CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
In ancient Indian literature short story had two forms — the fable and the popular tale or the folk tale. In the fable form usually the characters are animals symbolising human beings. It is fraught with moral edification. Similarly the popular tale has the virtue of quenching the curiosity of the reader by imparting him some useful knowledge in the most interesting way. 'Panchatantra' is a good example for the fable. 'Kathasaritsagara' is a typical example for the folk tale. In a way, the fable and the popular tale served as models for the short story writer in modern literature in India. These two impressed the modern short story writer with their spirited narration and the use of suspense.

With the advent of the British in India, Indian literature moved in a different direction. New forms like the lyric, the novel and the short story began to appear in Indian languages. By the turn of the 19th century, some of the Indians made a sincere attempt to write short story in English. They, like their counterparts in the west, followed two traditions in English short story. One tradition was pioneered
by Maupassant and the other one was started by Chekhov. In the first tradition, the stories are clear, simple and naturalistic. In the second tradition:

"We are asked to marvel at the workings of a mind which saw life as it were obliquely, touching it almost in remote control, telling its stories by an apparently aimless arrangement of casual incidents and producing such masterpieces as 'the darling'." ¹

In a way, the stories belonging to the first tradition are similar to the ancient Indian tale in the qualities like straight narration, persuasion of curiosity and the presentation of clear picture of life. The Indian writer in English, of course, got from his counterpart in the west, a sense of realism and an understanding of the human situation in a society through a firm character delineation in terms of his environment.

The rapidity of national movement, the spread of journals in English too influenced the

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Indian short story writers in English. The periodicals accommodated the short stories of the Indians.

It was in the beginning of the 20th Century that the Indian short story in English gained momentum through a collection of short stories entitled 'Stories from Indian Christian Life' by Kamala Sathianandhan. K.S.Venkata Ramani and K.Nagarajan in a way, pioneered Indian short story in English. In his 'Jatadharan and other stories' K.S.Venkata Ramani records the social conditions of the times. He comes before us with his leaning towards didacticism. In his own words:

"Almost unconsciously I find
I developed a didactic tail
which my compassion for all
life refuses to clips".  

In his stories Venkata Ramani does not hesitate to present a humorous and realistic picture of Indian villages. He also expresses his reformatory zeal to educate the illiterate villagers. In his 'The Bride Waits' he exposes the social evils of the

times. Even the language is in keeping with characters and situations. K. Naga Rajan in his 'Short Story Collection entitled 'Cold Rice' presents a colourful picture of the coastal regions of southern India. He has succeeded in using sparkling dialogue, spontaneous humour and a sense of a sudden revelation of the events. In a nutshell,

"Naga Rajan reveals himself a shrewd observer of human nature as well as of the contemporary society."³

Next appear on the scene, Manjeri, S. Iswaran and Mulk Raj Anand. Iswaran has about ten published volumes of short stories to his credit. His short stories concern themselves with the consequences of the world war and the nationalistic movement. The characters are mostly from orthodox Brahmin families, judges, lawyers, doctors, policemen, drivers, fishermen and beggars.

His stories like 'Sea-Shells', 'No Ankletbells for her' and 'Revelation' represent his art as a short

story writer. As he didn't have the publication facilities, his short stories did not gain enough acclaim as they deserved.

Mulk Raj Anand aimed at the presentation of the predicament of the men and women of his times. Though he is most prolific as a short story writer, one notices his sympathy for the underdog that dominates in them. Among his short stories, 'The Barbers' Trade Union', 'Lajwanti,' 'Lament on the death of a Master of Arts' represent his art as a short story writer. As Professor Kantak rightly observes,

"A simple how are you? Would certainly be preferable to speak 'O'brother! what is the condition".  

In fact, Mulk Raj Anand does this to bring out local colour and the Indian element. Mulk Raj Anand's interest in the poor and the wretched outweighs his interest in his artistic form. In a nutshell, he advocates his philosophy of judging everything on the humanistic scale of values. Perhaps Raja Rao supplemented this need to preserve the artistic form.

