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R.K.NARAYAN - THE NOVELIST OF THE COMMON MAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the readers, about R.K.Narayan, the renowned Indian writer belonging to the 20th century writers. Through his works he presents the typical Indian Society wherein he describes the life of the middle class Indian family. He has an extraordinary power of evoking a sense of life. He presents the habits, manners, daily routine, activities of the common man in the world of Malgudi the immortal town created by him. He is a rare example of pure artist and as a novelist of common people and common situation.

Key words: Novels, Indianess, common people, realism, fantasy.

R.K.Narayan, the most outstanding writer of Indian fiction, a novelist who has no axe to grind, belongs to the 20th century writers of Indian English. Born in 1906 in Chennai, known for creating the immortal town of Malgudi, is a rare example of a pure artist, who writes for the sake of art, and not out of any ulterior motives. That is why his popularity has been worldwide and lasting. His works have been translated into a number of languages of the world. He has 15 novels and many story stories to his credit.

He is known as a story-teller in the Indian tradition. His tales are episodic. Except in *The Guide*, there is a straightforward, chronological narration. His great regard for family ties and parties of the home make him an exception from the other writers of his genre. Human relationships, particularly domestic relationships, occupy a central place in his novels. Most of his novels present the simplicity of a middle class Indian family. This stress on the role of the family shows his Indianness. His novels are talked much because of the Indianness that is reflected in various ways.

His works present the typical Indian wife who are housewives, who bear the tyranny of their

husbands, passively and weakly. Even when they revolt, like Savitri in *The Dark Room*, the revolt is temporary and they return to their home and their children. Even Rosie in *The Guide* shows the essential Indianness in her solicitude for her husband and in the attitude of resignation, she adopts when Raju is arrested for forgery. She tells him; 'I felt all along you were not doing the right things. This is Karma'.

Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited in India. R.K.Narayan has presented these Sadhus, Sanyasis and Swamis as the characters in his novels. In *The Guide*, there is fasting to bring down the rain, and Raju is easily taken to be a Mahatma by the credulous villagers. Communication with the spirit of the dead, the undertaking of a fast to please a god or goddess to win some favour or other, are other relevant examples. Much is woven into the fabric of his novels, which recognizes no logic. There is the exploitation of such Indian merits as cobras a dancing girl as, devadasis for example, in *The Guide*. Rosie reads Natya Shastra of Bharat Muni. Frequent use of Indian myth and legend as in Gods forms the

background of his works. The *Man-Eater of Malgudi* is an example for this.

All his novels, except *The Guide*, are straightforward narrations, uncomplicated by chronological disjointedness or multi-point of view. The flashbacks in *The Sweet – Vendor* and *Mr.Sampath* are clear while the chronological sequence. According to Paul Vergheese, 'Narayan's is the simplest form of prose fiction – the story which records a succession of events. There is no separation between character and plot, both are inseparably knit together. The qualities of the novelist attribute to his characters who determine the action and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and, thus the story is carried forward to the end. In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, a middle and an end. All of his novels present a solution to the problem which sets the events moving;

R.K.Narayan's plots do not follow any standardized form. It may mean no marriage, no happy ending and no hero for standardized stature. Accidents, no happy ending and sudden reversal of fortune are used only on a very limited scale; his action mainly develops logically from the acts and actions of his characters. In this respect, Narayan is as much a 'materialist' as Henry James, H.G.Wells and Arnold Bennet.

Narayan's craftsmanship in plot construction does not reveal a consistent quality. In his novel *Swami and Friends* the story flows on in a very easy manner and helps us understand and Indian middle class family but developed an architectonic sense in his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*, and his third novel, *The Dark Room*, reveals definite signs of technical maturity.

Narayan uses both fantasy and realism in his works. As Uma Parameswaran points out 'Narayan uses both fantasy and realism in eight of his ten novels, they are to properly balance. The first half has excellent realism – drawn setting, characterization and action. About halfway through, there is a distinct break and fantasy takes over'. Generally, his plots split into two parts – the realistic and the fantastic – "the realistic vein being

carried alongside the fantastic and then dropped altogether'.

The plots of his novel is loose and episodic. Swami is not a vagabond. He is a simple character with all the innocence in him. There is a string of episodes and incidents, and the only unity is the fact that they all cluster round Swami, the chief protagonist. As in a picaresque novel, characters appear and disappear never to be met with again, and new characters are introduced quite late and most of the characters contain there, shadowy figures. There are a number of incidents and their order can easily be changed as in most cases the logical unity of cause and effect is lacking. However, none of them is superfluous for each serves to illuminate someone fact or other of Swami's character and to establish "the boy's world' which is looked at from the boy's point of view.

