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## R.K.Narayan's Talkative Man: A Study in Architectonic Quality

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According to R.K.Narayan:

“Talkative Man” is too long to be a short story, but is it too short for a novel? I prefer the shorter form because it gives me scope for elaboration of details, but within certain limits; I can take up a variety of subjects and get through each in a reasonable time, while a novel ties me down to a single theme for at least two years (1983,p.120)

The above comment exhibits Narayan's concern for the centrality of the theme in a novel. He ties himself to a single theme for at least two years while writing a novel. Theme in the novels of Narayan is the focal point around which constituent and characteristics elements like plot, character, narration, story, dialogue, humour, fate, society and regional qualities function. He exhibits the same pattern in his last but not least novel Talkative Man. This novel also possesses thematic architectonic quality because the constituents and the characteristic elements run into one another harmoniously to achieve the architectonic quality. The theme of the novel, as Narayan himself writes, is “a wife's attempt to reclaim her erratic, elusive husband. Who is a wanderer, a philanderer on a global scale, abandoning women right and left.”(1983 p.121) Thus, we can say that separation and loneliness are the themes of this novel. Almost all the constituents and characteristic elements run into one another to achieve this theme. I will discuss the theme first and then proceed to relate the other elements with the theme so that we can appreciate the architectonic quality which is the essence of this novel.

Separation and loneliness are the essence of Narayan's philosophy. They get expressed in most of his novels, among which The English Teacher, The Vendor of Sweets, the Guide and The Tiger for Malgudi are pre-dominant. This theme is also the keynote of this novel. It shapes the development of the novel. Dr.Rann, the leading character of Talkative Man's story, lives separately from his wife. He needs loneliness for his erratic activities. So, he leaves his wife who lives and works in Delhi. When he arrives at Malgudi, he starts living in the railway waiting room which itself is a symbol of loneliness because there in this waiting room no one except the bugs stay. Malgudi railway station is itself a lone place. It receives and flags-off few trains in a day. It is a claim and quite place. The following description gives us a feeling of loneliness prevailing at the railway station:

“The station master was distraught. He was a diminutive person whose job was to flag in and out two passenger trains at wide intervals, the non-stop express, and the goods wagons. After each performance he rerolled the flags, tucked them under his arm, and turned into his office to make entries in a buff register... After the passengers left, he put an iron lock on the platform gate and retired to his “quarters”, a small cottage fenced off with discarded railway sleepers, besides a Gul Mohur tree... He was a contented man, one of the thousands apparently forgotten by the Railway Board in far-off Delhi.” (1983,p.11)

Rann stays in a waiting room for more than three weeks. He “Went out in the morning and came back only at night.”<sup>4</sup> His comings and goings are mysterious. Even when he shifts to Talkative Man's house, his mysterious life continues. Here is a description:

“At home he would never emerge from the privacy of his room except in pyjamas and a striped dressing gown tasseled at the waist... here was this man, who never opened his door without being clad in his robe” (1983.p27)

So, the privacy leads to the mystery. Rann becomes the permanent quest in TM's home and continues his erratic and elusive activities of abandoning woman so secretly that even TM is not able to get any idea of his activities for a long time. It is the entry of Rann's wife which alarms him about the ill prospects of Dr.Rann. The theme of separation finds its expression in her character.

She introduces herself in the following manner:

“For the good reason that I am his wife-perhaps the only one wedded to him in front of the holy fire at a temple.” (1983.p.6)

Rann leaves her after a few years of their love-marriage. She reaches Malgudi for searching her elusive husband. Her search fails when TM conceals informations about her husband. She says in depression, “I seem to have lost him forever.” But when TM comes to know the fact that Rann is planning to elope Girija, the granddaughter of the old man at the Town Hall library, he informs Rann's wife about her husband and requests her to take him away. He makes a strategy to get-rid-of Dr.Rann and successfully hands him over to his wife. After six months Rann's wife comes to Malgudi once again and informs TM, “Your friend has vanished once again!” She is once again separated from Rann. The following lines express her utter loneliness:

