

Blueprint for Reading

the Author

**Rau, Santha Rama
(1923-)**

Rau was born in Madras, India. She attended Wellesley College in the United States, and graduated with honors in 1944. She became an instructor at Sarah Lawrence College and a free-lance writer. She has written many travel books. She lives in New York, New York.

Background Bytes

What do you know about India, or about *Bharatavarsha*, as its people refer to it in the Hindi language? India is located in South Asia and is the second most populous country in the world, with more than one-sixth of the globe's total population.

India is a subcontinent, separated from the rest of Asia to the north by the Himalayan mountain range. During its history, India endured partial "conquests" by Arab, Turkish, and Persian invaders. But when the British navy achieved supremacy during the nineteenth century, India fell completely to the British.

By 1858 the British ruled the country, with Queen Victoria also proclaimed Empress of India. British culture was entirely different from that of India. But India was a rich center of trade, and that mattered most to the British. The British made contributions to Indian society, but they transformed the Indian economy and Indian industry to suit the needs of the British Empire, using the wealth of India to benefit England. Even upper-class, wealthy Indians were treated as second-class citizens in their own country. Eventually Indian political movements gave way to more active struggles, with no success and little change.

Then, Mohandas Gandhi led a national non-violent protest movement during the 1920's and 30's. Various boycotts began. Indians were to give up British titles or honors. They were to stop wearing British clothes. They were to stop paying taxes. During these years thousands of Indians were imprisoned. Although many Indians served with the Allies during World War II, India, as a country, refused to join the war effort. They did not want to be associated with the British. It took until 1947 for India to finally achieve independence.

By Any Other Name

Into “By Any Other Name”

Read the story completely. Then read it again. As you read it the second time, try to understand why it is important to read a story such as this. Moreover, ask yourself why Santha Rama Rau wanted to write it. You are looking for the **theme**.

What happens when children cannot wear traditional clothes, eat familiar food, or think of their actions as normal? What happens if someone is ridiculed for personal habits, language, and beliefs? What happens when one’s natural behavior becomes a source of humiliation? Consider these questions as you think about the **theme**.

As you read, copy phrases that contrast British and Indian culture. Keep a list, as well, of vocabulary words that appear to come from Indian or Anglo-Indian culture.

Focusing on the Childhood Memoir

By Any Other Name is a beautifully written memoir about the author’s childhood world. The piece is vivid in its exotic details, and touches us with its subtle description of how British culture in India reached into the private lives of two sisters.

The **childhood memoir**, written by this upper class observer, gives the reader a sharp portrait of social inequality. The clear and simple writing is filled with a child’s wonder, and the ending is so satisfying that we can only love this tale.

As you read, note those passages appealing to the senses of sight, sound, and touch. Remember, the sense of touch includes the physical experiences of heat and cold.

Word Bank

Incomprehensible, Insular, Intensity, Intimidated: The vocabulary words for this story include four that begin with the prefix *in-*: **incomprehensible**, **insular**, **intensity**, and **intimidated**. What does the prefix *in-* tell us, anyway? When something is *comprehensible*, we can understand it. When it is **incomprehensible**, it cannot be understood. Clearly, sometimes *in-* is like the English word *not*. But, this is not always the case. **Insular** comes from *solus*, “alone.” In Latin, *insula* meant “an island”—a piece of land by itself, separated. Here *in-* means “of, on, by.” The Latin *tendere*, *tensus* meant “to stretch, to stretch toward” (English *tension*) and “to lean towards” (*attend* and *tendency*). The Latin word *intendere* meant “to stretch into” and came to mean “eager.” Here *in-* has the effect of **intensifying** the root word. The word *timid* means “fearful.” The *in-* of **intimidated** means “to be in a state of” or, for **intimidate**, “to put in a state of.”

baffled
incomprehensible
insular
intensity

peevishness
precarious
procession

provincial
sedately
semidarkness

sprinted
tepid
valid

By Any Other Name

At the Anglo-Indian day school² in Zorinabad³ to which my sister and I were sent when she was eight and I was five and a half, they changed our names. On the first day of school, a hot, windless morning of a north Indian September, we stood in the headmistress's study and she said, "Now you're the *new* girls. What are your names?"

