

Anti-colonialism: S. Rajaratnam's Wartime Short Stories

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The paper is based on *S. Rajaratnam: The Authorized Biography, Volume One, The Singapore Lion* by Irene Ng. It examines the political and cultural context of wartime London as a vibrant political and cultural hub, highlighting S. Rajaratnam's involvement in socialist activities and his interactions with mentors and friends. Adopting socialism as an analytical framework, the study integrates his wartime short stories, which illuminates the deep-seated inequalities, social tensions and pervasive absurdities within poverty-stricken rural Indian communities. Furthermore, the paper explores S. Rajaratnam's literary craftsmanship and linguistic mastery. By employing techniques such as personification and sharp contrasts, he creates unexpected and compelling narratives. While S. Rajaratnam greatly admires George Orwell and extensively collected his works, his writings transcend mere imitation; he incorporates original twists and shifts in narrative dimensions. Through these techniques, stories such as "The Tiger" acquire multi-layered meanings and fresh literary dimensions. Ultimately this study underscores R. Rajaratnam's solid and indelible position in the development of Singapore short stories.

Keywords: S. Rajaratnam, wartime short stories, rural dilemma, social tension, absurdities, intertextuality, contrasts, personification

The Study of Rajaratnam's Short Stories

Irene Ng's *The Singapore Lion* (2010) systematically records the life and achievements of the country's First Minister of Culture, Rajaratnam, who subsequently held other senior cabinet positions. One chapter in her work celebrates Rajaratnam's creative writing in the genre of short stories. Both Rajaratnam and Irene Ng were journalists who had graduated from constituent colleges of the University of London before becoming politicians. Despite the generation gap, Ng is a talent scout well suited for the task of evaluating Rajaratnam's oeuvre.

The Life of Raja: Traces of Negeri Sembilan, His Second Hometown

To evaluate a writer, especially a short story writer, one has to always study his social milieu and context. This method of research is almost a norm, whether the subjects are ancient or contemporary, of Chinese or other ethnic origins.

According to Irene Ng, Rajaratnam (hereafter cited as Raja for short) was born in Jaffna, Ceylon (the present-day Sri Lanka), migrated to Sembilan with his family when he was just two years old, and lived there in a Sri Lankan Tamil settlement 10 or more miles away from the town for five or six years.

There was no water in the settlement, and in the surrounding area tigers and pythons could be found.

The settlement near Sembilan Town, consisting of Jaffna's family clan members, had the rigid social hierarchy of Sri Lankan traditional culture. Raja's uncle was skilful in telling Ramayana and other Indian epic stories¹. Hence, Indian cultures were deeply rooted in the young Raja's heart. In daily life, family members often mentioned anecdotal deeds of cultural heroes such as Gandhi and Nehru. The experiences of rural life, observation of the behaviour of wild animals, family education, and a clannish cultural environment all formed referential data for his short story writing, in both subject matter and craftsmanship.

When he was old enough, Raja attended St. George School in town. Attending an English school did not induce culture shock; on the contrary, he found the English culture very fresh and interesting. The Irish teacher in the school was particularly concerned about his well-being and generously offered him extra instruction in religion; hence Raja's merits in religious studies surpassed his other subjects.

Inspiration From the Bible Initiated His Literary Path

The *Bible* led Raja towards his literary path because the *Bible* includes portions that are similar to modern novellas, with which he was already familiar. The scope of the *Old Testament* is broad and deep, and includes myths, historical narratives, predictions, fiction and law (Coogan, 2008, p. 2). Among this material can be found many short stories; for instance, the tales of Joseph (*The Holy Bible*, 1989, Chapters 37-50) are commonly recognized by modern scholars as constituting a novella: in all, its 14 passages relate Joseph's experiences of being sold as a slave, being put into prison, interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh, and eventually becoming a bureaucrat (*The Holy Bible*, 1989, pp. 65-69). Further, Coogan in *The Old Testament* describes the material in "Judges", "Samuel" "Parts 1 and 2, or "Kings" "(Part 1) as historical narratives (Coogan, 2008, p. 2). Raja was well versed in the *Bible*, and his creativity in short stories did not emerge by accident. It dates back to his early school days when he was very interested in religious studies as an examination subject.

