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PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND WAYS OF LIFE IN THE SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF RAJA RAO

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Abstract

The present paper is a humble endeavour to see how Raja Rao projects Indian ways of life in his short-stories, particularly "Nimka," "India: A Fable," and "The Policeman and the Rose." Rao, who is a renowned Indian English writer, has written novels and short stories, which are deeply rooted in metaphysics. One of his famous short story collections is *The Policeman and the Rose*, a collection of ten stories. Fantasy and metaphysics are the central elements in this work, and reality is put in the background. Various symbols are also used by Raja Rao. Rao's another focus in this collection is on the quest of self-realization. He also discusses socio-political issues of India. "Nimka", one of the stories from collection, shows social and philosophical appeal. Nimka is a Russian refugee girl and is fascinated by Indian ways. The story is full of Indian philosophy. There is reference of Sita. The story of Nala and Damayanti from Mahabharata is also influential. Raja Rao's faith in the strength of spiritual and moral aspects of Gandhian ideology is also reflected in "Nimka". "India: A Fable" and "The Policeman and the Rose" are two stories which become the vehicle of metaphysical statement. "India: A Fable" deals with the themes of difference between illusion and reality and of contrast between India and West. It is a blending of fact and fancy. The fact is that India is a mystery to the westerners. The westerners know a little reality about India and they consider all talk about India and her glory as a fable. Rao presents a fanciful picture of India through narrator. He tells about Gods, Goddesses, Ganga and many more. This story is full of symbols. "The Policeman and the Rose" is the last story in the collection. This story presents reality through a parable. The narrative serves as a metaphor for the distinctive Indian way of thinking.

Keywords: Metaphysics, fantasy, India, self-realization, fact, etc.

India has always been so devoted to her Vedic path that, even when her changing circumstances demanded a new view on things, it has been hesitant to promote daring and scientific thought for materialistic objectives. To comprehend India's present, one must first study her past, which encompasses not only her history but also the entire of her culture, including literary works. Raja Rao approaches his work with holy devotion. Literature is Sadhna for him, and by Sadhna he implies a form of spiritual discipline and progress or a kind of entire devotion to one's metaphysical self. Rao's *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978), a collection of ten stories, contains as many as seven of the nine stories in Raja Rao's first collection, *The Cow of the Barricades* and other stories (1947), with only three new additions. The epigraph from Shri Atmanand Guru and the Preface to *The Policeman and the Rose* appears to have special relevance to the new stories added to this collection.

The elements of fantasy and metaphysics take central stage in these works, while the aspect of reality is pushed to the background. These stories could be considered experimental in certain ways. Some of the statements in the Preface allude to the stories' investigational nature: "These stories therefore, have to be taken as the fruits of such an experiment stretching over almost three decades, their main interest being the intellectual excitement it all gave me, and which I am told, it has given a few others" (xvi).

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These new stories are based on the highest understanding of reality, which requires going beyond what the eye and reason can see. The emphasis in these metaphysical tales is invariably on symbolic presentation, with the quest for self-realization as the central focus. Every key aspect of "India: A Fable" is filled with symbolic value. Rao's portrayal of his birthplace comes from a personal perspective of India as the ultimate, metaphysical country. "The Policeman and the Rose," the title story, is particularly meaningful. The world of fantasy, vision, and fancy is brought into this world of reality through convincing visuals.

Rao is deeply concerned with sociological and political issues, as well as India's unique difficulties when he penned his early stories in the 1930s. However, these three pieces represent his mature period and illustrate the author's metaphysical viewpoint. "Nimka," one of the new stories in *The Policeman and the Rose*, illustrates Rao's growth as a writer and thinker. The story contains some of Rao's sociological concerns, such as his preoccupation with the suffering of the underdog, but its art and techniques are new. In the case of "Nimka," there is no uniformity of critical judgment. C. D. Narasimhaiah rates it very highly: "The story, perhaps the greatest of its kind by an Indian writer, at least in English, acquires the dignity and dimension of the work of the great European masters in this genre..." (12). It is the creation of a wonderfully gifted writer who is intimately familiar with both Europe and India, and who also understands how to employ the gifts of both cultures.

