

Thematic Analysis of *"By Any Other Name"* by Santha Rama Rau

"By Any Other Name" is a short story by Santha Rama Rau that reflects on the impacts of British colonialism in India, focusing on themes of identity, racism, cultural erasure, and resistance. The story is based on the real-life experiences of the author, presenting a nuanced depiction of the internal and external struggles faced by Indian children in a British-run school during the colonial era. Below is an analysis of the background, setting, characters, and key themes in the story.

Background

The story is set during the British colonial period in India, a time when British authority dominated every aspect of Indian life, including education. This period was marked by British efforts to "civilize" India through institutions like schools that promoted British values, culture, and language, often at the expense of Indian traditions. Premila's defiance embodies the theme of autonomy and resistance in the face of cultural imposition. She refuses to accept the unjust treatment and cultural imposition of the British, reclaiming her autonomy in the process. The setting is important because the school symbolizes the broader colonial influence and its efforts to mold Indian children into versions of what the British considered "civilized." The headmistress and teachers represent the British authority figures who impose their cultural standards on the students, enforcing a sense of cultural superiority over the Indian children. The school, in its physical space and institutional norms, creates an atmosphere where the Indian students feel alienated from their own heritage and identities. This alienation is central to the themes of identity and cultural erasure that permeate the story.

Characters

1. **Santha (Cynthia)**: The narrator of the story, Santha, is a young Indian girl who experiences the pressures of colonialism firsthand when she is forced to adopt an English name, "Cynthia," at the British school. Santha Rama Rau, the author, draws from her own childhood experience to highlight how colonialism shaped the identities of native children and exposed them to racial discrimination and cultural erasure. It also reflects the broader racism that was a hallmark of British colonial rule, where Indians were viewed as inherently inferior and untrustworthy.

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