Raja's Days in London, the Inspiration Behind His Short Stories

Raja first attended the Victoria Institute in Kuala Lumpur for preparatory courses, but after a year he transferred to Raffles Institute in Singapore and subsequently qualified for university admission.

The domain of London: Mental awakening by anti-colonialism. London was at that time a political, economic, and cultural centre with a rich and vibrant academic atmosphere at the height of anti-colonialism. Raja, a fresher from a British colony in Malaya, unaware and enchanted, was deeply attracted and awakened.

Raja read Law at King's College following his parental wishes. The courses were rigid and intense, and apart from attending courses offered by King's College, he had to attend other courses at University College London (UCL) and the London School of Economics. Although these campuses are not too far apart, it was quite tiring for him to travel from one to the next. Raja would grab a coffee and exchange views with friends and fellow students, especially in Hampstead, the premises of the Indian League. It is speculated that he probably joined the Indian League upon his arrival in London in 1935. The next year, Italy occupied Abyssinia, and in 1937, the Sino-Japan Incident took place at the Marco Polo Bridge, and the atmosphere of anti-colonialism escalated. Raja

¹ Among the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita is the most famous. One of its English translations is: *The Bhagavard Gita, Krishna's Council in Time of War*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004.

became more actively involved in the movement at the expense of his studies, although the evidence here remains inconclusive².

Left-Wing Movement: His Baptism into socialism. Raja was actively involved in the Left Book Club, whose activities were relevant to socialist enlightenment, but lacked a unionist or political nature (Lewis, 1970, p. 13). According to the preface by Lady Margaret Smith, after the Great Depression English men and women were deeply despairing, yet saw a glimmer of hope (Lewis, 1970, "Preface"). They therefore organized to resist Fascists, prevent wars and solve poverty, advocate equality, and promote socialism (Lewis, 1970, p. 14). Victor Gollancz, a successful publisher, acted as one of the Club's leaders. He first got in touch with Socialism as an undergraduate at Oxford University, and insisted that the Club should be non-political. Among the leadership were John Strachey, who later became a Labour cabinet minister, and also Harold Laski, an LCS professor³. Even though there were radicals among its members, my random estimation based on the data in the *Left Book Club* would place their numbers at no more than one in five. The Left Book Club's non-political stance remained unchanged.

The main aim of the Club was to promote socialism. By then the degree of poverty in England's north was aggravated by unemployment. Prioritising the solution of poverty was the Club's second aim. Another urgent matter was anti-Fascism, as Europe was on the brink of war (Lewis, 1970, p. 17). Nevertheless, Raja's short stories never touched on these European issues.

The Club showed great concern about England's political situation and the daily life of ordinary people, but it also showed empathy for global political situations such as those in Germany, Russia, and China. Raja's global views might have been inspired by all of these. From its inception in 1936, the Club's membership had shot up to 57 thousand in 1939 before WWII broke out. It had 1,500 branches across the country and even extended overseas. In India the Club was banned, but due to Nehru's friendly attitude, it managed to extend its influence in India (Lewis, 1970, pp. 7-8).

Confronting issues of persistent poverty in Europe, the Left Book Club had an inclination towards adopting the Russian model as an alternative (Lewis, 1970, p. 110), but the Chamberlain cabinet had no such intention (Lewis, 1970, p. 115). When Russia signed a Mutual Non-Aggression Treaty with Germany, Gollancz deemed the act a violation of the principle of socialism (Lewis, 1970, p. 115), and the Club's leadership was divided in its attitude towards Russia. After the outbreak of WWII, the Club's subscription plunged steeply, and in addition to wartime shortages of paper for publications, membership in the Left Book Club decreased sharply. Raja started writing his short stories during the Blitz when the Club was in its precarious decline, but he still harboured the socialist ideas he had earlier received. Nevertheless, his writings did not address the poverty of North England, but focused on the predicaments of India and the Greater Indian cultural sphere in Southeast Asia. This can be traced back to his identification with that culture, as provided by his Negeri Sembilan upbringing. Raja was not a sheer racial chauvinist, but a socialist. Though he had contacts with some radicals in London, he had all along maintained his own independent thinking.