“If he is here, please give him up again-I agreed to this trip in the hope that he might be here again, although I knew it was a hopeless hope.” (1983.p116)

She becomes restless for Rann's company:

“These few months have been our happiest ones. It seemed a revival of our far-off days in Madras- he managed to convey the same charm and warmth, The joy in each other's company and the sense of fulfillment were complete and indescribable... But also, I could not give him enough time.” (1983.p.117)

This feeling of separation and isolation is also manifested in Girija. She loves Rann deeply and is not ready to accept the unsuspected depths of duplicity in Rann's personality. She says:

“I don't believe you people. You are all against him. He was so good, oh, he was kind and generous and loving. You don't understand him, nobody understands him. Take me to him, wherever he may be, let me know the truth from his own lips, please, please, I beg you.” (1983.p.110)

Apart from these characters and circumstances, TM, the old man at the Town Hall library, and the stationmaster are also the chief sources of presenting the theme of separation and loneliness.

The plot is very much architectonic to the theme of this novel. R.K.Narayan himself writes:

“ I had planned talkative Man as a full length novel, and grandly titled it. “Novel No.14. While it progressed satisfaction enough, it would not grow beyond 116 typewritten sheets, where it just came to a halt, like a motorcar run out of petrol. ...I have told you his story as far as I could confine and observe him as a curio in Kabir Street, but I had to man oeuvre to get him out of Malgudi hurriedly, when I found that he was planning to seduce and abduct a young, innocent schoolgirl known to me. So there we are, and “finis” on page 116 inevitably.” (1983.p.120)

Once a man called Dr.Rann arrives in Malgudi. By his physical features and behaviour, he looks like a foreigner. He claims to be researching a project for the United Nations. As a newcomer he prefers to live in the Railway Waiting Room. He stays there for more than three weeks. Under the pressure of railway authorities Rann has to leave that place. He inveigles TM into taking him to his home on Kabir Street, where he begins an extended visit as a houseguest. As TM possesses a big ancestral house, he permits him, though half-heatedly, to stay there. Of course, he is impressed by Rann’s foreign impressions. He also writes an interesting story featuring the personality and activities of Dr.Rann. She also reveals some shocking facts about Dr.Rann which gives a new turn to the novel.

She reveals to TM that Dr.Rann is mentally frustrated and he is habitual of making illegitimatic relationship with girls and women. Though he does not help her in searching her husband, yet this information is sufficient to alarm TM, about the ill plans of Dr.Rann. He also learns through local gossip that Dr.Ranns is seducing one of Malgudi’s young girls and is planning to elope with her. So, he informs Rann’s wife and hands him over to his erratic and mysterious behaviour of Dr.Rann. The narration, description and the structure of plot are architectonic to the theme and characterization of the novel. The description of events and narration of incidents help us to grasp the theme of separation and loneliness and also in understanding the different shades in the various characters of the novel.

Narayan feels:

“When I am at work on a novel, I imagine that I am keeping a crowd of characters waiting outside my door, who are in search of their author.”(1983.p.121)

The above comment suggests Narayan’s concern about the importance of characterization in his novels. He owes a lot of importance to characterization. He creates characters in accordance with the theme, plot and social atmosphere of his novels. The Financial Expert begins with the description of Margayya’s name so is the case with this novel. TM begins his story by introducing and describing the name of Dr.Rann, the dominant character:

“Dr.Rann was actually, as I discovered later, Rangan, a hardy Indian name which he had trimmed and tailored to Sound foreign, the double at the end was a stroke of pure genius. One would take him to be a German, Rumanian or Hungarian-anything but what he was, a pure Indian from a southernmost village named maniyur.”(1983.p.2)

Dr.Rann is not a typical Narayan character. He, unlike the other heroes of Narayan, is an erratic and elusive person. One may compare him to Ramani of *The Dark Room* or Dr.Pal of *The Financial Expert*.

