puja cabinet, its doors wide open, with another portrait of Atmananda Guru, this time standing straight and looking directly at Raja Rao.«  The first query was typical of the writer:  »Do you remember Sankara's hymn to the Goddess? Annapurne, Sadapurne, Sankarapranavallabhe ...«  Paranjape reveals: »Raja Rao has tears in his eyes as he haltingly recalls the words.  »A beautifully preserved old man, with such an ancient face … Raja Rao himself is almost all light. His face and features literally glow. The skin on his face and hands is so fine as to be nearly transparent. On his hands, the veins show. The fingers are long and shapely, with elongated fingernails. The face, of an almost timeless, golden mien, dominated by the aquiline nose, is domed by a large and noble forehead. The fine white hair is combed back. There is a well-groomed beard too. Deeply inset eyes, so intelligent, so thoughtful. At ninety-three, these eyes still have a look of great wonder in them, a profound curiosity that is ready to face life's challenges and vicissitudes. This distinguished visage, all traces of privilege or arrogance now erased from it, only bears the marks of a long lineage of wisdom, suffering, compassion, kindness, and courtesy.«  \*Article originally published by [Indolink](http://www.indolink.com/). |