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English Literature

LITERARY WORLD OF R.K.NARAYAN: A BRIEF SURVEY

KEY WORDS: Storytelling, Reality, Locale, Live Characters

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ABSTRACT

R. K. Narayan is an inseparable genius among the pioneer writers of the twentieth century Indian English Fiction. The trinity included; Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Narayan is well-known as the perfect master in story narration. The imaginative locale, Malgudi is just like a leading hero of his fiction. His varied and extensive writings which are the outcome of real, rich experiences have almost attempted all the aspects of life. The vast gallery of Copious Characters, vivid and true to life enriches his literary contribution. Though he has depicted reality in real rhythm, he himself has remained untouched and detached, just holding the mirror up to the nature. He never tried to impose his own philosophy or preaching. This paper is the modest attempt to survey Narayan's Fiction in brief along with his noble literary qualities.



INTRODUCTION

The most significant event in the history of Indian English fiction in the nineteen thirties was the appearance on the scene of its major trio: **Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan** and **Raja Rao**, whose first novels were published in 1935, 1935, and 1938 respectively; and it is a mark of their stature that they revealed, each in his own characteristic way the various possibilities of Indian English fiction.¹

R. K. Narayan (Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayanswami Iyer, 1906-2001) belongs to the age of Indian Freedom Struggle of 20th century. The three bright stars, luminaries of Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao started writing their fiction, largely in this period of great ferment and excitement. Some of their early works truly reflect the conditions and the problems that characterize the early decades of the twentieth Century India and her people. All of them voiced the emotion of their age in their fiction directly or indirectly.

In the novels of R. K. Narayan, one can find the true representation of Contemporary Indian Life, Traditions and Culture in its vivid and realistic form. The Social realism is extensively and minutely described. Narayan is a pure story teller, an artist who portrays reality in its real rare rhythm. Social customs and reality are vividly described with unbiased objectivity and complete detached observation.

FICTION

The Major Novels of R. K. Narayan:

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|------------------------------|--------|
| 01. Swami and Friends | (1935) |
| 02. The Bachelor of Arts | (1936) |
| 03. The Dark Room | (1938) |
| 04. The English Teacher | (1945) |
| 05. Mr. Sampath | (1949) |
| 06. The Financial Expert | (1952) |
| 07. Waiting for the Mahatma | (1955) |
| 08. The Guide | (1958) |
| 09. The Man Eater of Malgudi | (1962) |
| 10. The Vendor of Sweets | (1967) |
| 11. The Painter of Sign | (1976) |
| 12. A Tiger for Malgudi | (1977) |
| 13. Talkative Man | (1986) |
| 14. The World of Nagaraj | (1990) |
| 15. Grand Mother's Tale | (1992) |

R. K. Narayan is a very different writer from Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan is one of the few Indian English writers of the earlier generation, or even any generation, who has been a full time writer. All his works have Malgudi as their setting, and he

polishes and carves this one inch of ivory to perfection. His is the middle class world of the small town - modernity has impinged on this society but not whole sale westernization. In his novels written before Independence, Narayan develops and fixes the ingredients of his recipe for his successful fiction. **Swami and Friends (1935)** is a delightful tale about the escapades of a schoolboy. **The Bachelor of Arts (1936)** is about the goings on in the life of a bachelor, Chandran, who rebelling against the idea of an arranged marriage even becomes a Sanyasi for some time. He, of course, returns to a traditional arranged marriage! **The Dark Room (1938)** is Narayan's attempt at something different - a story about the suffering and abortive rebellion of a housewife. Narayan never attempted such serious fiction again though **The English Teacher (1945)**, which was written after the tragic death of his wife, is a poignant novel about loss and reconciliation. This novel explores the world of the supernatural, again a subject that Narayan does not deal with seriously ever again. This understandably was his last novel before Independence.

R. K. Narayan achieved greater fame and fortune after Independence. He started off with **Mr. Sampath (1949)**, a novel about the world of films, and then wrote **The Financial Expert (1952)**, **Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)**, **The Guide (1958)**, **The Man Eater of Malgudi (1962)**, **The Vendor of Sweets (1967)**, **The Painter of Signs (1976)**, **A Tiger for Malgudi (1977)**, and **The Talkative Man (1986)**, **The World of Nagaraj (1990)**, and **The Grandmother's Tale (1993)**. Critics feel that Narayan was at the height of his powers from **The Financial Expert** till the **Vendor of Sweets**. Narayan is a delightful comic writer who studies middle class small town's South Indian mores, **The Guide (1958)**, which won the Sahitya Academy Award, is perhaps his most famous book and did very well in a movie version.