² Holden, Philip, e-mailed me that Rajaratnam was just an ordinary member in *The Left Book Club*. I thank him for sharing his work on "Tiger", October 2023, Modern Asian Studies.

³ As referring to Laski's biography, there is a recent Ph.D. thesis: "A 'Seedbed' for Post-Colonial Leaders", by Brant Moscovitch, Oxford U, 2017.

The Indian league: Deepening his thinking on anti-colonialism. Apart from writing, Raja actively took part in the activities of the Indian League. Previously a loose organization, in 1928 under the reorganization of Menon, the League's stance had become comparatively radical, in response to Gandhi's non-violent movement for Indian independence (satyagraha) (George, 1965, p. 58). When Menon was secretary of the Indian League, it radically focused on India's independence. Earlier on, in 1930, Menon had said he despised communism, and though he was radical, he did not agree with violence (George, 1965, p. 131). He deemed that in order for India to gain independence, the divide between the British and Indians must be broken. He made every effort to portray the destitution of Indian conditions so as to let British counterparts understand the disastrous predicament of the Indians (George, 1965, pp. 61-62). Raja arrived in London in 1935, and he probably joined the Indian League situated near his college. Earlier, Menon had persuaded a couple of British Labour MPs to visit India where they toured schools, hospitals, and prisons. They drafted an eye-witness report on the people's hardship and famine. In 1933, the report was published in England where it garnered great concern. An Indian envoy openly claimed there was no famine in India; the report refuted this allegation by revealing the stark truth. It can be presumed that Raja would have read the report, and his short story "Famine" probably gained inspiration from it.

Some of the members of the Indian League held double identities, as members of both the League and the Left Book Club. Thus we can conclude that the two organizations were similar in nature. After his immersion in socialism Raja might have started mentally plotting his short stories, but his serious writing began during the Blitz. His short stories never touch the German bombardments, however, but single-mindedly portray overseas colonial poverty, juxtaposing the hunger and famine of North England. During the period of his concentration on short stories the war escalated, but in 1941 Raja continued to focus on the destitution and backwardness of Indian villages. The war severed his economic source from Sembilan, and he was forced to take up part-time work as well as coping with his taxing studies.

In 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and proceeded to occupy Southeast Asia, and Malaya fell into Japanese hands. Raja's "Tiger", perhaps conceived in 1941, followed the same line of thinking as the short stories previously written. The Japanese occupation became a turning point in Raja's thought development. He began to show concern about Southeast Asian societies, and this vision extended even to the Pacific region⁴.

During WWII, the Indian independence movement had gained some progress. Raja's mentor Professor Laski deemed the independence of India to be crucial to the success of the global anti-Fascist movement, and his analysis gained much support. Researchers seem to somewhat overlook this point and overestimate the efforts of the Indian League. Professor Laski's vision of a mega world order initially impressed even US Democrat President Roosevelt. Later, after President Roosevelt changed his mind in 1943, Laski's fame began to decline because of his near-violent inclination.

War Raging Everywhere: Writing in This Historical Context

The war in Europe. According to Toh Wen Li, Europe's situation changed drastically as the Republicans fought bitterly with the Nationalists in Spain. After the emergence of Hitler, Germany occupied Rhineland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Italy, led by Mussolini, occupied Abyssinia. During this period, anti-colonialism

⁴ C/f Philip Holden's bibliography, NLB website.

increased. Among the anti-colonialists were many Indian students studying in London, who held banners to demand equality (Li, 2025, p. 182).

The fall of the far east and the south seas. After the Mukden incident in 1931, Japan took control of China's North East and, in 1933, with the fall of Shanhaiguan Pass, most of China's North East sovereign regions were gradually lost. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia, due to its rich natural resources, was coveted by the Japanese. In 1940, Japan openly advocated for a Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. And in 1941 it launched a massive offensive across the region (Kim, 2024, pp. 14-22).

