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**STUDY ON ROLE OF A RAJA RAO IN INDIAN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

# Study on Role of a Raja Rao in Indian English Literature

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**Abstract – After Rao, Indian writings in English started employing magical realism, bagginess, nonlinear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as Narayan where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that Indianness is a theme constructed only in IWE and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures. He further adds "the post-colonial novel becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself".**

**Some of these arguments form an integral part of what is called postcolonial theory. The very categorisation of IWE – as IWE or under post-colonial literature – is seen by some as limiting. Amitav Ghosh made his views on this very clear by refusing to accept the Eurasian Commonwealth Writers Prize for his book *The Glass Palace* in 2001 and withdrawing it from the subsequent stage.**

**The renowned writer V. S. Naipaul, a third generation Indian from Trinidad and Tobago and a Nobel Prize laureate, is a person who belongs to the world and usually not classified under IWE. Naipaul evokes ideas of homeland, rootlessness and his own personal feelings towards India in many of his books. Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner from the U.S., is a writer uncomfortable under the label of IWE. Recent writers in India such as Arundhati Roy and David Davidar show a direction towards contextuality and rootedness in their works. Arundhati Roy, a trained architect and the 1997 Booker prize winner for her *The God of Small Things*, calls herself a "home grown" writer.**

**Key Words: Magical Realism, Bagginess, Nonlinear Narrative, Evokes.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, such as V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Raja Rao, who are of Indian descent. It is frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. (Indo-Anglian is a specific term in the sole context of writing that should not be confused with the term Anglo-Indian). As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature- the production from previously colonised countries such as India. Rao, Raja 1909–2006, Indian novelist, Hassan, Mysore (now in Karnataka), as Raja. Rao took his surname as an adult, and was educated in India and France and for many years divided his time among India, Europe, and the United States. From 1966 to 1980 he was professor of philosophy at the Univ. of Texas at Austin. His novels are considered to be among the finest Indian works written in English. The first, *Kanthapura* (1938), describes the daily life of Indian villages during

a revolt against an overbearing plantation owner. Rao's commitment to Gandhian nonviolence is clearly revealed in his description of the peasants' conversion to the principle of civil disobedience. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is a semiautobiographical account of a marriage between intellectuals that is destroyed by philosophical discord. His metaphysical novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is a tale of individual destiny. In *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) he examines the political complexities of Indian liberalism, and in *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) he treats the quest for identity in various cultural contexts. Rao's works are profoundly serious, reflecting his abiding concern with the potential clashes between pragmatism and ideals. He published two collections of short stories, *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978), and several works of nonfiction, including a biography of Gandhi (1998).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Indian English Literature has a relatively recent history; it is only one and a half centuries old. The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet*; Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. In its early stages it was influenced by the Western art form of the novel. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is Indian in terms of its storytelling qualities. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English. Dhan Gopal Mukerji was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* where he relates his life experiences and influences. P. Lal, a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, founded a press in the 1950s for Indian English writing, *Writers Workshop*. R.K. Narayan is a writer who contributed over many decades and who continued to write till his death recently. He was discovered by Graham Greene in the sense that the latter helped him find a publisher in England. Graham Greene and Narayan remained close friends till the end. Similar to Thomas Hardy's *Wessex*, Narayan created the fictitious town of *Malgudi* where he set his novels. Some criticise Narayan for the parochial, detached and closed world that he created in the face of the changing conditions in India at the times in which the stories are set. Others, such as Graham Greene, however, feel that through *Malgudi* they could vividly understand the Indian experience. Narayan's evocation of small town life and its experiences through the eyes of the endearing child protagonist *Swaminathan* in *Swami and Friends* is a good sample of his writing style. Simultaneous with Narayan's pastoral idylls, a very different writer, *Mulk Raj Anand*, was similarly gaining recognition for his writing set in rural India; but his stories were harsher, and engaged, sometimes brutally, with divisions of caste, class and religion. Among the later writers, the most notable is Raja Rao, born in India, now living in the United Kingdom. Rao with his famous work *Midnight's Children* (Booker Prize 1981, Booker of Bookers 1992, and Best of the Bookers 2008) ushered in a new trend of writing. He used a hybrid language – English generously peppered with Indian terms – to convey a theme that could be seen as representing the vast canvas of India. He is usually categorised under the magic realism mode of writing most famously associated with *Gabriel García Márquez*. *Vikram Seth*, author of *A Suitable Boy* (1994) is a writer who uses a purer English and more realistic themes. Being a self-confessed fan of *Jane Austen*, his attention is on the story, its details and its twists and turns. *Vikram Seth* is notable both as an accomplished novelist and poet. *Vikram Seth's* outstanding achievement as a versatile and prolific poet remains largely and unfairly neglected.