"Nimka" is a touching story with social and philosophical implications. The narrator encounters Nimka, a young white Russian refugee, in Paris. She is a princess by blood, but she currently makes a livelihood as a waitress in a restaurant. She is drawn to India by Tolstoy and the narrator, and she states that India is "the land where all that is wrong everywhere goes right" (100). She is attracted to the young Indian narrator, who thinks that she is in love with him. He feels that "she could not marry me -I was too distant and indifferent" (102). As a result, he introduces her to his friend Michel, a Sanskrit student and poet. Nimka develops feelings for him. Finally, she marries a Russian refugee count who owns a vegetarian restaurant and has a child with him. However, the Russian count's son abandons her and their child. Nimka expects that Boris, her son, will return her to Russia, but when that hope is dashed, she lives a life of detachment, owning a little cloth shop: "Nimka asked nothing of life. She asked nothing of me" (103).

In just six pages, the writer conveys a deeper meaning to the reader and leaves a lasting impression on the reader's mind. The story is infused with Indian philosophy. This is something that anyone, especially an Indian, may appreciate. "She / Nimka / made a link between the smolny courtyard and the palace of Damayanti" (100). For an Indian reader, the references to Sita at the conclusion have special meaning because Sita represents someone who perseveres through adversity to emerge purer and nobler. The Mahabharata's story of Nala and Damayanti is likewise incredibly appropriate and influential.

Raja Rao's faith in the spiritual and moral dimensions of Gandhian doctrine is reflected in "Nimka." Nimka has pictures of Tolstoy and the Mahatma on the walls. "She believed that one day truth would reign in the world. She hoped Mahatma Gandhi might still save the world" (103). He is neither a man, nor a Saint, but a country to her. Hitler is a favourite of hers because he adores India. She is never depressed, but always hopeful. Her joys and sorrows are blended.

In India, success is linked to sin, and Gandhi is linked to poverty. Nimka's necklace becomes a symbol of suffering, poverty, and hardship. The work makes frequent references to India and the Indian ethos. Poetry, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Hitler, and other Indian epics are all incorporated throughout this novel.

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Raja Rao has succeeded in making shorter fiction the vehicle of metaphysical remarks in the two additional pieces, "India: A Fable" and "The Policeman and the Rose." The best tale in the second phase is "India: A Fable." In less than nine pages, the author has created a profound tale that addresses the related themes of illusion and reality, as well as the contrast between India and the West. There's a strange combination of fact and fiction in it. First, we are given the facts, and a concrete, the real world is presented:

Never was Luxembourg so beautiful as on that fragile spring day. March had come and gone boisterously, cold winds blew in April and then the immense sunshine came. The pools were transparent; the sky full of ochre clouds, the trees cut through the air with their leaves, the earth was hot. Men came out, old men with cough and whiskers and sat by the ponds reading newspapers. The old fat women removed their kerchiefs and spoke garrulous words. (104)

The critics are unanimous in praising "India: A Fable," which mixes fact and fancy: fact melts into fancy and fancy crystallizes as fact. The fact that India is a mystery to the westerners and that her very name produces a sense of mystification in them as though upon the innocent and inquisitive mind of a child has been very interestingly revealed in this story. Knowing little about reality, the Westerners consider all talk about India and her glory as a fable or a fairy tale. The element of fact and fantasy are combined to evoke the picture of a fabulous country that possesses a fantastic charm and a magical effect. Raja Rao gives an evocative description of both the natural scenery of Luxembourg and the rural world of Southern India.

On a spring day, the narrator—who can be identified as Raj Rao—wears a sherwani with gold buttons and visits Luxembourg Park. There he encounters Pierrot, a young French child of about five or six, who is being followed by his nanny and escorted by her young man. She encourages Pierrot to engage the Indian in conversation. He chuckles as he recognizes faces in the narrator's coat's golden buttons. In their conversation, he inquiries about India. Excited to learn that India is a country of elephants and goddesses, a country of forests and rivers where there are "two weddings a day – one by the light of the sun and the other by the light of the moon" (108). For minds that have not fully grown, despite their ardent love for reality, what is presented in this story is a fantasy. Through a charming exchange between the narrator and Pierrot, the entire concept is developed.

