

# REDEMPTION

## JAYAKANTHAN'S INTRODUCTION<sup>i</sup>

No individual lacking in a healthy attitude in sexual matters can ever become a complete human being. The community to which that he or she belongs can never mature into a sane, viable, integrated society.

The relationship between Rajaraman and Sharada Auntie in *Rishimoolam* can occur in any society and surely it does, but when it does happen, the consequences arising from such a relationship – the course of events described in my story – can take place only in the Indian context.

It is not that such events are uncommon in societies healthier than ours; they certainly do occur. But those societies do not obsess about them, and in the process, they don't destroy themselves.

The character Sharada Auntie of *Rishimoolam* displays a disposition healthier than Rajaraman's. She can think over what happened between her and Rajaraman and deal with it in her mind. She is also able to forgive Rajaraman with humanity and kindness.

Rajaraman, on the other hand, lacks a healthy view of sex. He is frightened of it and suffers from guilt. That is why he can never forgive himself.

And it is Rajaraman himself whose view prevails in the story. He is reduced to spending his days on a riverbank pathetically imagining himself in every corpse that is being consumed by flames on the opposite riverbank.

Now I would like to pose a question to my critics: what do you think my take is on Rajaraman? If you think Rajaraman's arguments and thoughts are just the mouthpieces of this writer, I can only laugh at you and politely praise you for your intelligence! Please forgive me, I mean no offense!

But this much is true: I have a great deal of sympathy for Rajaraman - I feel the sympathy the way a doctor feels concern for a patient.

In this story I have attempted to paint a mental patient by putting myself in his shoes, but if readers jump to the conclusion that everything I have articulated on these pages has to do with my own pain and suffering, they are sadly mistaken. In that case, I can only respond that I have been given too much credit, and feel proud (and a little embarrassed) about what I have written.

This story doesn't attempt to glorify Rajaraman. Not at all. What you see is a portrayal of a pathetic young man decaying, in soul and spirit, from a terrible, mental agony from his youth as he obsesses about something that occurred before his life journey really began. This is a case sheet, penned by a literary artist.

I have never called Rajaraman a *rishi* or sage. Indeed, he himself never laid claim to such a title. Rather, he mocked those who called him a *rishi*.

Rajaraman is a mental patient. How strange and eerie one feels watching his conscience play havoc with him as his mind is tossed around by memories, feelings, arguments, denials, and defenses. We should pity rather than condemn him.

It is important to realize that the stupid, ill-conceived taboos vigorously championed within families, as well as the inhibitions that a culture imposes upon itself, are primarily the problems every society has to address.

At a time when such taboos were common and were reinforced by organized religion, writers like Balzac ventured to tear through those walls of ignorance and bring enlightenment to the French public. Their critics, ever ready in their fight for 'moral uplift' accused them of pandering to the "depraved minds with their obscene writings." Karl Marx didn't share that sentiment about Balzac.

Today I see our modern society functioning as an arm of the organized religion, the individual citizen spending half his time preaching morality to others.

Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that our society, with its strict taboos and inhibitions, fails to produce great individuals. Despite our education and economic prosperity we face many hurdles in producing mentally healthy citizens.

That is the theme of *Rocking Chairs*.

A society incapable of producing citizens with wisdom and sophistication can hardly be a viable one. It can only be a patchwork of Philistinism, condemned to remain forever like a stagnant cesspool.

In our culture, when it comes to sexual matters, even those who advocate progressive views in the political and economic arenas, display a profound lack of sophistication. Their insight is sadly lacking in areas where a robust sensuality and respect for individual rights should be acknowledged and respected. Their writings and arguments suggest they suffer from what can only be termed a feudal mentality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Excerpts from the author's introduction to Rishmoolam, published by Meenakshi Puttaga Nilayam, Madurai, in September, 1969*