CHAPTER VI

A SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE
Raja Rao has received due acclaim for his infusion of metaphysical element in Indian short story in English. His 'India - A Fable' and 'The Policeman and the Rose' are fraught with the metaphysical concerns. In these, he experiments with language, symbolism, cross cultural narratology, philosophy and romance. One is naturally reminded of the dictum:

"Literature as anything but a spiritual experience is outside my perspective".¹

These two stories illustrate

"not only the oldest of themes (The enigma of Truth) and the Paradox of Paradox (the nondualist School of Vedantaha) they also focus on the philosophical faith which constitute an essence of metaphysical fiction".²

These two stories appear simple but they are very deep.

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'India - A Fable' is about a child's play, his imaginary journey to Arabia and then to India. On another level this story becomes a metaphor for spiritual quest. There is a reference to this spiritual quest in the 'Policeman and the Rose'. So in these two stories there is a spiritual quest of the narrator.

The story 'India - A Fable' runs like a fairy tale. The protagonist is a child of five or six who is always responsive to fantasy. The epigraph 'non-duality alone is auspicious' is metaphysical and adds to the beauty of the story. At first we gather a few literal details like Luxemburg, Anne of Austria and of Arabia. From these literary details, we are given the metaphysical details. The adult in the story remains as a passive observer of facts. But there is a suggestion that Truth is grasped through the instinct and imagination of an innocent child than through the understanding and experience of an adult.

Raja is an Indian adult narrator. Pierrot is a French boy. The conservation between the two
is very gripping. It begins with a beautiful description of a park in Luxemburg. The description of the park is very enticing

"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 coughs and whiskers, and sat by the ponds reading newspapers. The old fat women removed their kerchiefs and spoke garrulous words".³

This description is very vivid and realistic. References to the spring and other beauties of nature provide the necessary backdrop to the metaphysical nature of the story. The reader gets the feeling that he is on a familiar and secure ground. Suddenly one sees a shift in the story. There is a question mark inserted at the end of the date of Anne of Austria. Under whose statue the narrator sits at first? The question mark persists even at the end of the story. At first one may get the feeling whether Anne really died at all. With this doubt the story shifts from reality to fancy.

³ 'India - A Fable', p.104.
Raju the narrator sees Pierrot, a five year old French boy, playing with a toy camel in the park. He begins his dialogue with the French boy. The child says that he is going to Arabia to attend Prince Rufolfe’s marriage with princess Katherine Kiki. His toy camel, which is a wedding present to Katherine given by the King of Arabia, is his means of transport in this journey to that distant country of the oasis. The Indian boy gives a vivid picture of India, the elephant, rivers, goddesses and forests in the country. To reach this far off country one should travel by steamer for fifteen days. In this land, two weddings are celebrated 'everyday'.

"One by the light of the sun and other by the light of the moon".  

This fantastic account of India practically strikes the imagination of the French child. He expresses his wish to pay a visit to India. Immediately he becomes very imaginative and reaches India. He starts riding on the back of an elephant called Titi. Arousing the nationalistic aspirations of the protagonist, the story now brings out two categories

4. 'India - A Fable', p.108.
of images. There are camel, Arabia, Sands, Oasis, horse of gold on one hand, elephants, forests, rivers, Maharaja, Goddess with four crowns of gold on the other. There are the cultural metaphors of the two countries. The child is fascinated by the Indian counterpart of all those which belong to Arabia. He flings the camel into the pool and comes out with his preference for India.

Piarrot undertakes the journey to India with utmost enthusiasm and eagerness. He sees many children in the park and walks among them. He is going:

"Somewhere very far, far, far ....
full of great forests of trees, pools and big buildings and rippling sunshine. The sun shines there. The moon is big there. There are many birds, all blue and sometimes transparent." \(^5\)

The child poses questions about India and asks him to take him to the wedding. After a while he sees the Medici fountain in the park and declares:

"I know where I am, I am in India". \(^6\)

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5. Ibid., p.107.
6. Ibid., p.111.
In his ecstasy he slips into the water of the fountain:

"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..... In India the earth is warm with silence, and the Ganges flows".7

The child gets the satisfaction of having visited what he has wished for. His ecstasy is a contrast to the feeling of depression that overtakes his nanny, Geannot when her lover departs. She lives a dejected life.

As we gather from 'The Serpent and the Rope', India is not a land of rivers but it is a land of holiness, godliness and piety. For Ramaswamy in 'The Serpent and the Rope',

"Jnanam is India..... India is the Guru of the world, or she is not India".8

Similar quest for Jnanam is found in the long journey of the child from Arabia to India. As is found in the

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7. Ibid., p.112.
epigraph, Jnanam sought is 'Non-dualistic Truth' which is attained after resolving all dualities. For Raja of this story 'India' is a living experience and appropriately he couches it in metaphorical terms.