During the pre-WWII period, when Raja was schooling in Sembilan, he had a classmate by the name of Tomanaga, who eventually returned to Japan and was sent to China's North East. He sent Raja the book *An Overview of China's North East*. Irene Ng, Raja's biographer, says that when Raja received it, he did not know his friend's motive and did not react⁵. In August 1942, Raja published his article titled "The Changing Malays in Asia", in *Asia*, a USA magazine, and commented on the Malays making different choices during the fall of Malaya. After that comment, his stance was clearer and his scope expanded to cover Southeast Asia and the Pacific region. Hence we can see that February 1942 was a turning point in his thinking. (That article could in fact be Raja's immediate reaction to the Japanese invasion. The contribution of an article to New York from London took a longer period, as much as five to six months including the editorial process in those days.)

A Glimpse Into Anglo-Indian Cultural Interactions

E. M. Forster in BBC Talks Series, I just concentrated on the years 1937 to 1945, mentioned that in order to enhance communications with the Indians the British planned to introduce them to British culture and vice versa. There was one instance when E. M. Forster, briefing on T. S. Eliot's literary merits, was bitterly opposed by his Indian listeners, accusing him of bias by saying that Forster did not show concern for poverty. On this, Forster deemed that those accusations were unfair as his Indian listeners were out of date and uninformed of Eliot's stylistic changes. On the other hand, when the BBC broadcaster mentioned Haridwar, a poetry drama, in his introduction, he was highly praised by the Indian audience. The drama depicts a Brahmin protagonist who originally planned to go on pilgrimage to Haridwar, a place 200 km away from Delhi, but eventually abandoned the trip and donated the fare to the poor villagers to build a well. In Indian culture, a well symbolises spring-like sources of life and hope. Raja's wartime writing on Indian impoverishment could be regarded as resonant with E. M. Forster's point.

Villages in Malaya: Rubber Plantations and Their Ecology

Malaya started to grow rubber trees, initially managed by Chinese nationals. By 1910, some Malays had begun to grow rubber trees in parallel with their Chinese and Indian counterparts. After WWI, the rubber industry rose to become Malaya's stable source of revenue, and in some regions, paddy and rubber cultivation ran simultaneously (Drabble, 1991, p. 85).

When the rubber industry was at its peak, Malaya's plantations accounted for almost half of global cultivation area, and the ecological environments had changed enormously: Humans and animals competed for living space and sometimes they had to adopt coexistence reluctantly. These facts are consistent with the views of *Ecology: A Very Short Introduction*. Similar scenes are to some extent reflected in Malayan Chinese literature.

⁵ C/f NLB website's articles; most have a link.

For instance, Bing Go's prose "Legacy of Traces of Tigers" in *The Depths of Rubber Plantations* can serve as a footnote to Raja's "Tiger". It portrays tiger encounters in a minor plantation owned by the Chinese. Whenever a tiger appears looking for food, villagers beat gongs to scare away the beast (Bing, Liao, Huang, & Zhang, 2015, pp. 151-154). The plantation in the story was originally owned by a Malay who later sold it to a Chinese. This fact tallies with the facts elaborated by an academic monograph. The appearance of tigers in a Malay rubber plantation substantiates what Raja portrays in "Tiger". Deforestation was inevitable when rural areas were exploited, and environments were severely damaged (Gazoul, 2020, pp. 40-70).

Raja's Mentors and Friends in London

During this period, among Raja's mentors and friends there were quite a number of celebrities. I list some key ones as follows:

(1) Harold Laski, a famous professor of politics and economics, LSE; he visited Harvard University and had chances to meet President Roosevelt in the States. His global views initially impressed the President very much and they jointly pushed cooperation on anti-Fascism. He was also the mentor of Menon, Secretary of the Indian League. The support from the US for independence could not have been achieved without his succinct analysis and prediction of the global situation (Newman, 1993, pp. 179-257).

(2) John Strachey, one of the key leaders of the Left Book Club. He authored *The Theory and Practice of Socialism* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936), advocated for a Planned Economy, and later became a Minister in the Labour Party.