*Shashi Tharoor*, in his *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), follows a story-telling (though in a satirical) mode as in the *Mahabharata* drawing his ideas by going back and

forth in time. His work as UN official living outside India has given him a vantage point that helps construct an objective Indianness. Other authors include *Ashok Banker*, *Manoj Das*, *Vikram Chandra*, *Anita Desai*, *Kiran Desai*, *Arundhati Roy*, *Gita Mehta*, *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni*, *Upamanyu Chatterjee*, *Samit Basu*, *Raj Kamal Jha*, *Jhumpa Lahiri*, *Bharti Kirchner*, *Khushwant Singh*, *Vijay Singh*, *Tarun Tejpal*, *Amit Chaudhuri*, *Amitav Ghosh*, *Vikas Swarup*, *Anil Menon*, *Rohinton Mistry*, *Suketu Mehta*, *Kiran Nagarkar*, *Bharati Mukherjee*, *Vandana Singh*, *Abhay Kumar*, *Lakshmi Raj Sharma* and *Prajwal Parajuly*. *Vikrant Dutta* captures a rare format through his novel in ballad verse "Ode to Dignity"

One of the key issues raised in this context is the superiority/inferiority of IWE (Indian Writing in English) as opposed to the literary production in the various languages of India. Key polar concepts bandied in this context are superficial/authentic, imitative/creative, shallow/deep, critical/uncritical, elitist/parochial and so on.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD:

The views of Rao and *Amit Chaudhuri* expressed through their books *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* and *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* respectively essentialise this battle. Rao's statement in his book – "the ironic proposition that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear" – created a lot of resentment among many writers, including writers in English. In his book, *Amit Chaudhuri* questions – "Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?"

After Rao, IWE started employing magical realism, bagginess, nonlinear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as *Narayan* where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that Indianness is a theme constructed only in IWE and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures. He further adds "the post-colonial novel becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself".

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The Glass Palace in 2001 and withdrawing it from the subsequent stage.

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Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner from the U.S., is a writer uncomfortable under the label of IWE. Recent writers in India such as Arundhati Roy and David Davidar show a direction towards contextuality and rootedness in their works. Arundhati Roy, a trained architect and the 1997 Booker prize winner for her *The God of Small Things*, calls herself a "home grown" writer. Her award winning book is set in the immensely physical landscape of Kerala. Davidar sets his *The House of Blue Mangoes* in Southern Tamil Nadu. In both the books, geography and politics are integral to the narrative. In his novel *Lament of Mohini* (2000), Shreekumar Varma touches upon the unique matriarchal system and the sammandham system of marriage as he writes about the Namboodiris and the aristocrats of Kerala.

## POETRY

A much over-looked category of Indian writing in English is poetry. As stated above, Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English. Other early notable poets in English include Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, and her brother Harindranath Chattopadhyay.

A generation of exiles also sprang from the Indian diaspora. Among these are names like Agha Shahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt, Richard Crasta, Yuyutsu Sharma and Vikram Seth.

In modern times, Indian poetry in English was typified by two very different poets. Dom Moraes, winner of the Hawthornden Prize at the age of 19 for his first book of poems *A Beginning* went on to occupy a pre-eminent position among Indian poets writing in English. Nissim Ezekiel, who came from India's tiny Bene Israel Jewish community, created a voice and place for Indian poets writing in English and championed their work.

During the last four decades this bilingual literary movement has included Richard Kostelanetz, John M. Bennett, Don Webb, Sheila Murphy and many others worldwide and their Indian counterparts. Vattacharja Chandan is a central figure who contrived the movement. Prakashana fiction is a fusion of prose, poetry, play, essay, and pictures. An example of a Prakashana work is Chandan's bilingual *Cosmosphere*

(2011). Some bilingual writers have also made significant contributions, such as Paigham Afaqui with his novel *Makaan* in 1989.

## NATIONALIST NOVELIST

Returning to India in 1939, he edited with Iqbal Singh, *Changing India*, an anthology of modern Indian thought from Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In 1943-1944 he coedited with Ahmed Ali a journal from Bombay called *Tomorrow*. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, *Sri Vidya Samiti*, devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization; this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, he was also associated with *Chetana*, a cultural society for the propagation of Indian thought and values.

## CONCLUSION:

Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel *Kanthapura* (1938) was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small Mysore village in South India. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. Rao returned to the theme of Gandhism in the short story collection *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947). In 1998 he published Gandhi's biography *Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. In 1988 he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality.<sup>[2]</sup> *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels. Their contemporaries in English poetry in India were Jayanta Mahapatra, Gieve Patel, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Eunice De Souza, Kersy Katrak, P. Lal, Kamala Das, Adil Jussawalla and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, among several others. The younger generation of poets writing in English include Smita Agarwal, Makarand Paranjape, Nandini Sahu, Vattacharja Chandan, Arundhati Subramaniam, Ranjit Hoskote, Sudeep Sen, Anand Thakore, Deepankar Khiwani, Vivek Narayanan, Hemant Mohapatra, Jeet Thayil, Mani Rao, Jerry Pinto among others. India's experimental and avant garde counterculture is symbolized in the Prakashana Movement.

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