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## Indian Thought and Tradition in the later Short Stories of Raja Rao

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### Abstract

Raja Rao is an outstanding personality amongst the first rate Indian English fiction writers. 'The Policeman and the Rose' is a highly symbolic and complex story. It is replete with the advaitic philosophy of 'Jiva' and 'Soul'. Its Vedantic nature makes its serious, ambiguous and hence—complex. 'India: A Fable' is another attention winning story of the second collection. Its theme is developed through a conversation between the narrator and the French child-Pirrot. 'The Premiere of Shakuntala' is also a fine story of Raja Rao. It is not a reproduction of Kalidas' interesting story. Rao has described Kalidas' personal life and his intellectual rivals. Rao throws out ample light on the history of Ujjain and its glory. Rao's comments on the classical literature of India are of much significance. The writer has highlighted Indian thought and tradition within the short bulk of story. Notwithstanding diverse themes and techniques, Rao's short stories bring a unity of vision of the rich and ages-old yet vital and living Indian tradition. On several occasions, Rao has admitted the impact of the Sanskrit classics on his works. Most of his works reflect Indianness. He begins his stories generally as 'once upon a time etc.' It is, of course, a variation of Sanskrit as अथ पुरा वत आसीद् पुरा ।

**Key Words:** Fiction writers, Jiva and Soul, Shakuntala & Indianness.

### Introduction

Raja Rao is an outstanding personality amongst the first rate Indian English fiction writers. He was an erudite scholar and philosopher, whose literary career spanned over more than half a century. Raja Rao's sensibility is verily Indian and presents a unified vision of life. His novels leave us with the impression that the Indian life can be understood in terms of its metaphysics only. In his fiction, Raja Rao has captured the core of the Indian thought and tradition and a quest culminating in an identification of the individual self with the Absolute. In India, literature has been considered 'sadhana'. It is a part of spiritual quest and calls for rigorous discipline and penance on the part of the writer and Raja Rao's novels reveal that he firmly believed in the principle.

Usually, it is conceded that India has a poor history of her own nation, but in the same breath, it is a matter of pride that she does have a rich and glorious literary treasure. The Vedic literature of India is

the richest mine of knowledge not only for Indians but for foreigners also. Of course, it is a sorry matter that most of our Indian English writers, kept themselves off this glory. As compared to these writers, Rao has brought the stream of the Vedic period, to his writings. The Vedic glory has allured great alien philosophers and thinkers like Maxmuller and Geothe. This literature of India has enlightened and benefitted the world. Due to the lack of the spread of Sanskrit, it could not embrace the global heart and mind as it and the world had latent desires. Rao has done his best to make the world realise the ancient glory of Indian thought, culture traditions, and above all - her spiritual quest by writing in English language.

‘The Policeman and the Rose’ is a highly symbolic and complex story of Raja Rao. It is replete with the advaitic philosophy of ‘Jiva’ and ‘Soul’. Its Vedantic nature makes its serious, ambiguous and hence—complex. The policeman arrests everyone. He stands for evil. He is ‘ahankara’ of man. The story is a memorable metaphysical document in the form of fiction. It has no parallels in the whole range of Indian English fiction. The theme and the style both show how philosophical thoughts can be transformed into art. However, Rao has cultivated a new tradition in Indian English Fiction.

‘India: A Fable’ is another attention winning story of the second collection. Its theme is developed through a conversation between the narrator and the French child-Pirrot. There is a quest in the mind of the boy. He wants to know about India and Indian things. The way of story-telling is quite in Indian tradition. ‘The Premierre of Shakuntala’ is also a fine story of Raja Rao. It is not a reproduction of Kalidas’ interesting story. Rao has described Kalidas’ personal life and his intellectual rivals. Rao throws out ample light on the history of Ujjain and its glory. Rao’s comments on the classical literature of India are of much significance. The writer has highlighted Indian thought and tradition within the short bulk of story. Among the short stories of Raja Rao ‘In Khandesh’ has a unique place. It is praised and liked for its simple theme. The story displays a witty and vehement satire against the defunct feudal system and forced loyalty expected by the British rulers. Rao criticizes the blind adherence of the Indians to false values. This short story shows how Indians were fed up with the feudal system and the British rule and consequently, organizing themselves to oppose the foreign government. It shows people’s restlessness for freedom and mass-awakening. We see in the story that the period of complete loyalty to the government was over and Indians had developed a strong quest for national freedom and common Indians were more prompt for it than ‘Rajas’ and ‘Maharajas’. Prof. L. S. R. Krishana Shastri comments on the story:

**The story depicts the transition from the era of unquestioning loyalty to the British to the beginning of organized opposition to the alien rule. The pattern**

**of broken and unconnected lines adds a visual dimension to the description of the confusion of the storm.<sup>1</sup>**

The concluding part of the story has a double suggestiveness. On the one hand it shows the stormy British rule and their exploiting nature, on the other, it shows how Indians started to withdraw their loyalty to them. It points to a shift in Indian thinking from loyalty to the alien rule to their nationalism. Regarding the story, M. K. Naik aptly comments:

**..... at least one story. 'In Khandes' already shows the descriptive power which is a mark of Raja Rao's later and mature works.<sup>2</sup>**

'On the Ganga Ghat' (1989) is the third collection of Rao's short stories. The collection contains eleven short stories. If we read all the stories at one go, we may weave them into a novel. These stories are as lovely as the Mother Ganges. Rao has described the traditional holiness of the city - Benares. Since the times immemorial, it has been thought that one's death in Benares, leads one to Moksha. Many people come from different parts of India to Benares as it purifies all. Death and cremation on the ghats make one immortal. The pious city tempts people of different sections of society. Rajas, princes, beggars, sadhus, sages and simpletons, Brahmins and concubines come to the Ganga Ghat.

Like R.K. Narayan's 'Malgudi', the Ganga is the central character of these eleven short stories. The Ganga has long cherished Indian respect. It has been said that the Ganga has always been holy and she has purifying power. The traditional Indian belief about the Ganga has been strongly supported by Rao.

Notwithstanding diverse themes and techniques, Rao's short stories bring a unity of vision of the rich and ages-old yet vital and living Indian tradition. On several occasions, Rao has admitted the impact of the Sanskrit classics on his works. Most of his works reflect Indianness. He begins his stories generally as 'once upon a time etc.' It is, of course, a variation of Sanskrit as 'अथ पुरा वत आसीद् पुरा ।

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