My sister answered for us. "I am Premila, and she"—nodding in my direction—"is Santha."

The headmistress had been in India, I suppose, fifteen years or so, but she still smiled her helpless inability to cope with Indian names. Her rimless half-glasses glittered, and the precarious bun on the top of her head trembled as she shook her head. "Oh, my dears, those are much too hard for me. Suppose we give you pretty English names. Wouldn't that be more jolly? Let's see, now—Pamela for you, I think." She shrugged in a baffled way at my sister. "That's as close as I can get. And for *you*" she said to me, "how about Cynthia? Isn't that nice?"

My sister was always less easily intimidated⁴ than I was, and while she kept a stubborn silence, I said, "Thank you," in a very tiny voice.

We had been sent to that school because my father, among his responsibilities as an officer of the civil service, had a tour of duty to perform in the villages around that steamy little provincial town, where he had his headquarters at that time. He used to make his shorter inspection tours on horseback, and a week

1. Santha Rama Rau (SAHN tuh RAHM uh ROW)

2. The *Anglo-Indian day school* was a non-boarding school in India with British administrators.

3. *Zorinabad* (ZOR IN uh BAHD) is a village in northern India.

4. *Intimidated* means easily threatened by the actions of others.

Word Bank

precarious (pree KARE ee iss) *adj.*: uncertain; dangerously insecure or unsteady

baffled (BAF ild) *adj.*: confused, bewildered, or perplexed

provincial (pruh VIN shil) *adj.*: not city-like; unsophisticated

before, in the stale heat of a typically post-monsoon⁵ day, we had waved goodbye to him and a little procession—an assistant, a secretary, two bearers,⁶ and the man to look after the bedding rolls and luggage. They rode away through our large garden, still bright green from the rains, and we turned back into the twilight of the house and the sound of fans whispering in every room.

Up to then, my mother had refused to send Premila to school in the British-run establishments of that time, because, she used to say, “you can bury a dog’s tail for seven years and it still comes out curly, and you can take a Britisher away from his home for a lifetime and he still remains insular.” The examinations and degrees from entirely Indian schools were not, in those days, considered valid. In my case, the question had never come up, and probably never would have come up if Mother’s extraordinary good health had not broken down. For the first time in my life, she was not able to continue the lessons she had been giving us every morning. So our Hindi⁷ books were put away and we were sent to the Anglo-Indian school.

That first day at school is still, when I think of it, a remarkable one. At that age, if one’s name is changed, one develops a curious form of dual personality. I remember having a certain detached and disbelieving concern in the actions of “Cynthia,” but certainly no responsibility. Accordingly, I followed the thin, erect back of the headmistress down the veranda to my classroom feeling, at most, a pass-

ing interest in what was going to happen to me in this strange, new atmosphere of school.

The building was Indian in design, with wide verandas opening onto a central courtyard, but Indian verandas are usually whitewashed, with stone floors. These, in the tradition of British schools, were painted dark brown and had matting on the floors. It gave a feeling of extra intensity to the heat.

I suppose there were about a dozen Indian children in the school—which contained perhaps forty children in all—and four of them were in my class. They were all sitting at the back of the room, and I went to join them. I sat next to a small, solemn girl who didn’t smile at me. She had long, glossy-black braids and wore a cotton dress, but she still kept on her Indian jewelry—a gold chain around her neck, thin gold bracelets, and tiny ruby studs in her ears. Like most Indian children, she had a rim of black kohl⁸ around her eyes. The cotton dress should have looked strange, but all I could think of was that I should ask my mother if I couldn’t wear a dress to school, too, instead of my Indian clothes.

I can’t remember too much about the proceedings in class that day, except for the beginning. The teacher pointed to me

5. *Post-monsoon* (POST mahn SOON) refers to a dry period following the monsoon season of winds and heavy rains.