(3) Mulk Raj Anand, an established Indian English-language writer, active member of the Indian League. He has two famous novels, *The Untouchables* and *Coolie*, to his credit. *The Untouchables* contains many phenomena that tally with what Raja identifies as Indian poverty.

(4) Xiao Qian, a journalist of the Dagongbao and a part-time research student at Cambridge University, lived in the same hostel as Raja; they took shelter together during the Blitz. Their relationship might be very close. *The Complete Works of Xiao Qian* contains a volume of fiction, but he modestly says he is no novelist. He states that the duty of a journalist is to deliver truth to readers as quickly as possible. This description is very similar to Raja. Raja modestly admits that he is no novelist, but he still intends to publish a collection of stories. A booklet of Raja's short stories and drama was published posthumously by Irene Ng. *The Complete Works of Xiao Qian* does not reveal anything about these traces, and Xiao Qian's written materials were completely destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. But scholars believe that there are remainders left in the London archive.

Raja's Wartime Short Stories Creation

Subject Matter and Major Research Focus

T. Wegnesan in *Bunga Emas—Malaya English Literature, 1936-1963*, classified Raja's short stories as rural stories. This classification laid out the direction for research on his subject matter. Combined with multi-dimensional perspectives previously mentioned on Raja's life and context, especially his London days, I think using socialism as a core perspective on the study of his short stories is the most appropriate. Raja's short stories do not depict phenomena of London or England's impoverished northern areas, but instead focus on destitute Asian villages—his first and second hometowns—as core materials for the analysis of poverty, revealing sharply the subtext of reformation and changing the colonial system.

Raja's Wartime Short Stories: Titles and Publication Timeline

Core titles and creation timeline. Raja wrote six short stories during WWII on drought, famine, and locusts: "It Has to Be", "Astrologer", "Drought", "Famine", "Locusts", and "Tiger". Most of these were drafted in 1941, although some of them were not published until early 1942. The last piece created in 1947, *The Terrorists*, does not belong to this period as the historical context had entered into a new era; hence I exclude it for discussion here.

Controversy over publication dates. Irene Ng's dates differ somewhat from Holden's and should be clarified. Holden published the dates for these stories (see the table on the NLB website)⁶. The author of this paper has every reason to believe Irene Ng is right. The timeline of Raja's short stories, based on the data on pp. 70, 72, and 76 with their respective endnotes in *The Singapore Lion* by Irene Ng, are as follows:

- August 1941, "Famine" in Indian Writing (p. 70, *The Singapore Lion*).
- August 1941, "The Locusts" in Life and Letters and the London Mercury "What Has to Be" in the same issue. See Note at the end of this summary.
- April 1942, "Tiger" in Modern Writing (p. 72, *The Singapore Lion*) (This was further confirmed by the British Library in answering my email question).
- 1946, "The Stars" (*The Astrologer*) in Mulk Raj Anand's *Collected Stories*. The date could be slightly earlier.

Note: Life and Letters changed its publication frequency and reprinted all articles of the last issue. So publication should be dated back to the initial version as what Irene did, not the subsequent reprint. Holden overlooked this. Of course checking is difficult as the magazines are scattered in different locations. Currently the British Library in London has not a full correction of this magazine. This conclusion is somehow supported by the Library's expert. See Irene Ng's relevant note in *The Singapore Lion*.

Publication platform and some background for Raja's contribution. In order to simplify the discussions here, Raja's stories carried forward by other magazines will not be repeated statistically unless necessary. My focus is the date of first publication. Raja's stories were published mainly in UK magazines such as *Indian Writing*, *Tribune*, and *Life and Letters Today*.

Only "Tiger" was published in the American's Asia. His contribution of this piece was probably motivated by author payment, because the outbreak of war meant that his financial supply from Sembilan, Malaya, was cut off as postal communications were interrupted. Raja's contribution of articles initially had to rely on networking with Foot, a young leftist journalist. I imagine that Foot had some influence on Raja's creative direction as well (Ng, 2010, p. 68).

Creative Features and Ideas of the Stories

Core ideas in his most prolific period: 1941-1942. Socialist ideas were a constant right from the beginning of Raja's period of short story writing. He sharply attacked social injustice with the aim of social reform, and his works were anti-colonial texts.

