



The Serpent and the Rope

Raja Rao

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The Serpent and the Rope introduces to American readers India's greatest novelist. Reflecting the flavor and wholeness of the traditional Indian way of life, where fact and fable, philosophy and the matter-of-fact blend into one, this semi-autobiographical novel can be called timeless, just as India herself seems timeless and other-worldly by virtue of her unchanging rituals.

But the novel also portrays a very definite period of time, describing the full implications of the meeting of East and West on the most intimate plane through the story of Rama, an Indian, and Madeleine, a French girl, who meet at a French university shortly after World War II. Their marriage is the central theme of the book, and it is in telling the story of this marriage that Rama reveals, more deeply than most writers are able to suggest in their lifetime, the meaning of love. For these two people it becomes a question either of preserving their identities or of sacrificing an inherited background to make their marriage a success. Family ties on both sides do not help, and Rama's trip back to India for his father's illness forcibly reminds him of the underlying contrasts between India and Europe, and of a certain conflict between them and himself. While there he meets his friend Pratap's fiancée, Savithri, an event which is to bring many forgotten questions to the surface and to alter the whole perspective of his life. When Rama returns to France, he and Madeleine have to face their problems and find their own solutions.

To express his fundamental and universal message, Raja Rao has created a memorable style, a compound of the unhurried breath of the Eastern sense of time with a fresh and personal imagery. Together with the compelling story he unfolds, this provides for a remarkable new literary experience.

The Serpent and the Rope Details

Date : Published 1986 by Overlook (first published 1960)

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Author : Raja Rao

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From Reader Review The Serpent and the Rope for online ebook

Sachin says

An overdose of the Vedanta and glorification of the past. Found it difficult to digest it and above all it was boring!

Bish Chic says

Very engaging piece of literature.

I found his storytelling enthralling. However at certain parts of the book he is so elitist and annoying... and its compelling how he uses his status to justify his at times pompous behavior.

Suraj Alva says

When I found out about this novel and its writer, I was pissed. Because I had just NOW come to know of both.

The best few days of my life were spent in Aix-en-Provence, with a French girl. We walked around Aix and Marseilles talking philosophy, life etc. It was Before Sunrise except the dialogue was in French (she spoke no English and I had been studying in Paris), was over a period of three days, and no names were exchanged. So yeah. Oh! And I forgot to mention, I am Indian.

Among the scholarly papers I read, a lot has been said about the failed marriage Of Madeline and Rama: difference in cultures, viewpoints, temperaments blah blah. But nothing was mentioned about the two dead babies. I guess, given Mado's attachment to her first dead baby boy, it is not far fetched to say that by the second time, she couldn't bear seeing Rama's face as it reminded her of her loss.

Her interest in Buddhism and such is typical of someone grieving, of course. But then she actually goes nuts (and this is explained in the novel by her becoming more and more orthodox in her new faith): she loses interest in life and its pleasures. And her body suffers, immensely. I think nowadays such is known as Major Depressive Disorder.

Why Savithri, besides the intellectual connection? Why Lakshmi for sex? I have lived in America (with interruptions) for 12 years and among all women, I consider Indian women to be the hottest. Why? Years of being exposed to Indian customs, media, culture. This is also highlighted in the novel, with the main character constantly fantasizing about all things Indian. So in a way, some of the scholarly criticisms hold weight.

The novel is not a breeze. It takes effort but I promise it's worth it. The pure poetry of the prose will make you stop breathing for a few seconds. Besides, love, marriage and India, the novel also illustrates the nature of the individual, of death and so on.

Lydia says

Indulging piece of work, altho all that intellectual wankery couldn't save a holy benares of his own personal life.

Vaijayanthi says

This book was prescribed for B.A., and was read as a text book at that time. Now, I am not able to trace this book to read again and this has been out of print since 1986.