6. *Bearers* (BAIR erz) carry heavy loads of materials and supplies.

7. *Hindi* (HIN dee) is the official language of India.

8. *Kohl* (KOLE) is a dark powder used as eye makeup in the Middle East and India.

Word Bank

procession (PRO SESH in) *n.*: a line or body of people or vehicles moving in a formal, orderly way

insular (IN suh ler) *adj.*: narrow-minded

valid (VAL id) *adj.*: legally sound, effective, or binding

intensity (in TEN sih tee) *n.*: great force, strength, or energy

and asked me to stand up. “Now, dear, tell the class your name.”

I said nothing.

“Come along,” she said, frowning slightly. “What’s your name, dear?”

“I don’t know,” I said, finally.

The English children in the front of the class—there were about eight or ten of them—giggled and twisted around in their chairs to look at me. I sat down quickly and opened my eyes very wide, hoping in that way to dry them off. The little girl with the braids put out her hand and very lightly touched my arm. She still didn’t smile.

Most of that morning I was rather bored. I looked briefly at the children’s drawings pinned to the wall, and then concentrated on a lizard clinging to the ledge of the high, barred window behind the teacher’s head. Occasionally it would shoot out its long yellow tongue for a fly, and then it would rest, with its eyes closed and its belly palpitating, as though it were swallowing several times quickly. The lessons were mostly concerned with reading and writing and simple numbers—things that my mother had already taught me—and I paid very little attention. The teacher wrote on the easel blackboard words like “bat” and “cat,” which seemed babyish to me; only “apple” was new and incomprehensible.

When it was time for the lunch recess, I followed the girl with braids out onto the veranda. There the children from the other classes were assembled. I saw Premila at once and ran over to her, as she had charge of our lunchbox. The children were all opening packages and sitting down to eat

sandwiches. Premila and I were the only ones who had Indian food—thin wheat chapatties,⁹ some vegetable curry,¹⁰ and a bottle of buttermilk. Premila thrust half of it into my hand and whispered fiercely that I should go and sit with my class, because that was what the others seemed to be doing.

The enormous black eyes of the little Indian girl from my class looked at my food longingly, so I offered her some. But she only shook her head and plowed her way solemnly through her sandwiches.

I was very sleepy after lunch, because at home we always took a siesta.¹¹ It was usually a pleasant time of day, with the bedroom darkened against the harsh afternoon sun, the drifting off into sleep with the sound of Mother’s voice reading a story in one’s mind, and, finally, the shrill, fussy voice of the ayah¹² waking one for tea.

At school, we rested for a short time on low, folding cots on the veranda, and then we were expected to play games. During the hot part of the afternoon we played indoors, and after the shadows had begun to lengthen and the slight breeze of the evening had come up we moved outside to the wide courtyard.

I had never really grasped the system of competitive games. At home, whenever we

9. *Chapatties* (chah PAT eez) are thin griddlecakes of unleavened bread used in Northern India.

10. *Vegetable curry* (VEJ tuh bul KUR ee) is a pungent dish of vegetables cooked in a sauce with curry powder.

11. A *siesta* (see ESS tuh) is a midday or afternoon rest or nap.

12. In India, an *ayah* (AH yuh) is a native maid or nanny.

Word Bank

incomprehensible (IN kahm pree HEN sih bul) *adj.*: impossible to understand

played tag or guessing games, I was always allowed to “win”—“because,” Mother used to tell Premila, “she is the youngest, and we have to allow for that.” I had often heard her say it, and it seemed quite reasonable to me, but the result was that I had no clear idea of what “winning” meant.

When we played twos-and-threes¹³ that afternoon at school, in accordance with my training, I let one of the small English boys catch me, but was naturally rather puzzled when the other children did not return the courtesy. I ran about for what seemed like hours without ever catching anyone, until it was time for school to close. Much later I learned that my attitude was called “not being a good sport,” and I stopped allowing myself to be caught, but it was not for years that I really learned the spirit of the thing.