⁶ London's British Library clarifies in an email that its publication date of "Tiger" is March 1942, which confirms Irene Ng's dating.

This creative core value coincided with concern over the poverty of North England and shared a common nature. Raja's stories can be compared with Orwell's work *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). The poverty of industrial societies in North England is mirrored in Raja's semi-feudal Oriental societies. It was natural that the Left Book Club showed concern for domestic poverty, but it showed equal concern for global poverty and social dilemmas, reflecting its mission of a global consciousness. Raja's views on Indian poverty had the same intention, to illustrate a socialist global vision.

Analysis of content and themes. "It Has to Be": A direct revelation of the roots of poverty in human society. "It Has to Be" is among Raja's early short stories, and directly demonstrates the logic of such situations. This view coincides with England's leftist collective urge to analyse social ills in an upswing of hope following the despair of the Great Depression.

The story portrays a couple who lose their livelihood on the land and suddenly fall into great misery: Their infant is sick before birth and very weak once he is born. The husband is extremely depressed, and even thinks of strangling the infant; worse still, the wife cannot breastfeed her child due to malnourishment. Ultimately, the infant dies at the age of ten months. Six months later, the wife being pregnant again, the couple are very worried that history will repeat itself but they are helpless and cannot do anything.

"Drought", "Famine", and "Locusts", tragedies under the oppression of natural and social environments. Raja focused on villagers' predicaments when he unfolded his narratives. These were related to both natural and social environments; the ignorance and stubbornness of the villagers were pertinent to the social system itself. "Famine", "Drought", and "Locusts" all reflect the dilemma of human beings under challenging environments, as they react impulsively and primitively.

"Drought" depicts cracked earth and withered crops. Indian writer Raj Anand in his narratives had often shared similar grim spectacles. In this story a youth, Suria, harbours deep hatred of the rich peasant Mudaria who suppresses the price of ploughing cattle and buys them cheaply from the victims of the famine. He is even reluctant to sell water to the hungry and thirsty herds and watches them die helplessly. Suria decides to gain revenge by poisoning Mudalia's herds in the name of justice and to avoid enslavement. He opposes the system rigorously in order to obtain economic freedom. His words and deeds are not in line with Gandhi's satyagraha spirit, but truly reflect the stark reality.

The first sentence of "Famine" starts with the phrase "After drought, famine follows immediately". This can serve as a hermeneutic note to "Drought"; the date of its composition could be earlier than that of "Drought", but in actual fact, "Drought" was published earlier in another magazine. The story does not focus on famine or hunger; instead, the priest's hated words to the protagonist teach him a religious and ethical lesson on ways of existence and let him learn the significance of collective survival. And indeed it was a vital socialist aim to popularise education, as championed by the Left Book Club. However, while this is implicit in the story, Raja does not make open mention of it.

"Locusts": This story does not show the imagery of a locust plague ravaging the crops, but a miracle taking place: The locusts swarm off the field and go away. The peasants are about to rejoice when, all of a sudden, the exploiters, oppressors, creditors and tax collectors appear on the scene. The author briefly juxtaposes a contrast criticising the imperfectness of the political system and the unfairness of resource redistribution, effectively demonstrating a strong satirical protest.

With social development and demographic growth, people were competing with people and, to a certain extent, with animals for room to survive. In addition, the colonial government did not exert its utmost efforts in running the country, and various inequalities including class tension emerged (Gazoul, 2020, pp. 40-70). The tensions in these three short stories almost reach breaking point.

“Tiger”: Ecology under colonial rule and the emergence of a new women’s liberation perspective. The plot of “Tiger” still moves around environmental issues. Due to the demands of rubber cultivation and other social developments, vast regions were exploited. Humans competed for survival space with animals and both were forced to closely coexist. Thus there were frequent reports of humans being attacked by wild animals.

The story closely tallies with reality: some Malay minor rubber plantations in Sembilan or elsewhere were sold to Chinese plantation owners. After the sale, ecological tensions still remained. (See “The Legacy of the Traces of Tigers” in *In the Depths of Rubber Plantations*, where mysterious stories took place, women were marginalized and animals are abused and denied their right to survive, as compared with the intertextuality of “Tiger” in this paper. Hence anti-colonialism subject matter had generated a fresh new perspective on women’s liberation.)