There are a few images in the story which add to the metaphysical notation of the story. Vivid references to 'elephant' immediately take us back to the Indian belief in elephant God. Just as Gowri the cow in 'The Cow of the Barricades' becomes a symbol of deity, 'elephant' becomes a symbol of Vigneswara who wards of all evils in the beginning and brings prosperity. In a traditional and methodological society like India elephant is conceived as an Airavatha, the one that gives everything that one asks for. Similarly elephant is God manifest in terrestrial form. Naturally any one in search of Jnana is asked to offer obeisance to Vigneswara, the elephant God.

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'The Policeman and the Rose' is a powerful story of Raja Rao's. This is most autobiographical and in this

"Autobiographical story the narrator is foregrounded, Cultural symbols are perplexed by personal symbols and the protagonist is self in a complicated obscure metaphysical sense".  

The writer endeavours to put into it man's aspiration and destiny towards the realization of God in self. The theme of the story is primarily metaphysical and it is brought with the quotations from scriptures and other sacred writings of India. The action dealing at once with the eternal and the immediate, the universal and the individual, the cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth, moves back and forth, within as well as beyond the bounds of space and time. The reader is not surprised when he is confronted by such material. He may feel that the figure in the carpet eludes him. He may even feel that to read it through is like treading a maze. The writer finds himself fascinated

by it, by the sureness of its tone and vibrant quality of its language. To have a grasp of the story one is supposed to have a knowledge of advaita philosophy. The story begins thus:

"When I was arrested my problem was not me but it". 10

These lines suggest the idea of bondage and the speakers' awareness of it. In the next sentence, the theme is universalized,

"All men are arrested the moment they are born. So are the women". 11

Soon are introduced two major symbols. The policeman holding men and women assist are briefly described. There is a Rose, which is naturalistic and inevitable. The policeman remaining as a private symbol. The function of the symbols will soon be dwelt upon.

The narrator gives a retrospective account of his life upto his going to Travancore and living the 'retirement'. The story develops through a series

11. Ibid., p.113.
of transactions, encounters and conflicts between them and the protagonist. The narrator is 'I' and the 'Policeman'. All the experiences described are those of the first person narrator.

The narrator Says!

"Every living man has a policeman, and his name is your name, his address is your address, his dreams your dreams".12

The protagonist feels that the story of the policeman is his own story. They have apparent contradictions in their distinctive identities. The policeman is in a way an alter-ego, another self of the protagonist. If the policeman is different person from the narrator whom he address, then who is he? what does he stand for? In advaitic philosophy the policeman holding 'I' in arrest suggests the ego overpowering in 'Jiva' and thereby hampering its attempts at self-realization. It is the process of advaita philosophy.

The policeman is a familiar figure in the civilized world. He is usually associated with the

idea of authority and arrest. To make the story credible, the policeman in this story appears often in his uniform and he is ready to spring to action. He is given a number also. In the same way the word 'I' in the story symbolises 'Jiva' in its empirical outfit. Other details like the upbringing, his illness as a child, and the gifts given to him by his grand-mother, his several travels in France and India are very graphically described.

The narration draws the attention of the readers immediately. Philosophically speaking so long as the 'Jiva' remains bound by ego and ignorance and it remains in duality. In the opening, the narrator tells us how the policeman goes to them, in some contrast and the climate in some countries he is quite monstrous. The earth bound 'Jiva' grows in its knowledge of his identity and he loses his hold on it. In the absence of such knowledge and with darkness everywhere the policeman becomes a monstrous policeman. Infact, he believes that he has attained the knowledge of God and paradise. His actions are drawn by the lure for
"holy paradise after death, girls and all". 13

The 'Jiva' takes the cycle of rebirth until it achieves its liberation following the annihilation of the ego. The world in which there are so many egoistic individuals, becomes the 'police state'. The policeman says that

"he is awake when I am awake, he sleep-dreams as I have wake-sleeps, and he just has no existence in the deep-sleep state". 14

The policeman continues his story

"My policeman was born thousands and thousands of years ago. He was a native of space and his germ was the atom. The atom played at the cross-roads and created water ... your policeman is naked but he is all blind". 15

These lines show that the policeman is in utter darkness as he doesn't have any knowledge of non-dualism.

The policeman arrests the new born child. He urges his victim to seek his freedom, assures him of his deathlessness. In doing so, the policeman seems to become the benefactor of the protagonist. Perhaps the author suggests that the 'Jiva' understands the meaning and value of freedom. Only after experiencing bondage one seeks liberation. The narrator quotes the example of Ravana for he sought death through Rama. He even calls Ravana 'the police-Jamedar'. If the policeman is the ego, the police-Jamedar becomes the super-ego which cares for values and ideals. In that case Ravana may be called the Police-Jamedar.

The narrator uses the Ravana-Rama myth to exemplify the urge in the self to seek the eradication of the ego through the attainment of true knowledge which alone frees the self from the dualities of earthly existence and from the cycle of free birth. This myth also serves as a means to connect the present with the past and the protagonist narrator with the mythical and epic characters in the past, since he claims to have been once a contemporary of Rama and Ravana. After giving a brief account of
different places, the narrator talks about the contacts with the child.

