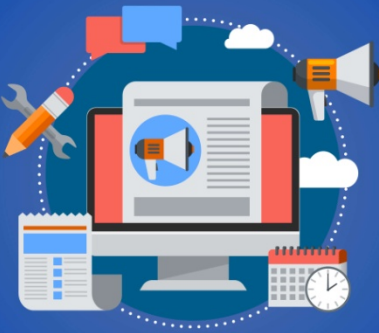


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The English Teacher's Quest to be a Spiritual Student

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Abstract:

The English Teacher is written in an autobiographical vein by the reverend maestro of literary artist RK Narayan. I have discussed the unique aspect of this novel named *The English Teacher* which is directly related to our life as well. From a humble English teacher how a professor started on his journey of becoming spiritually awakened and thus connecting to the higher goals of his life. I tried to probe into the psychic realm of Krishan wherein he attained the level of self growth and awareness through his consistent painstaking effort with guidance from his deceased better half. Although Narayan is expert in the art of make believe still this is more than an account based on an imaginary tale of a widower turning into a hermit sort of a human. The unknown subtle details of afterlife with techniques like auto writing and meditations shock us and compel us to believe without leaving any chances of doubts. Science is rational and radical but there can be another branch of science which is based on the laws of another plane. After progressing into the spiritual growth he learnt to remain forever contented and happy without his soulmate. Thus we witness a gradual transformation of a teacher into a spiritual student.

Keywords: afterlife, spiritual growth, awareness, psychic realm, make believe, soulmate, higher plane, another dimension, radical.

RK Narayan recorded elements of his real life in this novel that is why it is close to his heart this is not merely a collection of memoirs but a journey of his life from teacher hood to a disciple of spiritual realm. I had reread this autobiographical book a number of times and in each time of my reading expedition I was lost in the labyrinth of self indulgence of deep drawn resemblances and consciousness. One of the reasons of this particular book being my favorite is that I too have unfathomable interest in life after death, in its spiritual aspect I feel a sort of déjà vu with this magnum opus of Reverend Mr Narayan.

I always fail to comprehend why Almighty always chose the hardest way full of pain, adversities and suffering to grant lessons of awareness and awakening to teach us? The readers are

not at all aware of this spiritual growth which their writer is going to encounter in the following chapters. This rendezvous of the author with the readers begins with the humble college life of the protagonist Krishna with whom we are acquainted in the 16th page of the novel otherwise before it we were led in to the novel with the first person narration. With the vivid description of his life as a professor of Albert Mission College in Malgudi we do get a chance to relish slices of wonderful vocabulary and sumptuous grammar robustness all packed with the appetizers of humor and irony.

My face has a constant smiley grin while going through his daily humdrum with his students and colleagues. Being a professor in English myself I relate all his experiences like mine. His daily routine matches with me I am too into Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare whole day. In fact I lunch daily with some or the other gentleman of literature in my short recess of 40 minutes, I swallow my lunch with an ode On his blindness by Milton to revise the gist before explaining to my students in the next lecture or at times I dine in the company of Shakespeare's drama to prepare myself for my first lecture in the morning.

Like in his every novel R K Narayan celebrates his loyalty with his created fictitious locale Malgudi we find a sense of nostalgic romance when we read the already known names of places like Albert Mission College, South Extension, Fort Area, Racecourse road, Vinayak mudaki street, Lawley Extension, Sarayu street etc. I feel by visualizing these names as if these places belong to my mayeka (mother's home of a married girl) where I cuddle in after a long return.

Readers are left spell bound by the splendid treatment of humor which heals subtly in his most remarkable novels. You can't help laughing at the cynic Principal of college Mr Brown. His over concern for the accuracies of English grammar makes us laugh and delight at the same time for instance :

“He motioned us to our seats and said, “Could you imagine a worse shock?” I came across the student of the English Honours, who did not know till this day that honours had to be spelt with a u?”

Krishna never missed a chance to enjoy this humour at the expense of Mr Brown, he mocked at his colleague and senior professor he said,” Mr Gajapathy ,there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel.”

