

Existentialism in Raja Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare*: A Comparative Analysis of Govindan Nair and Søren Kierkegaard

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India is a country composed of sophisticated civilisations that have given birth to a number of rich philosophies which have influenced many Indian writers in English. Raja Rao, one of the first three prominent Indian writers who wrote in English, has likewise utilised Indian philosophies in formulating his fiction and characters. The protagonist of Rao's novel, *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), Govindan Nair epitomises the influence of Sri Ramanujacharya's philosophy of *Vishishta Advaita Vedanta*. However, attentive scrutiny upon the afore mentioned character would suggest that Govindan Nair is also an existentialist in practice. Hence, the study attempts to examine the parallelism between Govindan Nair and Existentialism, in order to assess the validity of the hypothesis that similarities could be found between Nair's ideology and Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist thoughts. As a qualitative research, the study is based on a thorough textual analysis of the mentioned novel, while a comparative analysis with Kierkegaard's philosophical thoughts is conducted to formulate the theoretical framework for the research study. The study elucidates that Govindan Nair has comprehended the futility of materialistic life and the attempt to pursue worldly desires, which are the essence of existentialist thought. However, unlike atheistic existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, Govindan Nair transforms himself into God in order to seek salvation. Hence, Govindan Nair's ideology accurately conforms to the thoughts of Søren Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism. Accordingly, the study concludes that there is precise parallelism between Kierkegaard's existentialist ideas and the philosophical positioning of Govindan Nair.

Keywords: Existentialism, Indian Fiction in English, Raja Rao, Søren Kierkegaard, *The Cat and Shakespeare*.