In all his novels except *The English Teacher*, *The Guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan is the omniscient narrating in the third person and thus following the traditional and conventional mode of narration. In *The Guide* alone, Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration, wherein part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself. The novel begins with the release of Raju from prison. What happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator whereas whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned, is told in series of flashbacks in Raju's own words and finally in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to think of him as a saint. The effect of this technique is to think of him as a saint and to make the figure of the hero more sharp and real than that the other characters.

R.K.Narayan is a straightforward descriptive artist. His narrations are very much impressive as well as interesting. Narayan has a peculiar way of narration wherein the keen situations described by him, lingers in the memory of the readers. He describes his characters with sympathy. His descriptions are full of interest because they abound in realism and fantasy. He does not fail to depict human life with all its flaws and frivolities, therefore, an element of bizarre is also present in his novels.

Narayan is one of the most celebrated Indian English writers. His style is simple, gentle and humorous. Narayan is remarkable not only for his outstanding and grand qualities of humour, descriptive beauty and characterization but also for his simple and easy language and unaffected and elegant prose style. He has used the language of the common man in his novels. His sentence patterns are conventional and easy to grasp without having any ambiguity. He uses appropriate and suitable words conveying the desired sense in a most straightforward manner. Unlike other Indo-English writers like Mulk Raj Anand, he keeps his language free from Hindustani words and phrases. He is not in the habit of using these words and phrases in his narrative and dialogues. His sentences are simple and natural, they are never complicated in structure or ambiguous or obscure in meaning.

Narayan has attained the reputation of being one of the greatest descriptive artists among Indo-English prose writers because of the qualities of simplicity, purity and elegance in his writing style. In his narratives and dialogues, he is always straightforward, free from affectation and obscurity. His style is never pompous, dull and ornate. It is free from repetition and is marked by precision, exactness and clarity. Just as he is conservative in his thinking, so also he is conservative and traditional in his style. His expression is free from artificiality and picturesqueness. It is always transparent, easy and full of elegance. The rare qualities of clarity, exactness, lucidity, fluency mark his prose style.

R. K. Narayan insists on keeping his language free from ornamentation, sometimes he uses similes, to make the speech effective. William Walsh writes, 'Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone. But always an evolved and conscious medium, without the exciting, physical energy – sometimes adventitiously injected – that marks the writing of the West Indians'.

Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, Indian sensibility'. He is away from the naturalistic mode of expression and photographic representation of reality. He creates

fantasies and uses his language to depict his understanding of the fundamentals of life. An example for this goes like this "The sun was setting, its tint touched the wall with pink. The tops of the coconut tree around were aflame. The bird's cries went up in a crescendo before dying down for the night. Darkness fell. Still, there was no sign of Velan or anyone."

He uses a language fit for his characters. Many of his hero's and heroines are common men and women whom we find around us. He uses a language appropriate to their standard and does not use long or terms of abuse. His language is free from the mannerism. His language doesn't differ from character to character. It is almost uniform. It, however, differs when a character speaks in emotion or sentiment. On meeting Rosie for the first time, Raju started feeling excited and spoke a few sentences to Velan in appreciation of beauty romantically, but immediately Raju said, 'forgive me waxing poetic'. Another example: - "The River dripping away in minute dribblets made no noise. The dry leaves of the peepal tree rustled. Somewhere a jackal howled. And Raju's voice filled the night." This shows how Narayan's language has austerity. It pretends no sophistication; it does not have any literary qualities. It has the tendency to catch and state poeticism. Yet has beauty too. It lacks intensity; it is incapable of participating in the subtler function of imaginative life.

Narayan's journalistic touch can be seen in the passage such as "in spite of protestations to the contrary", "to will whom it may concern", "inside the bars of outside". She was a sorry sight in every way", "Now I had made a mess", "go from strength to strength", "It does not matter". Narayan also uses hyperbole's, like, here he was in the presence of experience. This man will finish me. 'Oh monster, what do you do her that makes her sulk like this on rising? What a treasure you have in your hand without realizing its worth like a monkey picking up a rose garland'.

Narayan's neologisms are also suitable and suggestive. "Freeze-gazing", "goldmine" (for Rosie), "dance practice", "art business" are the examples of Indian English. His language is like a one-stringed instrument. Sometimes Narayan applies Tamilian

idiom into English which, he does with a natural manner. Narayan has been using the stylistic device from the very beginning of his career as a novelist. Through this device, he creates not only the atmosphere but characters also.

Narayan describes the most absurd and even the most serious events in the same vein. In order to impart naturalness and simplicity, the author uses popular Tamil words liberally in his novels. The words like "Asura, Barian, Dhoti, Lungis, Karma, Moha, Krodha, Lobha, Puja" occur in his novels often. Narayan's language is the language of the ordinary people. It is the language of Malgudi people. His language gives us an idea of a small South Indian Community with their setting, their manner, conventions and thoughts. Though his language is simple, Narayan's style is rich and suggestive. He mixes his imagination and his skill so perfectly while describing the day of the match in *Swami and Friends*. The parting scene of Rajan has been described with pathos and poetic style. The scene is full of emotions and intensity. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran's affair has been described in such a way that we can see his narrative art. In *The English Teacher*, his style is picturesque and lyrical when he describes Krishna's passion for his wife. The story of the marital life of Krishna and Susila is like a prose lyric. In *The Guide*, we witness the blending of several artistic devices in a very different manner, the language is mild in metaphor and simple in syntax. Through easy action, he expresses his feeling towards his characters.

