



## **Vision of R.K. Narayan in His Works**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This view rules out the possibility of Narayan supporting the theory of Karma, but at the same time it is not a statement supporting the Epicurean theory of 'carpe diem' or 'seize the day'. Our deeds in this life will have repercussions in this life only, and through the realisation of our follies and delusions comes wisdom. He believes in making our faculties and experiences useful in this life, rather than accumulating them for an after-life. Narayan's view is that wisdom is not gained through meditation, or by spiritual contemplation, but by going through the experiences that life has to offer.

Raju in *The Guide* has an ordinary childhood, an extra-ordinary love affair, a parasitic life which extends to his term in jail. In plain and simple words, Narayan portrays a normal Indian man in different circumstances. I find no similarities between Raju and existential characters such as Mersault in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. What happens to Raju has something in common with what happens to Savitri in *The Dark Room* when she tries to commit suicide after being driven out by her husband, to the headmaster in *The English Teacher* when he does not die on the day an astrologer predicted that he would, to Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* when his son Mali violates all his notions of life, and to Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* when he renounces everything and becomes a sanyasi. They all die a death, but this death is not an end but the starting point of a new life. As Narayan says about Chandran when he becomes a sanyasi because he couldn't marry a young girl called Malathi:

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KEYWORDS:- FINANCE- SEXUAL ABUSE- INNOCENCE- RURAL LIFE

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### **INTRODUCTION**

R. K. Narayan has deservedly come to be regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. He has endeared himself to millions of readers throughout the world, because of his impassioned blend of profound and comic vision. He has an uncanny capacity for empathizing with the common masses in a realistic manner. His art of storytelling enabled him to carry the tradition of great writers to new heights. He not only interpreted the soul of India, the real India of the villages to the West, but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers, the religious, moral and spiritual heritage of India. Though he makes no overt attempt to include religion, yet the religious factor does get interwoven in his novels, as it is a part of life in India. What gives Narayan, a distinctive place in the Postcolonial Indian English Literature, is the great importance he attaches to his vocation as a writer. Rashipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was one of those creative writers who made a living out of their creative writing. He struggled very hard to establish himself as a man of letters. R. K. Narayan born in 1906 in Madras is a well known novelist of the twentieth century India. He made his first appearance on the literary horizon with the publication of *Swami and Friends* (1935) and has fifteen novels to his credit. He is an eminent writer whose creative vision has attracted diverse criticism. Critics of eminent stature like William Walsh, C. D. Narasimhaiah, P. S. Sundaram, Meenakshi Mukherjee, S. C. Harrex and many others have analyzed his writings with a deep penetrating insight. Geoffrey Kain writes: 'With the death of R. K. Narayan in May of 2001, India lost perhaps its most prominent literary figure. Narayan had more staying power and offered a more consistent, prolific output over more years than any of the other internationally acclaimed Indian writers of fiction in English. . . . Narayan is often discussed as one of the three principle trailblazing Indian novelists writing in English for an International audience who emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, but only Narayan has proven so persistently present as a writer over the decades

Next three novels, *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), and *The Guide* (1958) appeared in 1950s which are markedly different from his earlier novels. The publication of *The Guide* proved a landmark for Narayan after which he had received an outstanding recognition not only in India but abroad. The novel won him Sahitya Academy award in 1961. The 1960s produced two more exceptional novels, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961) and *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967). 1964 saw Narayan's another remarkable contribution *Gods, Demons and Others*, a tribute to Indian myths and legends. Narayan continued his spiritual writings in the next decade with the depictions of *The Ramayana* in 1972 and *The Mahabharata* in 1978. In 1976 another novel came with the title *The Painter of Signs* which explores the predicaments of a female activist in a patriarchal and man-dominated society. His twelfth novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), an anthropomorphic tale, is another excellent gift to Indian spiritual odyssey, which reveals his interest in animal behavior and psychology also. His two short story collections, *Malgudi Days* (1982) and *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories* (1985) appear in 1980s. The ninth decade of his career saw the publication of three novels: *Talkative Man* (1986), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993), out of which the last one is the only Narayan novel in the whole oeuvre of his writings without a Malgudi setting. Some sketches and essays entitled *Table Talk* also appeared in this decade.