Narayan depicts the ambience of college life with such real life beauty that we feel to be part of his hostel colleagues mates or sometimes we found ourselves sitting among his students enthralled in his lecture. The world of our erudite English Professor is limited only to his college and hostel where he is contented and peaceful.

In the 19th page of the novel we discover that our genius writer is married and has a wife along with a baby. He received letters from his father and wife asking him to arrange their stay and to quit his pseudo bachelor life! The search for house begins to set up his new family, which is also as usual decorated with pearls of soft humor.

“This is a house evidently intended for monkeys to live in. This house have been designed by a tuberculosis expert so that his business may prosper for the next hundred years this house is ideal for the one whose greatest desire in life is to receive constant knocks on his head from door-posts. A house for the twisted pigmy.”

I am sure in none of the novels of RK Narayan we can find such a blissful flamboyant narration of a happily married life. Here in this novel the husband always remains a lover, a devoted admirer of his wife and always treats her tenderly like a baby. This virtue of Krishna had touched my heart. Usually married couple get into mode of complaints and always brew at loggerheads soon after the honey moon period is over .I am stunned and jealous by the loyalty and faithfulness of this husband who keeps all the seven vows that he had taken during his marriage ceremony even after the demise of his dear wife.

On one of the occasions Krishna exclaimed about his wife and expresses his unending, measureless love and appreciation for her,” the divine creature! I reflected within myself, looking at her tall slim figure. She was a phantom of delight. When first she gleamed upon my sight.” and then again at another place in the novel when they went out to search a home for themselves,”...The fresh sun, morning light, the breeze, and my wife’s presence, who looked so lovely-even an unearthly loveliness-her tall form, dusky complexion, and the small diamond earrings-Jasmine, Jasmine ...”I will call you Jasmine, hereafter” I said.

Krishna remained a one -woman man till his last breath .Unfortunately Narayan's wife couldn't survive to read and relish and feel proud of her spouse's novel which is interwoven with her beautiful praises that spreads throughout the novel like hymns of a devotee. I feel remorse and regret at the loss of the protagonist. The untimely demise of Shusila, his wife leaves me as much bewildered as it does with Krishna.

I admire the struggle of a wife- less husband who played very successfully the role of mother as well single parent and never ever let his little daughter Lila feel the deprivation of her mother.

The most dreadful and unexpected turning point came when Sushila went to explore on her own new house leaving her husband aside and brushing his warning."Sushila replied:"No you needn't come. I will just see the compound and backyard and return."..."Oh, wont you let me alone even for a few minutes?" she whispered "Nobody will carry me off".

Both of them were ignorant from the evil deadly planes of destiny when Sushila experienced awful disgusting foul lavatory where she happened to lock herself barefooted unknowingly and unwillingly. There she was bitten by some poisonous flies and mosquitoes and the infection inflicted to her untoldable sufferings which ended in her painful premature death.

"The door was so bright ..."she replied softly."I thought it would be clean inside too...but I couldn't come out after I went in-the door shut by itself with a bang. I thought something terrible had happened...Ah,the flies and other things there "She was convulsed with disgust."Oh,Oh...a fly came and sat on my lip..."

Here after we notice a sharp and steady decline in her health in the course of the time we witness her death journey bit by bit. Sadly, she fades away like jasmine flower writhing away its freshness with each passing day. Along with the author we join helplessly and desperately in the upcoming turmoil filled events.

"I went away to my study and stood for a moment gazing at my table. My wife had given up all attempts at tidying up my room and it had lapsed into the natural state of my hostel days."

Krishna switched from a role of worshipping husband into dotting caretaker of his wife turned into a patient. He treats her like a child, love has myriad facets and we find all shades of

pure unconditional love in our beloved Krishna –a sensuous lover who can't stop admiring beauty of his wife and keeps comparing her with Jasmine and finally rename her as Jasmine then we see his love taking the shade of affection and benevolence at its peak wherein he is able to feel the same pain and agony of his wife with the same intensity and empathy.