Narayan's characterization is realistic and lifelike. He is satisfied with his 'ivory inch'. And like Jane Austen portrays only a limited type of people. That is to say that he portrays only those characters who are known to him. His character is full of life and vitality. They are thoroughly human in their likes and dislikes. Krishnan the philosophic minded, lectures in English with all his idealism that stands in sharp contrast with the worldly-minded Ramani, who founded his happiness in a mistress. Mr.Sampath, the happy-go-lucky opportunist serves a contrast to Raju in *The Guide*, Savitri, the proud but staunch Hindu wife is quite different from modern independent-minded Rosie.

Narayan's heroes are drawn on a heroic scale. His heroes are the unheroic heroes. They do not control the events, but the events control them. In the case of Narayan's heroes character is destiny as well as destiny in character. Many of his heroes are compelled by the force of circumstances to level their homes. Raju goes from town to town, and after a brief span of time in jail settles down on the banks of the Sarayu near Margayya Village. Mr.Sampath, the cunning shark is impelled by luck and levels Malgudi forever.

Narayan portrays his characters realistically. He also gives details of their traits, manners, habits and dress. He also gives their background. Narayan always grasps the psychological essential which gives his characters their reality. Mr.Sampath is one such character who may not be as full of life, but we understand him. We know his psychological make-up and we know just how he will behave and why. This psychological grip enables Narayan to draw complex character better. A character like Raju or Sampath is full of complexities. He is not only a sinner, he is also a saint. If he can cheat he has his moments of generosity too. Mr. Sampath is an unscrupulous and cunning rogue, who is the victim of high ambition and over-confidence without adequate corresponding abilities.

Another such character is Srinivas, an idealist, who lives with his wife and children. Structurally the role of Srinivas is very important. It is he who integrates the plot. All the characters in the novel are known to us in the preparation to their relationship with him. His repeated reading of Upanishad's makes him indifferent to his family life. He holds a philosophical attitude to the life and the world. He is fixed about his duties and responsibilities. Living absorbed in the work of The Banner, he forgets to remember his wife and children. Through his characters he wants to convince his readers that "family duties come before any other duty."

In Narayan's novels, we don't have pure villains and pure saints. We can find an array of good and bad in his major characters. Mr.Sampath and Margayya and Raju and Rosie all have their weaknesses as well as virtues. In fact, they are more

sinned against than sinning. This is another proof of his realistic characterization, for in life we have neither purely good nor entirely bad people. His minor characters play an important role in the novel. For example, without Velan of Mangala village, it could have been impossible to develop the action of the novel in an existing manner. Narayan brings out some merits of a joint family. Soon after coming out of a joint-family, Srinivas found domestic duties an extra-burden. Since there is a division of labour in the joint family system, no particular person can feel more burden.

Casteism is one of the worst evils of society. Sriram detected the feeling of casteism and untouchability because it divides human beings into compartments. He, therefore bursts into anger when his wife hesitates to take food-stuff brought from a nearby hotel for the fear of pollution of touch by a lower caste: 'What foolish nonsense is this?' Srinivas cried. He stood looking at her for a moment as if she were an embodiment of knotty problems. He knew what it was rigorous upbringing, fear of pollution of touch by another caste, orthodox idiocies – all the rigorous compartments of human beings.

Narayan's novels are supreme instances of the psychological quest. His minute psychological observation reminds us of the great psychologist like Allier and Freud. Through his novels he displays the typical mentality of an Indian house-wife. Srinivas's wife is an ideal housewife. She prepares nice food-stuffs with all care and expects admiration, like every house-wife's, from her husband. Keeping in mind her husband's taste, she prepares "leaf", "potato chips", "cucumber soaked in curd" etc., with full interest. She serves it to her husband and wants appreciation. But when her husband eats silently, she is hurt: 'He ate his dinner silently ruminating over it'. His wife stooped over his leaf to serve him. She had fried potato chips in ghee for him and some cucumber soaked in curd; she had spent the day in the excitement of preparing these and was so disappointed to see him take so little notice of them'

This pictures present the common Indian family life that we see around us. We can say that Narayan's purpose is to entertain, to amuse his readers by telling them an interesting story, which

does not necessitate any great effort on their part. He does not preach or moralize. Though there is an analysis of human feelings, emotions and motives, there is no probing into the subconscious and the unconscious as is the case with the modern novelist.

To conclude, Narayan's place among the Indian novelists is supreme. There is, no doubt, a novelist of common people and common situations.

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