“The Astrologer”: Criticising superstition and undemocratic notions. Ignorance under the colonial system can also be seen in the superstition of astrology and belief in fate. In the story “Astrology” the astrologer is obsessed with star signs in order to escape physical labour, leading to his financial destitution. His wife constantly admonishes him, but he simply turns a deaf ear. Through predicting the date of his own death, he tries to prove the authenticity of astrology and Stella’s spiritual efficacy. He even self-directs a farce, as he undertakes preparations for his funeral and calmly awaits the appointed date. The farce arouses anger and accusations among a group of peasants, although there are also some who, half believing and half sceptical, form a circle to watch the absurdity. Yet his death does not arrive. He apologetically explains there has been a calculation error. His revised algorithm indicates that he has to wait another five years. However, he dies two years before the newly predicted date arrives. As early as the 16th century, Pedro Sanchez Cirilo’s works had criticised this pseudo-science as hindering social development. If democratic and dialectical discussions could be carried out, it would speed up the efforts to eradicate social ills. The story also encourages democratic debates.

The value of the short stories per se, and in external criticism. These six pieces, which appeared in fragmentary fashion, reflected the colonial society in critical sharpness with a flair of modernity.

External reviews of Raja’s short stories were positive, especially “Famine”, which was praised by E. M. Forster for its well-knit structure and its vivid and lively style (Li, 2025, p. 186).

“Drought” was also highly acclaimed and was selected in Asia’s *The World of Distinguished Fiction*.

The Short Stories’ Artistic Features

Raja’s achievement in this genre is superbly evidenced in the following respects:

Lively and vivid language: That is precise but everyday English. Referring to the language in Raja’s short stories, Singapore’s founding Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew called him the master of language. His vocabulary is rich, his style concise and natural. He discards classical stereotypical symmetries, his depictions are vivid, and he often adopts personification. The following passage identified by Toh Wen Li exemplifies his skill at personification.

The exhausted earth groaned and quivered under the monotonous glare of the sun. Spirals of heat rose from the ground as if from molten lava. A panting lizard crawled painfully over the fever rock in search of a shady crevice. Cattle and dogs cringed under the scanty shade of the trees and waited for the rain to deliver them from the heat and thirst. Instead, the heat grew more intense and oppressive each day, singeing and stifling all living things with an invisible sheet of fire, which only the rain could put out (Li, 2025, pp. 186-187).

Nonlinear plots: Abruptness and negative space in Raja's fiction: Immerse readers in deeper contemplation. For instance, in "Famine" the male protagonist Suria thinks of poisoning the herds of the oppressor to express his hatred. Unexpectedly the herd is not poisoned, but his own father is poisoned instead. When the tragedy escalates, the unfolding of the plot stops abruptly against the reader's expectation, but a sense of grief and bereavement lingers on, exemplifying a masterpiece of writerly text.

Use of contrasts to highlight contradiction and conflicts. In "Famine", the rich take advantage of a drought to oppress the peasants and slash prices, as was commonly seen in a feudal-capitalist society. In a certain household both father and the elder son succumb to such a situation, and only the youngest son bravely rises up to resist the rich peasant Mutalia. The character of the youngest son is totally different from that of his brother and father; the rich peasant's ugly facial expressions and the righteousness of the deeds and sharp words of the youngest brother contrast strikingly in the story. In "Locusts", the peasants are overjoyed when the locusts fly away without devastating the crops, creating a contradiction with their fear and grievance when creditors and tax collectors appear.

Excellent intertextuality surpassing the original. Intertextuality is Raja's best craft. It is based on the framework of Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant", but its twists demonstrate a sharper critical edge and introduce distinctiveness.

The discovery of intertextuality. This discovery of the connection between Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (1935) and Raja's "Tiger" was accidental but plausible. I have all along admired Orwell's literary reputation, and had read some of his works; and made this discovery after checking a fuller collection of his oeuvre (Orwell, 1981, pp. 148-159). In my Chinese version Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" corresponds with Raja's "Killing a Tiger" (I translated it as "Killing a Tiger" instead of simply "Tiger (Tigress)" so as to emphasise the parallel and highlight their intertextuality).