But this comparison would not be accurate because Dr.Rann is one step ahead of these two characters. He is as Narayan himself describes him in his postscript, “a wanderer, a philanderer on a global scale, abandoning women right and left.” (1983.p.122). Narayan also gives us a beautiful description of his physical features:

“He had blonde hair, a touch of greenish- blue in his eyes, and borderline complexion-unusual for an Indian of these parts.”(1983.p.3)

Dr.Rann pretends that he has come to Malgudi in search of peace so that he can complete his project of United Nations. He is an evil person, more evil, untrue, and unworthy person than Margayya, Ramani or Mali. He is a man of seductive character, who leaves his wife for the sake of his luxury. Wherever he goes, he tries to seduce girls and women. When he comes, Malgudi, he wins the confidence of the local inhabitants and starts seducing one of Malgudi’s young girls. The Description of Rann’s character, and behaviour develops the progression of the story. It is not described separately but it is very much a part of the plot. On the other hand Rann’s character helps in the smooth progression of the plot. This is the architectonic quality about which we are discussing.

Roja is another dominant character in the novel. She is Rann’s wife and is called the large woman. Though she is not as dominant a woman character as Savitri of *The Dark Room*, Susila of *The English Teacher*, Bharti of *Waiting for the Mahatma* and Rosie of *The Guide* yet she finds a significant place in the description, narration and plot of the novel. Had she not arrived at Malgudi, TM would not have got the actual impression of Rann’s personality and past. She alarms TM against the ill-plannings and seductive character of her husband which proves crucial and significant for the inhabitants of Malgudi. Her love story which she narrates so passionately also introduces new dimensions to the development and description of the plot. She saves Malgudi from the western influence by taking Rann with her on the information of TM. She is an active lady. She still loves Rann and tries her best to search her erratic and elusive husband.

TM the narrator of the story of myscheivious Dr.Rann is Narayan himself. As Shakespeare seems to be subjective in one of his last plays *The Tempest* by presenting the shades of his personality in the character of Prospero, so does Narayan seem to be in this novel. He introduces TM not unlike himself, a compulsive engaging recounter:

“They call me TM. Some affectionately shorter it to TM: I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with other is irresistible.”(1983.p.1)

In postscript, he makes this point more clear:

“I had planned *Talkative Man* as a full-length novel, and grandly titled it, “*Novel No.14*”. While it progressed satisfactorily enough, it would not grow beyond 116 type written sheets, where it just came to a halt, like a motor car run out of petrol. TM, the narrator, had nothing more to say. ...I have told you his story as far as I could confine and observe him as a curio in Kabir Street, but I had to manoeuvre to get him out of Malgudi hurriently, when I found that he was planning to seduce and abduct a young, innocent school girl known to me. So, there we are, and “finis” on page 116 inevitably.” (1983.p.120)

Among the minor characters the Station Master who has been serving to the Railway department for thirty years is significant. He is a simple man. He performs his duty well, which includes flagging in and out two passenger trains at wide intervals, the non-stop express, and the goods wagons. Narayan calls him as “a diminutive person”. (1983.p.11) He also describes him as “a contended man, one of the thousands apparently forgotten by the Railway .”<sup>18</sup> He lives a life free from worries or hurry until Dr.Rann alighted from Delhi as passenger. After arriving at Malgudi, Dr.Rann shifts his luggage to the railway waiting room. Soon he makes his permanent stay there which according to the station master is against the rule. He seeks the help of TM in this matter. Had he not, the story would revolve some other way round. Thus plot and character are harmoniously blended to achieve architectonic quality.

The whole novel is wrapped in the local flavour of Malgudi society. Malgudi and society both help plot and character to develop and enrich. The action of this novel is laid down in the different localities of Malgudi among which Kabir Street, Ellaman Street, Market Gate, Town Hall Library, Albert Mission School, New Extension, Kismet Club, Lotus club are significant.

Thus plot, character, Malgudi and society are harmoniously blended to achieve architectonic quality.

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