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## CONCEPT OF NARRATOLOGY IN HIS WORKS

Narayan produced in the succeeding decades seven more novels—The Man Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), Talkative Man (1986), The World of Nagaraj (1990) and The Grandmother's Tale (1993). In the later phase of his writings, realism is almost abandoned. Instead there is a wholesale transportation of mythical, legendary and supernatural elements. His novel A Tiger for Malgudi shifts us rather unobtrusively into higher regions of metaphysical enquiry, search of the self, the theory of Karma and the 35 cycle of life and rebirth. In the novel Narayan's Indian sensibility is linked with the age old allegorical and mythical tales. It is written from the first person point of view. He has used the flashback technique. The end of the novel forms its beginning. In his later novels, Narayan is at the full maturity of his literary powers. Although the total number of novels written by Narayan is fifteen; and since the study is the illustration of technique in different phases, I would like to examine and explicate the six of his major novels— two novels each from the three phases: Swami and Friends (1935) and The Dark Room (1938), The Financial Expert (1952) and The Guide (1958), The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961) and A Tiger for Malgudi (1983) respectively.

R. K. Narayan's first novel Swami and Friends (1935) and the third novel The Dark Room (1938), and illustrate Narayan's literary skills in the beginning of his career. This critical examination will reveal the origin of Narayan's distinguished style of narrative and portraiture. The study places first three novels in the early phase, which includes novels written from 1935 to 1939. Swami and Friends is the first novel written by the author, set in pre-independent India, in the fictional town Malgudi, which needs no introduction to the scholars of English literature because of its wide recognition and popularity. Narayan narrates in his memoir My Days, the circumstances in which his first novel was published. He narrates how at first the novel was rejected by publisher after publisher in India and abroad, and was eventually available to the public in 1935 through the recommendations of Graham Greene who hailed it as a book in ten thousand\*. Greene wrote enthusiastically of Swami and Friends that it —brought India . . . in the sense of the Indian Population and the Indian way of life, alive to me Swami is the story of a child written with complete objectivity, with a humor strange to our fiction, closer to Chekhov than to any English writer with the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness (Introduction vii). Compton Mackenzie declared that he had —never read any other book about India in the least like it! (qtd. in Sundaram 27). Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah writes, —Re-reading this novel of a school boy's life after twenty years—I was surprised to find myself endorsing fully the reviewers' first flush of enthusiasm for a novel by an entirely unknown quantity from colonial India Thus a new era in Indian English literature begins with Narayan as a new emerging writer on a literary scene. Radhika Menon, Managing Editor of Tulika Publishers, devoted to Children's publications classifies Children's literature to various categories: —socially conscious (with —didactic function), —melting pot (focusing on —the universal ignoring sub cultural differences) and —culturally relevant (—presenting realistic images) and then —there is a fourth category: books written not specifically for children but which would be enjoyed by them . . . The works of writers such as Sukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray, Rabindranath Tagore, R. K. Narayan, Ashokamitra, Basheer (in regional languages), Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Ruskin Bond talk to readers young and old at different levels, in different voices (qtd. in Desai 30). R. K. Narayan's Swami and Friends belong to the fourth category, which make it available to children, but primarily meant for adult readers as his other novels (Desai 30). Swami and Friends is R. K. Narayan's first novel published in 1935 set in pre independence days in India. It is the story of a 10 yrs old school boy growing up during this particular time. He is a student at Albert Mission School, a school established by the British. The novel reflects how the British rule affected India socially and politically. And the society is in dilemma whether to adopt the western culture or not. On one side the patriotism running in an Indian blood whips up the protagonist to revolt against the British rule but at the same time he is attracted towards the appurtenances of power . R. K. Narayan, who himself looks at the society as an insider, has given this novel an omniscient third person narrator that not only knows what is happening outside but also knows what the characters are thinking or feeling at a particular point of time. This study attempts to show how the third person narration helps in an objective presentation of the colonial administration.

Thus it is clear from the above analysis of the two novels that though the macrostructure of the narratives seems to be following linear chronology yet going deep into the structure of the narratives, these are found punctuated with anachronism, memory, ellipsis and frequency. Almost every sequence in the narratives changes its pace and rhythm with mimetic and dietetic mode of narration. Since these seemingly linear narratives observe various analyses, move between outer and inner space, deal with the domain of memory, these cannot be called classical linear narratives. Rather these may be termed as realist narratives because of the emphasis on descriptively, plausibility, reliability and probability as Bohumil Fort in his essay Realist Narratives as Meeting Places for the Sciences, Humanities – and People! says that —The most frequent qualities commonly associated with the term realist narrative are objectivity, descriptively, plausibility, probability The early phase is also an effort to give voice to marginal section of society where sufficient time and space is given to female characters by using the techniques of point of view and polyphony as narrative strategies.

