

The Notes of Human Connection: Personal relationships in Raja Rao's "The Serpent and the Rope"

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Article: Received: 8/04/2026, Accepted: 25/04/2026, Published:30/04/2026.

D.O.I. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19921905>



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Abstract: Raja Rao's novel "The Serpent and the Rope" shows how personal relationships and spiritual quests are linked. The story follows Ramaswamy's search for self-realization and examines how his loves with Savitri, Madeleine, Saroj, and a symbolic "little mother" mix romantic, spiritual, and maternal feelings. The study finds that love acts as a bridge between the material world and spiritual understanding, revealing a clash between Indian spiritual traditions and Western rational thought. Using nature symbols like the Ganga, it stresses that relationships help people grow, find fulfillment, and move toward spiritual enlightenment, proving Rao's idea that love leads to a deeper truth.

Keywords: Possessiveness, Enlightenment, Adventure, Spiritual, Goals, Fascinated etc.

Introduction: Raja Rao's novel "The Serpent and the Rope" looks at how human life connects with the real world. The book mixes a personal journey of self-discovery with a deep study of how men and women relate in the outside world. Rao blends India's cultural heritage with Western ideas in his writing. The novel gives a strong picture of reality and self-discovery. It shows Raja Rao's search for self-knowledge, which is like the experience of the romantic poet William Wordsworth, who found inspiration in nature. The novel's epigraph says, "waves are nothing but water; she is the sea." The protagonist Ramaswamy introduces us to the book's themes with the lines, "I love the rivers and lakes, and make my home easily by any water side – Hamlet." _The Serpent and the Rope_ examines the complex relationship between man and woman, focusing on the legendary Ram-Savitri union. Ramaswamy's values are "like Upanishadic figures Yagnakaya and Maitreyi, who love the self, the Brahman in the other not his or her person" (Singh 69). His bond with his "little mother" is pure and innocent, like returning to the womb, showing a deep wish for maternal love and protection. The little mother shapes Ramaswamy's personality and is seen as the maker of his family's destiny. She is a masterpiece that reflects many facts of India's ancestral history. After Ramaswamy's father dies, the story becomes an adventure with his little mother and Sridhar. It explores the speech, real dimensions, and sacred meaning of mother and the Ganga, which are shown as the same thing. The story moves around the Ganga River. The little mother gives nurturing love and speech, showing both obvious and hidden meanings. Ramaswamy has inner peace and self-awareness because of Vedantic philosophy. After his father passes, Rama feels like a lonely wanderer searching for belonging. The little mother's love and guidance help him find selflessness, making her a protecting guardian. The water of the Ganga River is linked to the idea of a "little mother". Both the river and the little mother are made of sleep and waves. In Ramaswami's view, the little mother is a refreshing influence. She brings back feelings of peace and happiness that Ramaswami lost after marrying Madeleine. Ramaswamy thinks