The core contents of "Shooting an Elephant". The narrator, speaking in the first person, is a colonial police officer who realizes that the colonialists are hated by the people. As a dignified person of conscience, he feels uneasy and guilty. He blames himself and feels repentant. I have to emphasize his awareness of the importance of defending the superiority of the empire builders. And the concept of White superiority is closely linked with the White Man's Burden, especially at the height of anti-colonialism and when truth and lie are revealed. This is consistent with Orwell's *Burmese Days* and should serve as an elaboration of the theme. The British governed their own people and the colonies differently.

The story takes place in a village in Lower Burma. Orwell uses a great deal of space to portray the awkward position of a colonialist who feels ashamed of colonial hypocrisy. After the shooting of the elephant he resigns. Here, the reader can justify the rationality of anti-colonial sentiments, as even the colonialists themselves harbour a sense of guilt.

The story unfolds as follows. One day the police station receives a phone call reporting a mad elephant devastating thatched huts and grain, and seeking police assistance. The narrator, Orwell, a police officer, takes a gun and, arriving at the site, discovers a crowd of two thousand already watching at the scene. All the people tacitly deem the Europeans to be superior, and as such believe the Whites have unsurpassable skill in taming elephants. As elephants are sacred religious animals and also human companions, Orwell naturally did not want to kill it. As he approaches nearer to the elephant, the watching crowd's tongues are wagging, which makes Orwell feel even more uncomfortable. For the sake of safeguarding the White's superior image, he decides to shoot the elephant even when he judges it to be no longer aggressive. The story portrays the process of shooting in detail. He shoots three times before the elephant falls. He adds another bullet into the beast's ear. The crowd is stunned and bursts into thunderous applause. This act of course fulfils his White sense of professional pride, but as a conscientious man, he is ashamed of his actions, which are against his conscience.

The dimension of textually of "Tiger" and "Shooting an Elephant". First dimension: The colonialist's own confession of his errors justifies the legitimacy of anti-colonialism. Raja, on the other hand, indicates that the colonial government, having inherited the feudal administrative model, continues to ignore women's rights, leading to the marginalization of women and the denial of their voices. The colonists are accountable for all misdeeds done. For instance, the Malay woman deems that the tigress has no enmity, but her words are totally ignored.

Second dimension: Humanity and animals having the same nature, they share the attribute of motherly love. Raja openly recognises this subtlety, where although humans and animals have no common language, their actions and gestures suggest a sense of mutual understanding and trust.

In this story, a pregnant Malay woman is about to deliver, and the agony of labour is deepened by the knowledge that a pregnant tigress has been killed and her cubs left bereft of maternal care and protection. This suggests an authorial intention to frame her sufferings not simply as pain, but as a muted yet conscious protest against silencing and injustices.

Raja's "Tiger" is successful in not only inheriting Orwell's ideas of anti-colonialism, but also exploring a new narrative dimension, and his style is not preaching. In the story, the woman and the tiger's emotional exchanges, as well as the woman's disagreement with her vision mother, all these lead the reader to become more emphatic that the pregnant woman was actually wronged. These complicated narrations require careful appreciation on the part of readers. The later part of "Tiger" is even more innovative. Raja's creativity is clearly shown: Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant" adopts a first person perspective whereas Raja in Tiger uses the third person omniscient, but although the visions are different, they are equally persuasive.

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Appendix

This Paper was originally written to commemorate SG 60. The collection *Sharing our Singapore Stories* in which this paper was collected was three months behind schedule. It was a little rushed in order to meet the deadline, and I could not have enough time to think twice before submission. Here is a translated, shorter, and retitled version of the original Chinese version without an introduction and a conclusion. But it is a little enlarged and with moderate revision. Interested readers should refer to the Chinese original where I compared Raja's short stories with those of the Late Qing Utopia fiction in my concluding remarks, which has been purposely omitted in my English translation.

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