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## CONCLUSION

Narayan's later novels use the tradition of Indian storytelling more than his early novels. The nature of storytelling in his middle and later narratives is derived from ancient Indian sources which use embedded narrative structures. The Guide uses extra and intradiegetic narratives, while A Tiger for Malgudi uses an inclusive form of exteriorization, similar to those of Panchatantra and the Mahabharata, which makes room for hypodiegetic narratives telling many stories within the frame of one story modelled on epics. Following the oral storytelling tradition, the narrator in The Guide retells various mythological stories, whereas his later novels The Man Eater of Malgudi and A Tiger for Malgudi make use of Hindu myth as a structural device and not as mere retelling the stories. Thus Narayan though using ancient Indian storytelling tradition in his narratives, these differ from each other in their techniques. Narayan, like any other novelist preoccupied with the significance of place in fiction, knows all about the district of Malgudi that he paints in his writings. Life in Malgudi is woven around age-old traditions and modernization. The city is still dominated by old cultural values but the new civilization also starts emerging through the markets, co-operative banks, schools and colleges. The silent and peaceful city is now 236 marked by

increasing crowds' noise and bustle on the roads and the marketplace. With the advent of this new civilization, the place is befouled by the open gutter which symbolizes the domination of foul and filthy values on the traditional life of high values. The people of this fast-changing town are greatly affected by modern capitalist norms. The culture of money has so much a tight grip over them that they do not hesitate in making money over unclaimed dead bodies. Narayan in his entire oeuvre does not show any political commitment. Rather he takes up the cause of the struggling masses in their relation with other men, projected various rhythms of human life in his distinct style. The presence of a superior force is always a part of his vision. Things generally happen as per a predestined order that permits to struggle hard to achieve one's goal but ultimately determines the result. He is not interested in protecting his self-individuated voice. Multiplicity of voices is another hallmark of Narayan's craftsmanship. The narrative situation in his early novels is markedly different from his middle and later novels. He is not a reactionary essentialist who rejects all the western strategies of narrativity. As a conscious craftsman, Narayan deploys the role of narrator in various ways. He enters into the dramatic relationship with the reader and cocktails the European narrative traditions with the Indian oral narrative traditions. He as a subtler artist controls the narrative movement in such a way as not to disturb the aesthetic poise which is the hallmark of a true work of art. The Guide is a perfect example of his conscious craftsmanship. Instead of making his novels deliberately monologic, Narayan wrestles to make them polyphonic. He employs an array of techniques and strategies both from Western and oral traditions. He is a syncretism artist who is trying to narrate Indian experience through both Eastern and Western canonical 237 techniques. In consonance with his modernist ideology, Narayan also maintains authorial reticence that he does not project his vision and ideology directly and explicitly. He projects his vision through the voices of his characters. He maintains not only an ironic distance from the character but also in the end he upholds no vision. Instead of simply dominating the worldview, there is a preference for plurality of ideological positions. For instance, the entry of Master's wife just before the eight pages of the ending of the narrative in *A Tiger for Malgudi* opens up another debate of desirability of 'Sanyas' at the cost of one's family life. In this way Narayan imparts polyphony and heteroglossia to his novels. As such there are neither propagandist tones nor didactic tones for the reader. Thus it is quite evident that extensive experimentation has been done by R. K. Narayan, and the form has witnessed a variety of significant structural changes in the hands of Narayan. In the beginning, the narrator with God like omniscience played upon the reader and directed the readers' responses. In fact, the entire action of the novel was presented through the eyes of a narrator. Due to the authority and centrality of the narrator, the structure of the novel in early phase was well maintained. There was a strong element of story. The narrator holds to preserve the organic quality of the work. The immediate effect of this is to limit the readers' freedom of interpretation. But under the influence of twentieth century theoreticians, many technical developments have been employed by the author to extend the freedom of the reader. One major trend that marginalized the narrator used by Narayan is the multiplication of the narrator and focalizer. Another method adopted by Narayan is the stream of consciousness where the scene is in part 'interior monologue'. This marginalization of the authorial voice has had a significant impact on the form of Narayan's narratives. The effacement of the narrator 238 added dramatic element and his relativistic fragmentation added irony and ambiguity in the novels of Narayan. And the outcome of all these technical developments in Narayan's works gained a baffling complexity of form and structure. This is quite clear in his middle and later novels which have already been discussed in the foregoing chapters. For Narayan, then technique is not an end in itself but a means whereby he seeks a deeper and a more profound knowledge and presentation of his characters. Narayan is thus an organic writer, the elements and constituents of his art cannot be studied in isolation. His work has to be seen as a whole, as emerging from his profound and comic vision of human life

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