“Meanwhile my wife’s sobbing increased.”Control yourself child,”I said.”Take this you will be alright....I sat down and caressed her forehead and asked:”Do you feel alright now? I will fetch the doctor.”

One thing I fail to understand is that despite being able to get the best medical services for his ailing wife why he delayed so much to consult a doctor and why he limited the consultation to only a couple of doctors? He never took his dying wife out of home to avail a well equipped hospital? These unanswered questions keep haunting me till date. I believe if timely treatment in the hospital was given to the lady she would have been saved and lived up to witness her husband’s fruitful journey of 100 years of life span with innumerable awards and laurels including Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Filmfare Award for Best Story. Narayan’s wife Rajam **died** of typhoid in 1939. Her death affected Narayan deeply and he remained depressed for a long time. I am sure typhoid had treatment in those times. I am afraid to say but a wise and timely decision of the author might had saved her but we all are helpless and ignorant before the unpredictable craft of fate.

Throughout in this painful journey of a beautiful tall woman turning into lifeless lump of dead mass, the innocence of child Lela and her childlike deeds bring us back to sobriety. The child adjusts a lot much ahead of her age she copes up with the profound illness of her mother accompanied by lone and never ending separation. Although her unstoppable queries regarding her mother seem to remain unquenchable still just to console her father’s anxiety she pretends to understand everything .She seems to identify with the famous quote of Alexander Pope ‘Child is the father of man.

“I ordered ;”Little one, you must learn to obey your mother in all these matters ,without a word...”The child threw a pained look at me, and went away....My wife said :Don’t be so harsh with her, poor girl!”The child returned with the blue frock and shirt. I took it in my hand

and said :”How lovely!”the child replied swiftly;”it is not lovely “and submitted herself to her mother’s handling.

Losing wife in 30s is not a good idea it broke him mentally and physically .He was attached to his wife on subtle plane they were real soul mates. Her sudden demise was shock and terror for him he couldn’t make terms with it for a long time it took unexplainable efforts on his part to make terms with her loss and only spirituality gave him the way. We experience the darkest phase of his life during the early stage of his wife’s separation with him .He undergoes a turmoil of saddest emotions which touches and makes us grief ridden too.

“I was never a sound sleeper at any time in my life, but now more than ever I lay awake most of the night, sleeping by fits and starts. My mind kept buzzing with thoughts and memories. In the darkness I often felt an echo of her voice and speech or sometimes her moaning and delirious talk in sickbed”.

Destiny grants him a new lease of life when he was invited by a stranger to join him in communication with his dead wife. This man later proved to be an instrument of constructing a spiritual connection between Krishna and his wife. He was a medium used by the spirits to communicate with him but in true sense he also became means of Krishnan’s spiritual awakening. It is through spirits only this stranger could contact on the address given by these spirits. There is a method of afterlife communication known as automatic writing here that man used this method to reveal Sushila’s thoughts on paper to Krishna .He just had to hold the pencil and effortlessly the pages were filled with messages from the other side. It was hard to believe such unscientific fact by logical rational intellectual mind of Krishna but later he was stunned by the subtle secrets Sushila revealed through this man’s writing that he was head over heels in belief with this.

“How much of the child do you see?”I asked.”As much as anyone else, perhaps a little more. I have direct access to her heart now; I am always watching her now”.

These sittings with his psychic medium friend brought much relief to his otherwise agitated life. He started learning new lessons of life and its journey. Later Sushila through auto writing suggested him to make attempt at his own psychic development and devised a wise and well defined plan for it.

“I can hardly come to you, because the grief creates a barrier and this should be avoided for both our sakes.”

“But look here, “I pleaded “How can I help having you as the permanent background to my thoughts? I can’t help thinking of you...”

“Just as I am thinking of you, I know you will also be thinking of me .But I want this thought to be coupled with the desire to commune with me. It is this aspect that I want to impress upon you as necessary for psychic development and free communion between us”.