traditional Hindu women, like the little mother, give everything without expecting anything back. Raja Rao shows her as a calm and comfortable symbol of motherly love. “The most significant images of this withdrawing aspect of the mother are the sleepy flow of the Gangas and silence of little mother”. (Singh72) the water of Gangas is related with little mother as both of them “were made of sleep and each of us wave”. (S. R. 28) Ramaswamy’s bond with his step-sister Saroja is important in the novel. It shows the complicated feelings and relationships in his life. Saroja is close to him and makes him feel ownership and possessiveness. “Ramaswami is preferences for the Vedantic Brahma, and his altercation towards the maternal symbol brings to the force a psychic tendency to recede into the unconscious so as to realize again the undifferentiated pre-dyadic condition of a child’s psyche where difference is yet to be discerned.” (Singh79) She also makes him think of the Vedantic Brahma. Ramaswami likes the mother figure so much that he wants to go back to his childhood feelings. Because of this, it's hard for him to leave his past and move on. People can make relationships outside their family. This is a trait of narcissistic personalities, according to psychologist P.S. Pratt. Says “the outward libidinal cathexis of the narcissistic. Psyche will tend More markedly to be restricted to person with a whom the object readily identifies himself. There will be in the first-place blood relations or Pupil who are regarded as such” (Singh137) People focus more on themselves. They prefer blood relations or pupils who see them as special. The brother-sister bond is a deep personal connection. P.S. Bratt gives examples like Shelly Wordsworth. “The Indian family structure a sister occupies a pivotal position in development of a male child because of her nearness during the period he is being brought in a joint family” (Mandelbaum 67) Ramaswami meets Saroja after his spiritual journey to the Ganga River. This meeting has a big effect on him. He feels fascinated and drawn to her. Saroja makes him feel connected to his family and home. He sees her as a sister, and this gives him a sense of belonging. Ramaswami feels safe and comfortable with her. His spiritual search is mixed with feelings about family life and loving his sister. He is fascinated by Saroja even when he tries to focus on his spiritual goals. The Ganga and Yamuna rivers give him a different feeling compared to his spiritual wishes. Ramaswamy says Gramma is a sacred place for him, like the river Ganga. He links it to truth and spirituality. He feels a deep connection with his step-sister Saroja, “made the knowledge of her womanhood natural to see, to observe an even to breath”. (S. R. 52) He notices that he often seeks intense connections with women, which shows how much he feels for Saroja. “Saroja’s presence in his psyche casts dye over a passionate feeling which rise in his heart after he leaves about Savitri” perspective arrival in Axi” (Singh 81)6 the mayor presents of Savitri brings Ramaswamy women’s joy and her trip to France is a source of great delight for him. He feels that “Saroja herself was coming” (S. R. 109) Saroja is very loyal to her family, and Ramaswamy respects her a lot. He sees that Saroja wants to be independent and free, to go beyond traditional family expectations and live an expensive life. She wants to follow her own dreams, but she accepts that her life will be shaped by her family’s wishes instead of her own desires. “This is the ideal of a woman that Ramaswamy cherishes in his mind” (Singh 83). Ramaswamy has changed his understanding of human relationships. He now knows the importance of women in society and sees womanhood as the essence of life. He believes self-identity is not fixed; it is discovered through experience and growth. Raja Rao says self-identity unfolds through personal experience. Ramaswamy has built a strong relationship with Madeline. He is a responsible husband and caring father. He loves Madeline deeply and wants to connect with her on a deeper level. His traditional views about femininity make it hard for him to fully understand her as an individual. His relationship with Madeline shows a conflict between two opposite ideas – closeness and separation from her. “His relationship with Madeleine and the path that it traverses shows his Dito mouse psyche with its opposing pulls, simultaneously demanding a consummation with and estrangement from the person of Medeline”. (Singh 83) Medeline and Ramaswamy come from very different cultures. Medeline is a French woman with Christian traditions, while Ramaswamy follows the Vedic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The novel shows how their big cultural differences cause problems in their marriage because their values, beliefs

and lifestyles do not match. Raja Rao describes Medeline as a practical, earth-connected person who values real, tangible things in life. She loves human relationships. Ramaswamy, on the other hand, focuses on a spiritual quest and puts Brahma above personal connections. He learns that Medeline is very real and physical, she can smell, taste and touch things of the earth deeply. He realizes she is a precious gem in his life. "Geography was very real, almost solid. She smelled the things of the earth, as the sound, form, touch, taste, smell were such realities that you could not go beyond them even if you tried." (S.R.20) she comes to realize that Ramaswamy is precious gem in her life, a treasure she has chosen to cherish. "She feels for any human being in any form of trouble or wretchedness, carry the signification of a being attached to the world" (Singh 87). Madeline is warm-hearted and cares about treating workers fairly, showing her empathy. Ramaswamy wants a platonic (non-sexual) friendship with Medeline while he has a complex sexual relationship with Savitri and also thinks of his guru. He feels strong emotions because he cannot deal with losing his children. "Unlike the heroes of Indian epics who have always strongly reacted to the death of sons and gone to all extremes to demonstrate their respect for grieving mothers". (Mahabharata) The novel says men often cannot make amends for the pain they cause women, showing the historical burden women carry because of men's actions. It portrays Ramaswamy's search for self-discovery and Indian identity through his relationships with women, leading to a deep, metaphorical understanding of love and quest that mixes Western literary ideas. In Raja Rao's novel "The Serpent and the Rope", Ramaswamy feels a strong attraction to Savitri, like a boat drifting on the river Thame. He imagines loving her. Savitri, a young woman, loves Ramaswamy. Their love is so strong that it takes them to their own world, where they want to escape everywhere without worries. Ramaswamy knows Savitri is engaged to Pratap Singh, but he believes their love is powerful enough to break social rules and build a new world together, free from social pressure. The story shows Ramaswamy's encounter with women as an example of how love can be understood as an illustration and proof of an abstract idea. Savitri becomes Ramaswamy's whole world. His view of life, people, and history gets a deep mystical meaning, like the spiritual side of tantra. He feels he is waiting for a bus or car to take Savitri by his side, and through her he understands the rhythm and meaning of history, turning his thoughts to Christianity. Ramaswamy and Savitri's love grows into a pure, divine union like the legendary love of Krishna and Radha. They were not married in the morning, but if they had been, he would understand the silent knowledge of each other. A man is incomplete without a woman, and a woman can find her God only through a man. Rama says, "A man must be complete in himself and with his bride," meaning "all brides should be born in Benares." Savitri, understanding fully, replies, "If Benares is inner, My Lord, then the bride too exists in Benares." Benares symbolizes the sacredness of the Self, the ultimate Truth. For Rama, marriages are not created in heaven or on earth but in Benares, the inner spiritual realm. Savitri is shown as a woman on a quest for Truth, like a princess in fables who wishes to marry, but only the one who can solve the riddle "what is the IT that I seek?" can give her insight. This riddle refers to the search for the essential Truth. It is Rama who can provide her with that understanding. She quotes Kalidasa: "Just as word and meaning are a pair, indeed be Parvati and Siva himself," indicating the union of complementary principles in the pursuit of knowledge. Rama attains a profound awareness of his spiritual legacy upon encountering Savitri, discovering in her a kindred spirit that mirrors his own inner essence. Savitri embodies the perfect feminine response, the Woman or female Principle, which harmonizes with Rama's masculine aspect, the male principle. In this synthesis, the ultimate reality the One is constituted by the union of both principles. Consequently, within the Rama-Savitri relationship, there exists a singular point of reference, the 'I', expressed as "Savitri is I"; she demonstrates that the self ('I') can be realized through this divine communion. This experience evokes an emotion akin to sublime love, which is considered the very essence of God. Divine love is not an attribute belonging to God; rather, it is intrinsic to God Himself. This raises the philosophical question of who gives and who receives in such a transcendent exchange, implying that the individual's personal drama dissolves into the greater whole, merging the ego