The narrator paints a fantastical picture of India. He tells the child about goddesses and elephants. The narrator highlights the differences between Pierrot's world of romantic fantasy and India. The former's desert is contrasted with India's forests, the oasis with the Ganges, and the camels with the elephants. Pierrot discards his world of fantasy, throws 'Kiki' into the garden pool, and passionately imagines himself riding an elephant.

"India: A Fable" is a highly symbolic story. Every important detail has a symbolic meaning. The garden where the spiritual education of Pierrot takes place is the counterpart of the garden in *The Cat and Shakespeare*, with all its divine associations. Others in the garden, in contrast to Pierrot, lack a desire for spirituality. Even the serious-minded Sorbonne girls are content with book knowledge, while the old men read newspapers, the old women gab, and the young men sleep. In Pierrot's romantic fantasy, the East is only an opulent land of escape, while the Indian narrator's description of his land is a vision of quintessential metaphysical India. Every telling detail stresses the contrast; the camel, associated with trading caravans versus the elephant with his divine associations in Indian mythology: the human wedding of Prince Rudolphe and Princess Katherine vs. the spiritual union of the Indian Prince.

Although we think philosophy is intrusive, the symbols are capable of complex philosophical meanings. The epigraph itself contains profound philosophical ideas. This story about a

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French nanny encouraging her charge to converse with the Indian so that she can spend more time with her man makes a conscious effort to incorporate "Indianness" and philosophical significance. An attractive image of the child appears. His reply to the narrator demonstrates how a child has a remarkable new perspective on the world.

The epigraph is a pointer to the theme of the necessity of discriminating between illusion and reality. One recalls how Shankaracharya describes the advaitic experience of the non-dualistic perception of the illuminated soul, as "I have risen above my ignorance and my knowledge of this seeming-universe..... I know nothing but joy, limitless, unbounded" (Naik 113). The title also indicates how this spiritual quest has successfully been achieved in India.

One of the story's major symbols is the wedding. It symbolizes the fusion of the inner soul with the greater soul, a theme seen frequently in Indian spiritual poetry. In Pierrot's vivid depiction of his dreamworld, which is a riot of splendour and colour, the Westerner's escape-seeking idea of the "gorgeous East" finds free play: Princess Katherine rides on a red camel and is dressed in blue, while Prince Rudolphe rides a white horse wrapped in white gold. Again, the place of Prince Rudolphe is taken by the Indian narrator, who is a plebeian. The symbolic implications of the "wedding" become clearer when Princess Katherine yields place to the two goddesses, one on the right hand of the Indian Raja, and the other on the left. The two goddesses are further described as "one for the wedding of the night, and one for the wedding of the day. One who is dark as the bee and the other who is blonde as butter" (Rao 108). The Westerner's gross fantasy world is destroyed by the narrator's symbolic description of the spiritual "wedding." A metaphysical India in which romance is made a road to reality is opposed to the romantic illusion of the west. The French boy is put in contrast with the narrator, a capable representation of the Indian ethos. Their different ages show that India is more mature than the West, which is still developing. Pierrot is set apart from his fellow countrymen in the park because none of them has his capacity for imaginative fantasy. Pierrot later receives a pacificatory ritual bath by plunging into the pond, and at the conclusion, when he claims that he is now a Maharaja riding an elephant, his education is over. "He cried and slipped into the water. He touched the bottom that was like himself, his hands and feet made of light. The water was not deep, but very cold and full of perfumes" (112). Pierrot's final comment shows how his education is now complete. It is a changed Pierrot that the narrator meets after an interval. He seems "to have grown in years." Earlier, the boy was only a witness to the wedding in the romantic desert. Now he is himself is 'a Maharaja,' and rides the elephant. "I know," he says, "I am a Maharaja. I ride the elephant. The wedding is over" (112). The story seems to end on a metaphysical note. Hydan Moore Williams notices that "Raja Rao integrates his metaphysical theme with language, style and form" (96).

