



R. K. NARAYAN: THE CREATOR OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

We read stories and novels casually as for entertainment, for brooding, for analyzing. We read some works to be chewed and digested. R.K. Narayan's works belong to the last category. They have the academic value, like the works of Dickens, Hardy, Austen, Shaw and Marlowe. He is one among the few Indian writers, whose works have been prescribed in the universities. He enjoys so much of eminence, only because of his lucid and simple style, which at once understood by the reader with no affectations, no sophistications and no out of reach vocabulary.

R.K. Narayan is a writer, pure, simple and realistic, down to earth. His characters, their dwellings, relations, professions, psychologies, beliefs, customs and traditions- spring from the people living around him and with him in a tiny township of Malgudi- an Utopia, created for him, and by himself. All the characters appear in flesh, and blood of Malgudi. Every character, place, the surrounding atmosphere and the situation are real, nothing seems artificial or fictional.

R.K. Narayan's characters seem to achieve a sort of transmigration from body to body, name to name. Swami of Swami and Friends, is also the hero of The Bachelor of Arts, he is presently Krishnan of The English Teacher, the agreeable rascal Sampath of Mr. Sampath, is also Mr. Margayya in The Financial Expert, and later the railway Raju in The Guide, Vasu the taxi-dermist in The Man-eater of Malgudi, and Mali of The Vender of Sweets, the novel- machinist, the disappointed lover of The Bachelor of Arts, turns into a Sadhu for a change; the discharged convict is taken for a Sadhu in The Guide, an amazing change is the truth. Historical Mahatma is taken in 'Waiting for the Mahatma'. Susila of The English Teacher, Brinda of The Financial Expert, and Bharati of Waiting for the Mahatma, are all variations on the themes of Indian girlhood. Shanthabai of The Dark Room, Shanti of Mr. Sampath, and Rosie of The Guide, are also kindred souls. There are no good and no bad characters in R.K. Narayan's novels. R.K. Narayan himself says; **my characters were simple enough to lend themselves for observation;**¹

The striking feature of R.K. Narayan's writings is that nowhere, can we see a pre-planned, organized, well- thought out scheme of plots. Almost all the plots seem to have come casually in his way. His looks fall on an object or a subject and it brings him a story. Of all the things Malgudi is one such. When he started writing for the first time, the opening sentence of Swami and Friends, Malgudi might have not yet taken shape in his scheme of thought. In The Bachelor of Arts, he continues to fill in his picture of Malgudi. He created wonderfully memorable characters in this novel. It is a simple story, charmingly told of the ordinary, everyday incidents in the placid life of a Hindu House holder of Malgudi.

The movement from Swami and Friends to The Bachelor of Arts and from there to The English Teacher, marks a progress from the innocent pleasures of childhood to the youthful fancies of flirtation, and from there to the wisdom of matured adult. The comic note that is seen in Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts, is conspicuously absent in, The English Teacher. The Indian background in this novel is envisaged in terms of the grave and serious Hindu Metaphysics. At first this novel confines itself to the domestic, and later on to metaphysical plane. Hence the boisterous Malgudi life present in all other novels is marked the absent in this novel. **The story of their (Krishnan and Susila) wedded life is a prose lyric ...**²

The Dark Room of R.K. Narayan is a moving story of a tormented wife. Seemingly not a brilliant one, but it has a depth, and philosophical truth to it. It is perhaps the most perceptive of R.K. Narayan's novels. It's a novel dealing with the sorry fate of Indian womanhood, though it suggests no solutions; it clearly brings out R.K. Narayan's concern for the Savithris of our country. The plot is more coherent and well knit, the characterization is perfect and everybody seems perfectly exemplar for the roles assigned to them.

As we move in the chronological order of R.K. Narayan's writings, we notice a clear change of perspective, in his writing. First four novels have been mainly dependent on the structure or the plot; the latter group of novels namely, Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert, The Man-Eater of Malgudi etc., have characters of a different textures. It seems, while R.K. Narayan is particularly careful of the plot in the earlier novels, now his care is concentrated on developing the characters, in their varied complexities. They deal with deeper issues of life- innocence gives place to experience, plainness is replaced by



sophistication. Unlike, *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*, the later novels are not written in the same reminiscent mood- the school, the college, class mates, the headmaster, professors, are left behind and the characters find themselves facing with the grim realities of life. Each successive novel registers, not only advancement in the narrative technique, but also exhibits the writer's increased maturity of vision.

Srinivas in *Mr.Sampath* is deeply involved in printing the magazine, '*The Banner*', neglects his family, and his domestic duties. The result is, there are frequent domestic quarrels, and patching up soon. But, they should continue to live together, their routine humdrum life. There is struggle for life. Such things do not have a place in the earlier novels of R.K.Narayan.

