

Use of Indian Language in The Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan

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INTRODUCTION

RK Narayan, an Indian writer in English, passed away a few years ago (1906-2001). He wrote simple tales and novels that captured the South Indian middle and lower middle class ethos in an incomparable way: elegant brief sentences, understated psychological insights and an infectious lightheartedness that made you smile, never laugh. This paper is intended to examine R. K. Narayan's attitude towards the use of Indian language as reflected in his selected novels. Like other Indian writers in English, such as Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, he received English education and used to write in English from the beginning of his literary career up to the end. However, he is seen to have used the Indian language and literary form to scrutinise colonialism and depict the Indian society continually under change due to the colonial rule. A part of this endeavour seems to be evident in Narayan's attitude towards the use of Indian language.

R.K. Narayan uses 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 writings of the West Indians. Narayan's English is beautifully adapted to communicate a different and Indian sensibility." Indeed, Narayan is a great master of excellent English prose which has made him an unsurpassed descriptive artist of today.

STORY TELLER IN THE INDIAN TRADITION

R.K. Narayan is a traditional story teller. The novel *Swami and Friends*' is a Western art-form, but Narayan follows the Indian tradition of story – telling. His narration is straightforward, chronological and uncomplicated. He seldom has sub- plots in his novels. Episodes follow in quick succession and the construction is rather loose and episodic. E.M. Forster observes: "Like a traditional story – teller, speaks at a basic level, and needs an essential receptivity from his audience. Narayan certainly entertains but not at a rib-rollicking pace. On the other hand, the laughter he evokes is not recorded laughter but genuine and simple laughter."

Narayan's art of story-telling is superb and so he has attained distinction as a descriptive artist. There is logical progression in his descriptions and narrations. This is true in '*Swami and Friends*'. There are a number of episodes and the only unity they have is the unity of the hero, that is, the same personage is at the centre of all of them. However, there is no superfluity, for each of the episodes illuminates one aspect or the other of Swami's personality and contributes to build a rounded three dimensional figure. The narration is straightforward, there are no

flashbacks. Further, in the Indian tradition of story-telling disorder is followed by the restoration of order and return to normalcy. Thus, the disorder created by Swami's running away soon comes to an end with his return home, peace is restored in the disturbed family, normal life is once again becomes possible as here: Swaminathan had a sense of supreme well – being and security. He was flattered by the number of visitors that were coming to see him. His granny and mother were hovering round him ceaselessly, and it was a sneaking satisfaction that he saw his little brother crowning unheeded in the cradle... Many of his father's friends came to see him and behaved more or less alike. They stared at him, with amusement and said how relieved they were to have him back.
(Narayan, Swami and Friends, 1995, pg.173)

The secret of Narayan is his ability to keep these views in a perfect balance. It makes him a sub-title writer, concealing irony beneath blandly simple exterior as an Indian tradition caring little if they are loose in construction.

TYPICAL INDIAN SYMBOLS AND SCENES

Narayan represents Indians through his symbols too. He uses symbols which represent typical Indian culture or temperament excessive credulity and faith symbolize the cultural part of India as in 'The English Teacher' when Krishnan visits the medium man's place for the first time and he taken for a round by the medium man he perceived: "Beyond that casuarinas, would you believe it I have Lotus pond, and on its bank a temple, the most lovely ruin that you ever saw I'd love to see that temple, what temple is it? The goddess said that Sankara when he passed this way built it at night, by merely chanting her name over the earth, and it stood up, because the villagers hereabouts asked for it. The goddess is known a Vak Matha, the mother who came out of a syllable."
(Narayan, The English Teacher, 2003, pg.109.110)

The landscape in Narayan embodies structural solidity of Indian reality pervaded by the customs and traditions which control human identity and its spatiotemporal continuum. They reflect the typical India. They are a lively and realistic rendering of the interaction of the character and a typically Indian situation. The characters well in the reality of our existence and the events narrated are like the occurrences of real life. Their world is a replica of the actual and the real.

TYPICAL INDIAN CHARACTERS

Indian culture is very elusive and complex. It is difficult to summarize it through few situations or characters. Narayan is neither a social critic nor a Photographic artist representing the reality. His chief interest is the study of man and his predicament in this universe. Yet, despite all this his characters share Indianess. In his early novels his characters are typically Indian- Sworn/ Chandra, Krishan are Indians not only in name but also in character and spirit. They have the notions and feeling, taboos and morals of India with them. Narayan contends that all imaginative writing in India has had its origin in The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, and an author can pick up an incident or character out of either of the epics and create a new work . And Narayan remains true to his contention. Whether it is Swaminathan, Raju or Krishnan, all of them are dipped in puranic tradition. While Narayan's faith Divine scheme remains unshaken throughout his life with full awareness of man's utter helplessness in undoing the wrongs.