"At night policeman sits beside you and tells you, child, you know what that is - it is me. It is all me. Don't worry." 16

The protagonist protests that he does not understand his meaning. The policeman urges him to grow up and travel. The protagonist makes a long journey to understand 'self'. He gets his major experience of duality when he gets involved with a woman whom, he has to marry. In a bid to free himself from this bondage, he 'jumps the wall', flees his country India and goes to 'the western world - world of honour and liberty'. His self enquiry begins. He comfortably reaches France, the crown of flowers, on the Queen of Reason ..... dear France of liberty. Perhaps this suggests his search for release from the dualities through a strictly rational, intellectual inquiry.

The policeman accompanies the protagonist in Paris. This is described through the eyes the 16. 'The Policeman and the Rose', p.117.
protagonist sees in Paris and elsewhere. The irresistible fascination and its variety exert on him. Again the distinction between the two gets narrowed down and even becomes blurred for sometime as the protagonist who happens to acquire certain occult powers in his practice of 'yoga' as a means to spiritual enlightenment. He performs miracles, effects, cures, deals in portions, foretells the future, listens to confessions from virgins and promises enlightenment. God becomes his business and he thrives remarkably in this trade. He becomes famous and also wins recognition. He is called 'The Policeman of God'. Soon this policeman of God himself becomes 'a legitimate divinity'. This marks the Ultimate ... reached by the protagonist, when he is hardly distinguishable from his policeman. No wonder that the policeman who had grown 'small' now grows bigger. The policeman urges the protagonist to grow up and travel. One notices the travel 'motif' here which symbolises his quest for knowledge.

The protagonist experiences his dualities when he marries a woman. In self inquiry, he goes to France. With the growing of the policeman two inches small, he feels that the policeman lost his hold on
the protagonist. No doubt he accompanies the narrator even in France. He becomes a divine person receiving recognition from all. Suddenly he grows bigger than the narrator and goes back to India. His

"Virtue would now have confirmation, my miracles have rupee value, my mouth would smell of fresh roses". 17

For the first time there is a reference to 'rose'. It is here that his spiritual quest in its second phase is to be seen. He makes his way to Travancore, 'the sanctuary of the Beacon'. It is here that he falls ill and goes through, unexpectedly a nightmarish experience which helps him to move a step towards his final spiritual enlightenment. He wakes up from his sleep and finds himself surrounded by crowds and lizards. This extraordinary experience makes him realise that he is neither a 'divinity' nor 'God', but only a policeman who is 'under arrest' and who would be discharged when the time came.

With this realization he goes back to Avignon to sell his 'shop' and clear his 'debts'. He strikes his former disciples and admires as a different person

17. 'The Policeman and the Rose', p.120.
"you smell differently, you are
too funnily clothed for words". 18

He notices a perceptable change in him. He finds his
followers to be ignorant. To his dismay, they make
him offer flowers to his own statue. So he leaves
France for good, thoroughly dissatisfied with the
hole he has played so far. While most other seekers
would have stopped with the attainment of occult
powers, the protagonist continues his quest. Even
after returning from America, Japan and France, he
comes back to India once again and pays visit to
Travancore.

The protagonist asks the question, 'Why
Travancore'? and immediately gives an answer:

"For there you have Two Feet and a rose". 19

Travancore is not a very big city. It is part of
Kerala. The significance of this place can be related
to Raja Rao's own preoccupation with it and his own
pilgrimage in 1943 to Trivandrum to meet his spiritual
mentor, sage Atmananda Guru.

18. Ibid., p.121.
19. Ibid., p.121.
The protagonist's journey to Travancore is no ordinary travel but a pilgrimage earnestly undertaken. Towards his journey's end he grows 'Two-Feet', not as a mere intellectual inquirer or a miracle man as he was at one time, but as one who would surrender himself in humility to his mentor. The need for a guru felt with an extraordinary urgency brings him to Travancore. Appropriately, he places the rose he has brought along with him at the 'Feet' in 'worship' which suggests his surrender to 'the Lord', through whose meditation he has to free himself of all attributes of his ego which have clogged his soul.

There is a need for an explication of the use of the two Roses. At one level the red rose is the medieval symbol of romance and its chivalric aspects of passion and compassion. The 'white rose' symbolises an aesthetic Indian corollary of a European ideal of love or beauty or truth.

For an aesthetic enjoyment of the story it is not necessary to fix any single meaning to the story. Though the story has numerous advaitic echoes, we can enjoy it even without the advaitic matrix. Philosophically, the dual narration the 'I' and the
'Policeman' is a cultural specimen of an Indian kind. Both his aspects are products of Godhead and or in quest of God here. Perhaps their duality is intended to reflect the truth of illusion. The 'I' is a confident adviser of God. The 'Policeman' is one become many. His account of the past includes his vegetable incarnation in the think of Rama. So 'I' is the eternal self and the policeman is the self as ego. Thus the story is a very good narrative that illustrate the victory of ideal truth over impermanent beauty.