Unlike many of his novels, *The Financial Expert* has a direct message. The greed or the lust for money no doubt is there but it does not make man a monster. Another thing it shows is that money begets money, need for money goes on increasing with every accumulation of it. Man wants to earn more and more as his accumulation grows. It is a circle; one cannot disentangle oneself for it. The novel is about a money-lender- Margayya of Malgudi, his rise and fall, who passes through the vicissitudes of fortune from poverty to opulence, and turns around again, climbing the social ladder, then ultimately to insolvency and complete ruin wrought by his own greed.

As usual, Malgudi is the setting of the novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, as is implied in the title itself. Nataraj, Vasu, Rangi, Sastri, and the forest officer are the characters- the first two being in the main roles. Nataraj runs a printing press with Sastri as the sole staff. He has another companion a poet and journalist Sen. Vasu the taxi-dermist causes destruction and spoils the peaceful, carefree life of Nataraj. In all his actions, he brings down the world around him to his knees. But in spite of all his apparent successes, he remains a solitary, and a mysterious figure. A proper study of his character and his strange relationship with the world reveals the inner depths of his existence.

Of all the novels of R.K.Narayan, *The Guide*, is the most complete and popular novel. We see in the novel, an advancement and ripeness in the characterization and the fullest utility of the circumstantial atmosphere and places. The roles assigned to various characters have also been laid to perfection. Hence it is flawless, drawn with perfect characters. It is the most complex of R.K.Narayan's novels, dealing with the rise and fall of the hero, Raju. His dual personality, as a tourist guide and later as a 'Swami', is revealed in alternate narration. While planning the plot for *The Guide*, R.K.Narayan wrote in his '*My Days*'; **While I was hesitating whether to leave my hero alive or dead at the end of the story, Graham Greene was definite that he should die...**³

Lack of understanding between the father and the son- is the theme of *The Vendor of Sweets*. R.K.Narayan deals in this novel with the perennial struggle between young and old. Mali's character is representative of the present day youth, and Jagan is the representative of the old and the tradition bound father. The clash between the East and the West goes on in this novel.

It was the period of Nation's struggle for Independence, and also intervening period between two world wars. The writers also took upon themselves the responsibility of letting their works reflect the freedom movement. R.K.Narayan picks up writing a novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, taking Gandhi as a character and weaves a story around. In this novel, Gandhi is the central figure and everything is meant for him, everything happens for him and everyone is there for him. The rest of the novel has been the romantic love story of Sriram and Bharati

Of all the works of R.K.Narayan *Grandmother's Tale*, is a wonderful novel, if it is right for us to describe it as a novel at all. R.K.Narayan himself wonders in his 'explanation,' rather foreword as to how much of this tale is history, how much fiction. It's the tale of two youngsters, a young girl of eight, and a boy of ten years, who are joined in wedlock. The girl is Bala, and the boy is, Viswa.

In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, R.K. Narayan attempts a new dimension to inform by combining myth and fable. This form is deeply rooted in the cultural context of India where *The Panchatantra*, *Jataka Tales*, is replete with numerous such examples. He attempts to bring the centuries old religious and philosophical beliefs of his nation, into the orbit of a fictional narration. In this novel, he tries to transform fantasy into a spiritual experience.

R.K. Narayan is story teller. He has more than one hundred and fifty short stories to his credit. Many of his stories deal with innocent children. These stories are peopled with all types of South Indian society- peasants, thieves, clerks, artists, vendors, teachers, professors and persons rich and poor. His characters never indulge in extremities either good or bad.



R.K. Narayan's purpose is to entertain and amuse the readers by telling them an interesting story. As is said already and elaborately R.K. Narayan's art of writing is, only for art's sake. There are no sermons, no preaching, no messages, no exhortations, and no set lines. That is the true art, gushing from the heart and mind and taking the shape of letters. He doesn't postulate any theories nor does he canvas for any 'ism'. He feels. He writes. K.R.S. Iyenger rightly remarks; **Narayan's is the art of resolved and conscious exploration.**

R.K. Narayan's situation can be best appreciated in the context of Graham Greene's singular praise, when he remarks that *R.K. Narayan is the most interesting writer he has come across in English.* Perhaps, it is for the simple reason that *R.K. Narayan's productions have entertained and continue to entertain generations of readers to come, as Falstaff in Shakespeare entertains readers even today in a style that is necessary to entertain the readers.*

References

1. R.K. Narayan; My Days. P.197.
2. K.R.S. Iyenger; Indian Writing in English. P.367.
3. My Days. P. 190-191.