The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Raja Rao, professor emeritus, philosophy, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
RAJA RAO

Raja Rao was already recognized as a major figure in the world of letters when he joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin as a professor of philosophy in 1966. His first novel, *Kanthapura* (1938), partly reflected and partly anticipated his own involvement in Gandhi’s movement for achieving independence for India through non-violent resistance. The success of that novel, both within and outside India, not only earned recognition for him as an author but also helped establish a specifically Indianized style of English writing, one that eventually came to be prized as constituting a significant branch within English literature. His literary standing was enhanced and confirmed with the success of his second work of fiction, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), a semi-autobiographical work (drawing on his own life and his first marriage, in France) that delved into the tensions between Indian and western cultures.

One year before coming to The University of Texas, he had published *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* (1965), which sought to answer philosophical-metaphysical questions through the unusual medium of satire. In addition to eight works of fiction and a collection of essays, Raja Rao published one major work of biography: *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998).

He was the recipient of several distinguished awards: the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1988); the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, the most prestigious award in the field of letters in India (1997); the Padma Bhushan (1969) and the Padma Vibhushan (awarded posthumously, 2007), which are honors of the highest order awarded by the government of India for service to the country.

Raja Rao was born on November 8, 1908, in Hassan, in the state of Mysore in south India. His early education was in Muslim schools, the Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad and the Aligarh Muslim University. He continued his studies at Madras University, earning a degree in English and history. Winning a major state scholarship for study abroad, he pursued graduate study in France at the University of Montpellier and later at the Sorbonne in Paris.

His first two marriages ended in divorce. He retired from UT as professor emeritus in 1980, but he continued writing, conducting research, and teaching informally until his final years. He died on July 8, 2006, at his home in Austin, Texas. He is survived by his third wife, Susan Vaught Rao, and by two sons, Christopher Rama Rao and Stefan Lewellen.

Given that there are numerous notices and essays concerning Raja Rao’s life and work in encyclopedias and in web sites, it is appropriate and relevant that the present resolution should dwell some on his teaching at UT. He came to our campus at just the right moment: a period of increasing demand among students for exploration of the perspectives and the wisdom of the East. His classes were enthusiastically attended by hundreds and eventually thousands of students. Now, decades later, it is not unusual for former students of his to comment that his classes were among the most important and personally rewarding of all classes they attended during their college careers.

Professor Rao brought to his classes a depth of insight into the spiritual tradition of India that was gained from his own personal experience of that tradition. This was reflected in his sometimes playful and joyful approach to
teaching. He could be bubbling over with joy and good humor as he challenged students with mind-teasing questions that might be described as reminiscent of the koan of Zen Buddhism. The result, sometimes, was confusion. However, the purpose of these questions was not just to mystify the student—but rather, to point to a perspective which could ultimately prove to be deeply rewarding. He had the great capacity to speak both to the heart and from the heart of the Indian tradition, conveying both the distinct contributions of that tradition and the universality of its insights. Speaking at the memorial service for Raja Rao, one of his students remembered, “There was no discussion with Rao that did not lead to big issues.” At the same service, Dr. George Sudarshan (one of the undersigned members of the committee for the present resolution) remarked that in deciding to join the physics faculty at UT “one of the attractions of UT was the presence of Raja Rao here.”

Advanced and graduate classes in Indian thought had, of course, been taught at some North American universities before the 1960s. But the propitious recruitment of Raja Rao to UT—at the initiative of former Dean of Arts and Sciences, John R. Silber, who at the time was chair of the Department of Philosophy—had the effect of introducing Eastern thought and traditions more broadly into the undergraduate curriculum. This development at UT served as a model for similar expansion and enrichment of the curriculum at other universities and colleges throughout the country. We reap the benefits of these changes today, inasmuch as it is widely appreciated that the quest for understanding, value, and meaning that finds its expression in literature, philosophy, and religion is a universal human quest that should properly span as many diverse traditions as possible.

In the final years of his life, Rao expressed concern that his unpublished works and papers be preserved and ultimately published. Initially, he was assisted in this endeavor by the late professor of Indo-European linguistics, Dr. Winifred P. Lehmann. Since his death, under the direction of his wife, Susan Rao, “Sacred Wordsmith: The Raja Rao Memorial Literary Foundation” has been established. The Foundation aims are twofold: 1) to preserve, organize, catalogue and 2) edit the voluminous archive of his papers, and to promote publication of Raja Rao’s unpublished novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and correspondence.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Alexander P.D. Mourelatos (chair), George Sudarshan, David Sosa, and Linda K. Mackey.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on December 3, 2007. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.