

Research Papers



R.K. Narayan : A Typical Craftsman

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Abstract

As we know that R.K. Narayan created an imaginary place Malgudi in his works. And most of the novels and stories take place in this venue. Narayan depicted the Indian society scenario through his works on the land of Malgudi. Narayan's craftsmanship lies not only in the conventional life of Malgudi but also in the leaving attention he devotes to building up a real picture of Malgudi and its inhabitants. Malgudi is his greatest Character with its Mempi Hills, tiger haunted jungles, Natraj Printing shop, Jagan's sweet emporium, Johansian Character's like Mr. Sampath and Natraj. Narayan finds plenty of comedy in the normal life of Malgudi. His attitude towards Malgudi remains lovingly sympathetic. He loves to depict the traditional life of Malgudi with all its backwardness gentle-teasing and deep understanding.

R.K. Narayan is much aware in his depiction of distinguish characters. His outlook is basically comic. It is comic in a broad sense, which enables him to weave all the bizarre events into a beautiful vision of life, in which every small event, every small acquaintance, however insignificant and absurd, it might seem, turns to out to have a meaningful role in the eternal scheme of things.

Narayan's vision is shaped by a strong Indian sensibility and he holds the key position to the Indian soul. His characters embody the Indian psyche with all its accompanying hopes and anxieties, born of a deep rooted belief in fatalism. He has tried to bridge the gulf between the two. As Mulk Raj Anand rightly remarked in his book old myths and New Myths recital vs. novel: "R.K. Narayan is meticulous craftsman. He interprets the mood of his characters. He determines the pattern without overt intervention and thus he achieves organic composition as on canvas comparison and contracts bring out the internal crisis of the human

personality.

From the study of R.K. Naryan's novels we form an idea of the author as a shy and highly sensitive person but it remains to be verified from his personal contact. His mother tongue was Tamil. He had settled down in Mysore where the regional language is Kannada and he wrote in English. His locale was invariably 'Malgudi' an imaginary town, in the Taluk in which he was born and brought up. In some respect he follows the footprints of Henry James. His concern is not the fate of the community and even of an individual but the change that a contact with the world brings about in the character of the individual. Therefore, the subject matter is confined only to life and activities of the middle class people of the country, but in the later novels a greater depth is attained.

As a writer of social novels, Narayan had a light approach to life, and as such he stirs no deep human emotions. He is generally realistic and photographic. The details are accurate but there is

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also an explanation of the souls of his characters, who mainly consist of college boys' teachers, schoolmasters, merchants, municipal members, tourists and taxi-drivers-most of them from lower middle and poor classes of Malgudi. His perception of the conflict between the present and the past is more detached and impersonal than that in most other novelists. He has tried to bridge the gulf between the two Mulk Raj Anand rightly remarks:

"R.K. Narayan is meticulous craftsman. He interprets the mood of his characters. He determines the pattern without overt intervention. And thus he achieves organic composition as on canvas where comparisons and contrasts bring out the internal crisis of the human personality."

For the study of craftsmanship of R. K. Narayan we must discuss about his art of characterization. Now his typical art is as follows:

Realistic Characterization

Narayan portrays his characters realistically. He also gives details of their traits, manners, habits and dress. He also gives their background. Narayan always grasps the psychological essential which gives his characters their reality. Mr. Sampath may not be as full of life as Mr. Pickwick or Mr. Micawber, but we understand him. We know his psychological make-up and we know just how he will behave and why. This psychological grip enables Narayan to draw complex character better. A character like Raju or Sampath is full of complexities. He is not only a sinner, he is also a saint. If he can cheat, he has his moments of generosity too.

Neither Saints nor Sinners

In Narayan's novels we do not have pure villains and pure saints. We have an alloy of good and bad in his major characters. Mr. Sampath and Margayya and Raju and Rosie all have their weaknesses as well as virtues. In fact they are more sinned against than sinning. This is another proof of his realistic characterization, for in life we have neither purely good nor entirely bad people.

Rustic Characters

Narayan's rustic characters too are as good and significant as the rustic characters of Hardy. His minor characters play an important role in the novel. For example, without Velan of Mangla village it could have been impossible to develop the action of the novel in the existing manner.