with universal consciousness. The encounter signifies that spiritual awakening involves recognizing the balance and unity of masculine and feminine energies within oneself, leading to the dissolution of duality and the experience of oneness. In this state, the individual ego ('drama') is submerged in the universal essence, allowing the self to perceive its true nature as an indivisible part of the divine totality. The relationship between Rama and Savitri thus becomes an allegory for the integration of complementary spiritual forces, illustrating that ultimate truth resides in the unification of opposites, where the individual's identity expands into the infinite 'I' of divine consciousness. This philosophical perspective underscores the idea that spiritual fulfillment arises from recognizing the inherent unity of all principles and surrendering personal distinctions to the all-encompassing whole. In philosophical terms, the narrative reflects the non-dualistic view that the divine is both the giver and the receiver, and the act of loving or being loved is an expression of the self-realization of God within the individual. The experience of Rama with Savitri teaches that true spiritual heritage is discovered through the recognition of this inner harmony, where the separation between self and other vanishes, and the soul perceives itself as the embodiment of the universal principle, merging individual existence with the supreme consciousness that encompasses all dualities. Savitri wishes to surrender to Truth to be free because accepting any bondage makes one unfree. According to Ramon Liyull, a mystic philosopher, this surrender signifies spiritual liberation through embracing the inner reality represented by Benares, the holy city of self-realization. The dialogue emphasizes that the search for ultimate Truth involves recognizing the inner sacredness of existence, symbolized by Benares, and understanding that genuine love and freedom arise from transcending ego and embracing the Self. The text speaks of the recurring comparison between man-woman relationships and the divine couplings of gods and their incarnations. It focuses on the pairs of Siva-Parvati, Rama-Sita, Krishna-Radha, and Satyavan-Savitri, stressing that one should always remember that duality is an illusion because there is only one unified God principle underlying all of them. For instance, Siva (the destroyer) needs the ability to annihilate, and to fulfill this role he is accompanied by Parvati (the Prakriti or Phenomenal world). This is why Savitri declares that Woman signifies death... Woman represents the world. The Truth of the world is its dissolution. Or rather, Truth can exist only because there is death. If the world were merely the world, there would be no Truth. Text tells us that Hindu mythology constantly draws parallels between human male-female bonds and the unions of gods and their divine embodiments. The main examples are the god-consorts Siva with Parvati, Rama with Sita, Krishna with Radha, and Satyavan with Savitri. The underlying teaching is that apparent duality is a delusion; behind every pair lies a single, unified divine essence. To illustrate, Siva, who is the annihilator, must possess the power to destroy, and this capacity is enabled by his association with Parvati, who embodies Prakriti – the manifest, phenomenal world. Hence Savitri's saying conveys that the feminine principle stands for mortality. The woman symbolizes the entire world. The ultimate reality of the world is its eventual dissolution. In other words, Truth can only emerge because of death and change. If the world existed without this impermanence, there would be no true understanding or reality. Expanding the idea further, the scripture highlights how human relationships are mirrored in divine mythologies to teach non-dualistic philosophy. The couples mentioned Siva-Parvati, Rama-Sita, Krishna-Radha, and Satyavan-Savitri—serve as metaphysical models showing that every apparent separation between male and female, creator and creation, or life and death, is actually an expression of a single supreme principle. Siva, the aspect of God responsible for destruction, requires a complementary energy to perform his function; this energy is personified by Parvati, who represents Prakriti, the material or phenomenal universe. The text thus urges the reader to grasp that duality is an illusion masking an underlying unity. The quote attributed to Savitri conveys a profound metaphysical insight: the feminine aspect is linked with death and the worldly experience. The world, embodied by the woman, signifies the transient nature of existence, and the ultimate truth of the universe is its inevitable dissolution. Truth itself can only be realized through the acceptance of mortality and change; without the