Raja Rao appeared on the literary scene at a time when the short story writers were almost neglecting the saner aspects of our cultural heritage. He was born in a Brahmin family and naturally he drew a lot from the inherited customs and beliefs of the traditional Brahmin family. He comes before us as a writer who is commissioned to comment on certain social institutions as well as on the events of national importance from the viewpoint of decency, sanity, sympathy and understanding.

His father was a pandit in the then court of Nizam of Hyderabad. His association with the elite of the Nawab of Hyderabad touched his mental proclivity. In an interview given to a critic whether his upbringing in Hyderabad ever shaped him as a creative artist he said:

"I learned sufism there. This appears in many short stories."\(^5\)

He studied Urdu and some Islamic theology in Salar Jung's Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad. In another interview he commented,

"Literature as 'sadhana' is the best life for a writer ... all this may sound

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terribly Indian but it is not so really.
Valery, Rilke and Kafka, for instance, are as close to this view as Tagore in looking upon literature as 'sadhana'.

This shows that Raja Rao is a committed artist in his own way. We may tune with M.K. Naik and say,

"The form he experiments with here is the folk tale form or the popular legend with all the simplicity and credulity, its myth making power and the strong moralistic substratum on which it is, in its popular wisdom, often grounded."

Like a traditional youth of the times he eulogizes his mother land. He feels that at the feet of mother India, he has been blessed with a glimpse of the supreme spirit. So he makes it a point not to exclude the nationalist search of the times.

After his brief schooling and college studies in India, he went to England where he had direct contact

with Prof. Dickinson who inspired him to study French language and literature. He was awarded a scholarship and went to France to continue his study of French literature at the University of Montpellier and sometimes at the University of Sorbonne under the supervision of Prof. Cazamian.

His university life in France shaped his career as a short story writer. He equipped himself with various literary trends in Europe in general and in France in particular.

It was during this period that he wrote the collection of his short stories entitled 'The Cow of the Barricades' and other stories.

The epigraph to his 'The Cow of the Barricades' runs thus:

"On all the roads I go, they suffer
The hermit and householder when
I tell them the truth, they are angry,
And I cannot lie". 8

This only shows that he doesn't hesitate to present in his short stories, the impact of India's cultural past and its tradition on its peoples' attitude to life's ups and downs.

During his stay in France he has close contact with Camille Mouly whom he married later. To a certain extent his literary interest was shaped by his wife. His wife was his first literary critic and he inevitably dedicated his 'The Cow of the Barricades' to her. He said that he produced his literary works in Macaulayan English. In his own words:

"My wife said that it was rubbish ...
She advised me to give up writing if I had to write that way. Then I started writing in Kannada. I wrote a novel in Kannada and then started writing in English again. Then my Macaulayan English was left behind. I started translating my Kannada texts and began to find the richness of the English language."  

Though Raja Rao lived in France he evinced keen interest in India. He was very much involved with the rapidity of the national movement in that he visited

Gandhiji’s Ashram and had established contacts with the young socialist leaders in India. Somehow, he felt that there was vacuum in his mind and that he needed some spiritual guidance. He thought that his still centre was India. His search for a Guru took him all over India to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondichery, to the Ramana Ashram at Tiruvannamalai, and Pandit Taranath at Premayatana Ashram in Mysore. To a certain extent, he was influenced by Pandit Taranath who figured in his short stories. His quest was fulfilled when he met Atmananda Guru at Trivandrum. In his major work this Guru appears as a major figure.

After his spiritual enlightenment in India, he accepted an invitation from the University of Texas to teach philosophy of non-academic nature. In his own words:

"I have taught only Indian philosophy ..... I never told my students about my writing".  

In Austin he married Catherine Jones, a young American actress. He leads the life of superannuation in the city of Austin. Critics have made

full-length studies on his novels but not much on his short stories. Prof. M.K.Naik, Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, Dr. Shyamala A. Narayan, Dr. K.K. Sharma, Dr. K.R. Rao, Dr. Narasingh Srivastava, Dr. Paul Shard wrote full-length studies on Raja Rao's fiction. A full-length study on his short stories has not yet been made possible. No doubt, a few stray essays have appeared on his shorter fiction. A study of the shorter fiction of Raja Rao is going to be made in our dissertation.