When I saw our car come up to the school gate, I broke away from my classmates and rushed toward it yelling, “Ayah! Ayah!” It seemed like an eternity since I had seen her that morning—a wizened,¹⁴ affectionate figure in her white cotton sari,¹⁵ giving me dozens of urgent and useless instructions on how to be a good girl at school. Premila followed more sedately, and she told me on the way home never to do that again in front of the other children.

When we got home we went straight to Mother’s high, white room to have tea with her, and I immediately climbed onto the bed and bounced gently up and down on the springs. Mother asked how we had liked our first day in school. I was so pleased to be home and to have left that peculiar Cynthia behind that I had nothing whatever to say about school, except to ask what “apple” meant. But Premila told Mother about the classes, and added that in her class they had weekly tests to see if they had learned their lessons well.

I asked, “What’s a test?”

Premila said, “You’re too small to have them. You won’t have them in your class for donkey’s years.” She had learned the expression that day and was using it for the first time. We all laughed enormously at her wit. She also told Mother, in an aside, that we should take sandwiches to school the next day. Not, she said, that *she* minded. But they would be simpler for me to handle.

That whole lovely evening I didn’t think about school at all. I sprinted barefoot across the lawns with my favorite playmate, the cook’s son, to the

13. *Twos-and-threes* is a game similar to tag.


14. A *wizened* (WIZ ind) person has withered, shriveled features and skin.

15. A *sari* (SAR ee) is a garment worn chiefly by Indian women. It consists of a long cloth wrapped around the body with one end draped over one shoulder or over the head.

Word Bank

sedately (sih DATE lee) *adv.*: calmly, quietly, or in a composed manner

sprinted (SPRIN tid) *v.*: raced or moved at full speed for a short distance



stream at the end of the garden. We quarreled in our usual way, waded in the tepid water under the lime trees, and waited for the night to bring out the smell of the jasmine.¹⁶ I listened with fascination to his scary stories, until I was too frightened to cross the garden alone in the semidarkness. The ayah found me, shouted at the cook's son, scolded me, hurried me in to supper—it was an entirely usual, wonderful evening.

It was a week later, the day of Premila's first test, that our lives changed rather abruptly. I was sitting at the back of my class, in my usual inattentive way, only half listening to the teacher. I had started a rather guarded friendship with the girl with the braids, whose name turned out to be Nalini¹⁷ (Nancy in school). The three other Indian children were already fast friends. Even at that age it was apparent to all of us that friendship with the English or Anglo-Indian children was out of the question. Occasionally, during the class, my new friend and I would draw pictures and show them to each other secretly.

The door opened sharply and Premila marched in. At first, the teacher smiled at her in a kindly and encouraging way and said, "Now, you're little Cynthia's sister?"

Premila didn't even look at her. She stood with her feet planted firmly apart and her shoulders rigid, and addressed herself directly to me. "Get up," she said. "We're going home."

I didn't know what had happened, but I was aware that it was a crisis of some sort. I rose obediently and started to walk toward my sister.

"Bring your pencils and your notebook," she said.

I went back for them, and together we left the room. The teacher started to say something just as Premila closed the door, but we didn't wait to hear what it was.

In complete silence we left the school grounds and started to walk home. Then I asked Premila what the matter was. All she would say was "We're going home for good."

It was a very tiring walk for a child of five and a half, and I dragged along behind Premila with my pencils growing sticky in my hand. I can still remember looking at the dusty hedges, and the tangles of thorns in the ditches by the side of the road, smelling the

16. *Jasmine* (JAZZ min) is a fragrant, flowering shrub of the olive family.