The last story of the collection is the title story, "The Policeman and the Rose." The author has called it "pure fiction" and has sub-titled it "A True Story." The sub-title paradoxically helps to underline the pure fiction character of it. That is at one level. On another level, this is a true story in-so-far as this one the author lives and truly has his being.

"The Policeman and the Rose" presents reality through a parable. There is no attempt at realism, and the action takes place at an unspecified time. Like the previous story, it is also a metaphysical one; in fact, here the metaphysical vein is stronger. The story has a pronounced narrative element. Its central theme is man's quest for self-realization.

The narrative serves as a metaphor for the distinctive Indian way of thinking. The story's symbolism is intricate, unique, and challenging to understand. A quick review of the story's incidents will make it easier to interpret the symbols used in detail. Because we are all detained by the police as soon as we are born, the narrator claims that this is the tale of every

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man, which explains why newborns cry. The story has a lighthearted tone, and humour that arises from the acceptance of the total human situation which is typical of Govind Nair of *The Cat and Shakespeare.*

The author begins his story with the statement that "all men are arrested the moment they are born" (Rao 113). The narrator tells the tale of his many previous births, starting with the time when he was a contemporary of Rama and Ravana, and ends with his most recent birth in the city of Madurai, where he is described as the son of a wealthy father and the grandson of a scholar of Vedanta. He visits Paris when he is a young man. He becomes famous and successful. He comes to be known as "the policeman of God." Encouraged by this success, he returns to India. Here he falls ill and is treated in the district hospital. He realizes that he is under arrest while his policeman receives his Indian uniform and service number. When he gets back to France, he discovers that his fame has exceeded all of his expectations and that the French has built a statue in his honour after announcing his death. Now that he has returned in the flesh, they are making his life challenging. He is ultimately forced to leave. When he arrives in Travancore, he meets his guru. His guru is described as "the Retired Police Commissioner," "two-feet and a white Rose," and "Truth standing on a Lotus." The narrator offers his red rose at the altar "Lotus of Truth," and then becomes 'free.' He concludes that "all the trouble is that we mistake the Lotus for the Rose" (126).

The Advaitic concept of Jiva and the Soul, one bound and the other free from a single reality, is brilliantly developed in "The Policeman and the Rose. The very first sentence "when I was arrested my problem was not me but it" introduces the symbolic idea (112). Even as "death is a bath and we know our marks then" (114) birth is an arrest of the free soul, which is transformed into Jiva the soul mixed with the impressions of its characters, objects, and experiences of life. The transformation from one life to another and the change of the body one after the other becomes the law of a perennial life of the soul, which, though being essentially free and yet remaining bound becomes Jiva or the policeman with a forgotten past and an unknown future, both of which are joined with the present.

The term "Policeman" connotes ego-sense, which every human being has from birth and from which we must flee to find salvation. When it arrests you, you are released because it represents the law of karma. That implies that Karma is the only way to liberate oneself from worldly illusions.

The word "Rose" is also symbolic. It stands for purity. Because it is white, it represents holiness. The rose, of course, has a well-known history, and Raja Rao takes advantage of its significance, but in the process, he expands the meaning of the rose's symbolism, drawing inspiration from his own culture. M.K. Naik says: "The red rode may be said to stand for the quality of Rajas (Passion) - the second of the three gunas, essential constituents of the cosmic substance i.e., Prakriti in Samkhya philosophy" (Studies 44).

The Christian idea of the fall of man is intelligently combined with the Hindu concept of creation in such statements as this one: "God once got angry with him and killed him but he became many" (Rao 114).

To sum up, Raja Rao brilliantly translates philosophy into art in his works. The author discusses many Indian life philosophies in this text. He is able to convey extremely metaphysical and spiritual viewpoints using symbols. In the story "The Policeman and the Rose," he uses the myth of Rama and Ravana as an example of how he uses myth. This tale belongs to the category of Indian folktales known as self-realization tales. The novelist has shown Indian ways of life abundantly.

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