He vests most of the characters in his writings in a traditional garb. The Sadhus, Sanyasis, the common men we have been observing in our daily life, are found in his novels. Further, Narayan's female characters are also mostly Indian housewives. They are god fearing, modest and loving. They also bear the tyranny of their husbands quite meekly and passively as is evident in one of his early novels The English Teacher-Sushila also became a victim of Krishnan's

anger: I looked at the paper corner and wailed: 'you have given away those papers too there were old answer papers there...' 'Yes I saw them,' she said. 'They were four years old. Why do you want the old papers?' I was too angry to answer. 'You have no business to tamper with my things,' I said. 'I don't want any Tiffin or coffee. I picked up my coat, put it on and rushed out of the house, without answering her question: 'Where are you going? (Narayan, *The English Teacher*, 2003, pg.48)

Narayan's chief concern is with middle class common man with marked potential for the uncommon, trying to win attention for themselves. They struggle towards maturity within the accepted religious and social frame work. The major characters we come across in Malgudi belong to the higher strata of society which Narayan is intimately familiar with. Most of them are basically innocent. They are traditional and superstitious. They believe that everything in the universe is preordained and that no amount of human efforts can ease the situation, they are helpless creatures tossed this way and that by the caprice of fortune. In *Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran, who is intensely in love with Malathi cannot marry her because their horoscopes do not tally. He leaves home and becomes a sanyasi. In *The English Teacher*, after the death of Krishnan's dear wife, finds solace in the world of spirits. In a nut shell the heroes of Narayan depend upon chance or luck for their happiness. If things go contrary, they run away from the reality. Largely, they accept defeat and find happiness in submission to the traditional forces of society. In 'The Bachelor of Arts' Chandran gets frustrated, tries sanyas for a short time and settles down looking forward to his marriage with Sushila as per the wishes of his parents. Like Srinivas, Savitri and Margaya's son Balu Chandran in 'Bachelor of Arts', Swami in 'Swami and Friends', Sushila in 'The English Teacher' all run away but later come to terms with hard realities of life in the traditional society.

To quote Rajiv Taranath, "From average to the extraordinary and back again to a more poignant State of average seems to be the recurrent movement in terms of interacting characters in the majority of Narayan's novels. " (Taranath, R.K. *Narayan, A Study*, 1976, p.13) Though the characters make certain attempts to go against the prevailing social customs and traditions, they simply cannot stand the collective force of the society as a whole. The result is, they accept defeat, remorse comes and they find happiness in submission. Narayan does not seem to approve of their attitude or any kind of rebellion on their part. They are dissatisfied, either with their own self or with the world around them. Badal rightly observes: Narayan's characters are typically Malgudians rooted in the age old local traditions, these characters belong to Malgudi, these Sampaths and Chandrans do not play their part, but live, move in and out, talk and laugh, and then disappear on to appear again and again in the familiar sights. (8a ad I, R.K.Narayan, *A Study*, 1976,p.71)

Narayan personages are human types and their problems are universal problems. What is true of Malgudi is true of India. Narayan's heroes are aware of social and political canvas, but they do not take sides, nor do they commit themselves any ideology. Narayan imbues them with social awareness and a sense of responsibility only to the extent it helps him bring out their human qualities. Narayan's characters are literary incarnations of the Gandhian ideal. They are people in quest of truth. They embody the greatest virtues of the Hindu way of life at the level of the man in the street; exactly where Gandhi wanted them to be. At an individual level one can say that practically all of Narayan's heroes go through an "experiment with truth." This experiment is what his novels are primarily concerned with. Gandhi wanted to revive the spirit of Vivekananda and of Ramakrishna to lift India out of the religious superstition it had fallen into. Narayan's heroes prove to be very Gandhian in spirit.

CONCLUSION

R.K. Narayan presents his scenes, symbols and characters realistically. His writing style is simple, unpretentious and witty, with a unique flavor as if he is writing in the native tongue. Narayan shows his awareness to the complex issues regarding the position of the English language in the colonial India. He is conscious of the foreign origin of the language and its imperial connotation. Notwithstanding, he clearly depicts how the English language has established a firm root in India and become an essential part of its social reality. That is to say, Narayan seems to believe that it is impossible to eliminate the English language from the social reality of India. And he pragmatically suggests the acceptance of the language in its Indianized form.

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