In short he wrote Fifteen Novels, Five Volumes of Short-Stories, a number of Travelogues and Collection of Non-fiction, English Translation of Indian Epics, and the Memoirs *My Days*.

MALGUDI-THE FICTIONAL TOWN

Malgudi is a fictional town imaged in the mind of R. K. Narayan, where his literary works take origin. It's like a landscape as alive and active as a personified character. The fictitious region is woven in such a smooth thread that it creates a fine fabric of inseparable part of Narayan's realistic art. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'Border Countries' of Sir Walter Scott, 'Lake District' of Wordsworth, 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy or 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. It was a town created from Narayan's own experiences, his childhood,

and his upbringing. The people in it were people he met every day. He thus created a place which every Indian could relate to. A place, where, you could go "into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us, we know, with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open the door to yet another human existence.

VIVID CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL REALITY

India has inherited a great legacy of her culture from ancient time. Civilization has constantly been passing through its sophisticated form. India has also kept her age old prevailing tradition in the society with some modification. India is such a country where Festival, cultural events, protocols of civilization, Religious occasions, National Day Celebration Programme and Traditional Rituals always take place. They are the inseparable parts of our society. They basically aimed to unite people with the feeling of togetherness, to make people enjoy life very closely with harmonious mutual understanding. But in course of time deformities, ugliness and evils of society have spoiled them. In the fiction of R. K. Narayan, one can undoubtedly find the representation of cultural incidence, patterns of civilization and traditional values but the uniqueness of Narayan is the faithful, real depiction of contemporary society, without any criticism, satire or comments. So in his literature we can visualize the contemporary society as it was with virtues and vices. Social customs and reality are vividly described with unbiased objectivity and complete detached observation.

R. K. Narayan is a man of moral consciousness. He points out that commercial instinct ruins the morals of man. But On the whole, Narayan remains a pure artist. He is for the social integration and order. As an artist he has dissected the social motives successfully with the help of realistic characterization. So he does it with help of his characters. Narayan's novels are the expression of various problems of middle class society in which he has been all involved. The balance between his characters and society is well maintained.

REAL CHARACTERS

All the characters in R. K. Narayan's novels are live creation of artistic presentation. They are not heroes or heroines or of aristocrat or noble class but they belong to common lot of middle class. Their actions are obvious but they are puppet in the hands of God or Nature. They seem to perform their duties as an active agent who are put up into limelight or highlighted to some particular predicament in order to create normalcy. My effort in this research work is to show the gradual development of all the major characters of Narayan's novels in respect to their struggle, conflict, confrontation and adjustment or reconciliation at the end.

In fact, the success of R. K. Narayan lies in attributing universality to his common place characters. The non-heroes finally evolve into heroes. This is done with the artistic impersonality and distinct objectivity. There is no didacticism, no philosophy, no propaganda involved in their creation. They are drawn with extra-ordinary delicacy and tenderness, admirable integrity and intelligence. The novelists does not control and govern them but lets them be free. The viewpoints expressed by them are the logical outcome of their personality. What is remarkable is that Narayan's characters remain committed to the search of true meaning in life.²

CONCLUSION

The artistic excellence of R. K. Narayan is incomparable. His easy way of storytelling, his understanding of psychological behaviour of human beings, his realistic approach towards the art of characterization, his smooth plot making and above all, his use of stylist language make him the novelist of unique genius. Narayan does not use the medium of novels for any purpose other than giving artistic pleasure to his readers. He

is an artist novelist, pure and simple. He has created a very large variety of characters that will continue to delight the heart of his readers for a long time to come.

Narayan is noted well for his objectivity and detachment. He is free from desire to preach, to advise and to convert the contemporary society. His plots are built of material and incidents that are neither extraordinary nor heroic. The tone of his novels is quiet and subdued. He is a writer of social novels written in a comic vein. Light in their approach to life, these novels do not claim to stir deep human emotions or to reach tragic heights as the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao do. Narayan's novels keep a uniform quite tone. His backgrounds are absolutely realistic, almost philosophical in their realism.

The Secret of R. K. Narayan's great success and high distinction, on the other hand, lies in the complete aesthetic satisfaction he provides to his readers. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' points of view, maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality.³

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