I must appreciate for the uphill efforts that Krishna makes for this communion with his wife. He drastically changes his thought pattern and moulds himself by the guidelines given by an abstract medium that is spirit rather soul of his dear departed wife. Now I no more wonder how he is able to spent his entire life span of almost 7 decades without a companion, without a life partner Actually Sushila never left him in fact they become more close as now she being in another world there was no restraint of time and space. She gave her company as his better half and happily he was able to navigate through the desert of his long life span that was full of achievements and worldly delights. This spiritual enlightenment was not accomplished by him in a single day or fortnight he did tirelessly penance of many years to get his peace of mind and fusion with her soul guided by Sushila at every step of his improvement.

“The only trouble now is that your mind is rigid. Till lately I’d even greater difficulty because of your poignant sorrow. This barrier is now lifted more or less. What is now required is that you should be able to receive my thoughts. It can be done only if you do not make a stone image of me. I want you to behave just as you would d if I were conversing with you.”

Thus Krishna was able to transform from his desperate depressed state of mind to unlighted self development with the assistance of his wife. He became more cheerful and his memory hurts him less .The nightly contact gave him solace.”At first it will be a matter of belief, “I remember her saying.”I clung to it fast:”Belief, belief.”

One more incident strengthened his belief in his wife’s contact from the other side when he was able to find out the casket which his dead wife has described to him. This ivory worked sandalwood casket was brought along with the other baggage by his mother. He crosschecked

from the pages where he had written his wife's messages which he got via automatic writing through his friend who acted as a medium between both the worlds. He checked with the message and measured the length and breadth of the box and went mad with the excitement. Even we readers were awestruck. Nothing could defy this communion now. We humans see and feel only one dimension of existence where as there exists many more. Evidence are even sensed and felt by animals like dogs ,cattle, cats etc which are gifted by extra sensory nerves to catch these paranormal phenomena. We need evidences of everything. Lack of evidence doesn't mean evidence of lack. There does exist many planes many dimensions the only requirement is to clear your consciousness and reach out to your subconscious mind. Which is next to impossible for money minded superfast people of today but it was possible for yogis and meditating sages and hermits.

Finally a bitter change again came into his life when his mother came to take away child forever with her as he was not enough to cater to the needs of a growing daughter. The separation of father and child was very touching and heart tearing but somehow Krishna convinced himself for the better upbringing of his daughter.

Krishna reconciled with the pain and separation and made terms with it and relaxed and let it go. Then only he was led into the new avenues of hope and respite he too make up his mind to resign from his job of English teacher and take writing as his full time vacation. He received tearful adieu from his colleagues of more than a decade old.

The end of the novel moist our eyes once again when returning home after farewell he find himself lonely and his home deserted. He again went down to the memory lane. The jasmine garland gifted by his colleagues exported him to his Jasmine. We can't bear his loss, his sadness his gloom. Physically he was alone and that is the bitter truth. Along with him we too become so overwhelmed and wept. Later do we realize this was the way to reunite with her drowning in her memories he become hypnotic and let himself lose removing all the obstacles of holding back. And in a sort of meditative state reached the pinnacle of consciousness where the borders of barriers of the two different worlds dissolve and souls meet into souls communion .”Shusila! Shushila! I cried .”You here””Yes, I'm here, have always been here.”I sat up leaning on my pillow....”How well you look!”...”Still Jasmine –scented !” I commented.

“Dawn! She whispered and rose to her feet. We stood at the window, gazing on a slender, red illumination over the eastern rim of the earth .A cool breeze lapped our faces. The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy-a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death”.

R KNarayan the extra ordinary storyteller has woven imaginary Krishna a professor of Albert Mission College with his autobiographical undercurrent into the most convincing patterns of tragedy and humour. After studying this masterpiece for more than a dozen of times I am able to develop insights of Mr R K Narayan’s always happy demeanor. He never felt loneliness and depression because he made himself believe that his wife in spirit form is always accompanying him. Everything is in belief. He lives a very fruitful and healthy life span of almost a century being blessed by his beautiful comforting belief which acted as his savior and solace throughout his existence. Krishna a college professor by profession started his new venture as a student of spiritual realms after the death of his most beloved wife. He with his own untiring self development efforts kindled the light within himself and become unstoppable on the path of spiritual glory.

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