17. *Nalini* (nuh LEEN ee)

Word Bank

tepid (TEP id) *adj.*: moderately warm; lukewarm

semidarkness (SEM ee DARK niss) *n.*: partial darkness

faint fragrance from the eucalyptus¹⁸ trees and wondering whether we would ever reach home. Occasionally a horse-drawn tonga¹⁹ passed us, and the women, in their pink or green silks, stared at Premila and me trudging along on the side of the road. A few coolies²⁰ and a line of women carrying baskets of vegetables on their heads smiled at us. But it was nearing the hottest time of day, and the road was almost deserted. I walked more and more slowly, and shouted to Premila, from time to time, “Wait for me!” with increasing peevishness. She spoke to me only once, and that was to tell me to carry my notebook on my head, because of the sun.

When we got to our house the ayah was just taking a tray of lunch into Mother’s room. She immediately started a long, worried questioning about what are you children doing back here at this hour of the day.

Mother looked very startled and very concerned, and asked Premila what had happened.

Premila said, “We had our test today, and She made me and the other Indians sit at the back of the room, with a desk between each one.”

Mother said, “Why was that, darling?”

“She said it was because Indians cheat,” Premila added. “So I don’t think we should go back to that school.”

Mother looked very distant, and was silent a long time. At last she said, “Of course not, darling.” She sounded displeased.

We all shared the curry she was having for lunch, and afterward I was sent off to the beautifully familiar bedroom for my

siesta. I could hear Mother and Premila talking through the open door.

Mother said, “Do you suppose she understood all that?”

Premila said, “I shouldn’t think so. She’s a baby.”

Mother said, “Well, I hope it won’t bother her.”

Of course, they were both wrong. I understood it perfectly, and I remember it all very clearly. But I put it happily away, because it had all happened to a girl called Cynthia, and I never was really particularly interested in her.

18. *Eucalyptus* (YOO kuh LIP tiss) is a tree of the myrtle family with sweet-smelling evergreen leaves.

19. A *tonga* (TAHN guh) is a two-wheeled, horse-drawn vehicle.

20. *Coolies* (KOO leez) are workers hired at low wages for unskilled work.

Word Bank

peevishness (PEEV ish niss) *n.*: fretfulness; irritability

Studying the Selection

First Impressions

As you read, which were the three strongest phrases, sentences, or passages that appealed to the sense of sight, sound, or touch?

✓ Quick Review

1. What was the headmistress's "helpless inability"?
2. Why had the sisters been sent to the school in Zorinabad, despite their mother's opposition to English-run schools?
3. What did Santha do during a lovely evening?
4. What event brought about the sisters' leaving school?

In-depth Thinking

5. Why do you think examinations and degrees from all-Indian schools were not considered valid in those days?
6. Is the author correct in thinking that a change of name—as hers was changed—at the age of five and a half, encourages a curious form of dual personality? Support your argument with material from the selection.
7. Compare and contrast Indian and British educational practices as they are described in the selection.
8. Why do you think Santha wanted to ask her mother if she could wear a cotton dress to school?

Drawing Conclusions

9. How would you behave towards new neighbors, if the young girls in the family wore gold bracelets, saris, and applied kohl around their eyes? Would you be prepared to welcome them?
10. Why do you think Premila, who had so willingly conformed to the school's expectations, walked out in the end?



Focusing on the Childhood Memoir

1. Explore the etymology of five 'foreign' words used in the selection. Give your list to your teacher—with their definitions, history, and any related English words.
2. With your teacher's help, find some writings by civil rights leaders. Explore how they were influenced by Mohandas Gandhi's stand on non-violent non-cooperation. On index cards, make notes for an oral report to your class. Submit the cards to your teacher, making sure all quotations use the proper citation form.
3. Imagine you are Premila. In the first-person voice, describe what happened to you at the school in Zorinabad.

Creating and Writing

1. Write an essay on Premila's non-violent, non-cooperative reaction to the school's classroom practices. Relate her response to the teaching of Mohandas Ghandi.
2. You are the school headmistress. Write a letter to the mother of Premila and Santha, 'explaining' school policies.
3. Draw a map of India, indicating mountain ranges, rivers, and major cities. If possible, outline the various states.