cycle of death and transformation, the world would lack the depth that gives meaning to reality. In another paraphrase, Rao discusses how Hindu thought repeatedly compares earthly man-woman partnerships with the sacred unions of deities and their incarnations, citing the famous pairs of Siva & Parvati, Rama & Sita, Krishna & Radha, and Satyavan & Savitri. The essential lesson is that dualistic perceptions are misleading because all these pairs ultimately reflect a single divine principle. Siva, the god of destruction, needs the capacity to annihilate, and this capacity is supplied by his consort Parvati, who personifies Prakriti, the phenomenal world of experience. Consequently, Savitri's aphorism states that the woman is the embodiment of death. The woman represents the entire material world. The reality of the world is its eventual decay. Truth can only manifest because of this death and dissolution. If the world were static and immortal, there would be no genuine Truth. The text shows the couples Siva-Parvati, Rama-Sita, Krishna-Radha, and Satyavan-Savitri. It teaches that perceived dualities are false; behind every pair is one unified God essence. For example, Siva, the annihilating deity, must have the power to destroy, and this power is granted through Parvati, the representation of Prakriti or the phenomenal universe. The saying of Savitri thus explains that woman is the metaphor for death. Woman epitomizes the world itself. The essential truth of the world lies in its dissolution. Truth can exist only when there is death, implying change. Without the world's impermanence, there would be no authentic Truth. The Serpent and the Rope examine how Hindu mythology aligns human marital relationships with divine unions of gods and their incarnate forms, spotlighting Siva with Parvati, Rama with Sita, Krishna with Radha, and Satyavan with Savitri. It insists that the illusion of duality must be discarded because all these relationships reflect a single supreme God principle. Siva, the destroyer, needs the ability to perform destruction, and this ability is supplied by Parvati, who embodies Prakriti the manifest world. Savitri's statement therefore conveys that the feminine energy denotes mortality. The woman stands for the whole worldly experience. The world's truth is its ultimate dissolution. Reality or Truth can only be apprehended because of death and transformation. If the world were eternal and unchanging, genuine Truth would not exist. The novel portrays Ramaswamy's quest for self-discovery and Indian identity through his relationships with women, particularly his wife and his beloved, which ultimately leads to a profound metaphysical understanding. "This mingling of love and quest is derived from a literary convention wholly Western in definition" (Scholes Kellogg 229). "The Serpent and the Rope" shows how love creates many relationships between characters like Rama's father, little mother, Madeleine, Uncle Charles, and others. The characters of Rama-George and Catherine represent the heart and soul of the novel. Their love balances spiritual and material, masculine and feminine aspects. Ramaswamy and Savitri's relationship is a perfect example of union between man and woman. It shows the balance of Purusha (male) and Prakriti (female) forces. Their bond also shows the struggle between passion and detachment. The story pictures Savitri as Ramaswamy's spiritual soulmate, like a fairy-tale princess who marries her prince in a forest palace. Their connection is not about physical beauty but about spiritual harmony, like the balance found in nature. Savitri's love changes Rama's life in France into a garden of love, making him feel like a prince who finds joy and prosperity. Ramaswamy's love for Savitri was a deep, steady feeling that lit up his heart and helped him deal with real-world challenges. He explored abstract ideas while living the experiences described in Bhatri Nari poetry: "O mother earth and father air, Of friend fire, great, Kingsman water, O brother, ether to you all. In final parting I make obeisance." (S. R. 130) Savitri's love for Ramaswamy is like Meera's devotion to Krishna – a selfless, endless affection that feels like Mother Annapurna's nurturing spirit, always full and plentiful. Savitri has changed Ramaswamy's whole world, giving him a deep mystical feeling about life, people, and history, similar to the spiritual ideas in tantra. Ramaswamy compares his experience to walking by a cam, singing Sankara's hymns, and imagining putting Savitri in a bus or car beside him, which made him think about history and Christianity. "The human situation involving Ramaswamy's encounter with woman as the other is to be understood as an illustration and a viable proof of this abstract thesis" (Mann 342) Ramaswamy's

love for Savitri became like the divine love of Krishna and Radha, a pure and legendary union. It notes that they weren't married, but they understood each other fully, like having the whole knowledge of one another. "We were not married that morning we discovered we had been married else how she understands that silent whole knowledge of one another" (Rao 211) Finally, the novel by Raja Rao is said to show a deep connection between people and a remarkable, praiseworthy harmony between characters and the natural world. In the novel, Raja Rao shows a deep connection between people, highlighting a remarkable bond between characters and a harmony with the natural world.

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