Characterization in 'The Guide'

The characterization in The Guide is of a simple form. It lacks subtly. The novelist tries to unfold the nature of his characters through their acts and speeches. Rosie is a round character; she

changes. Raju changes only in form but not in essence. Narayan does not portray three dimensional characters in The Guide; all his characters are two-dimensional (Rosie) or one-dimensional. All the characters in the novel have their flaws. Marco and Rosie suffer from maladjustment; Raju is greedy and dishonest; his mother and maternal uncle are tradition bound; Velan is superstitious; Gaffur and Joseph are dry and wooden. But the novelist does not pass his judgment on his characters. Like an ideal artist he lets them act in the fitness of their individual virtue or evil. Women characters are very few, but the character of Rosie has been portrayed in detail. She is a tragic character.

The concept of the Hero

The hero of the novel, that is Raju, fulfils Aristotelian expectations. He is prominent, not by virtue of his being prominent person, but from the point of view of his significant presence in the novel. He never leaves the stage, and many dramatic things happen to him. He grows in economic stature; he has foible responsibility for his tragedy; the social climate goes against him. But at the same time is a it different hero from the one conceived by Aristotle. He is not of high birth; he is not of royal blood. This is because of Narayan's modern outlook. He believes that a hero should belong to the common strata of society. Like Dickens's heroes, the heroes of Narayan are also common people. Narayan here is like other Indo-Anglian writers of novels who regard the common man as the hero of their work. Narayan's heroes rise from the average to the extraordinary status.

The Concept of the Heroine

The heroine in The Guide is also typically Indian. She is dominated by the hero both emotionally and economically. She is unlike Becky Sharp of Thackeray's Vanity Fair or the heroine of Defoe's Moll Flanders. Most of heroines shine in the pages of fiction because of their sexual role or appeal. But Rosie is of a different ilk. She indulges in sex momentarily; but later on she devotes her life for the sake of art and culture. She is a typical Indian woman who is dominated by man both emotionally and financially.

Absence of Traditional Villains

Similarly the traditional villain in the novel is absent. The hero himself commits certain act of villainy, but he is open to correction or penance.

Objective Characterization

Narayan's characters are not only real, they are also objective. Narayan tries to keep them as much free from autobiographical touches as

possible. Precision and not abundance is Narayan's keynote of characterization. He gives only a few details of his characters. His characters are not mere types; they are individuals to a degree. He knows their foibles and social set-up. His characters move in the local atmosphere of Malgudi. He develops his characters very well.

Narayan excels as "an artful delineator of character." He says, "My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me." And what a richly varied portrait-gallery he has created over the years – students, teachers, parents, grand parents half-hearted dreamers, journalists, artists, financiers, speculators, film-makers, adventurers, eccentric, cranks, movie stars, sanyasis, and women – pious and suffering, coquettish and seductive. It is a veritable world of men and women, both real and exotic, brought to life with uncommon dexterity, "His eye and ear are almost flawless" – an eye for visual detail and an ear for how they speak.

"His most memorable character-creations," says Shiv K. Gilra, "are his great comic eccentrics, Sampath, Raju, Margayya and Jagan. They are ordinary men caught in a web of illusions – money, success, love and happiness, each one of them working out his personal salvation in his own characteristic way. These protagonists are individuals as well as 'universals' in their human aspiration, follies, foibles and ultimate resolutions. It is in such character-studies that Narayan reveals a penetrating human insight." However, generally, his reticence comes in the way of the plumbing of the depths. "Not only does Narayan not enter his characters, he is very reticent even in talking about them." (K.R. Srinivas Iyengar). As a result most of his 'unheroic' heroes like Sinivas, Sriram, Natraj and Raman live but do not grow."

His minor characters that people the world of Malgudi are almost as ageless as its familiar landmarks. They are fine cameos and, together, make a delightful bunch. They are mostly flat caricatures but very human, amusing in their idiosyncrasies and oddities. They impart colour and variety to the scene as well as suggest its continuity and permanence.

R.K. Naryan has not only attracted a large number of readers, writers and reviewers but has also received critical acclaim from Indian and foreign critics. He has received excellent response from E. M. Forster, Graham Greene, William Walsh, and Mc Catchion. Most of the universities in India have provided for the study of Narayan at the graduate and postgraduate levels. He has been

drawing the attention of the research scholars on different aspects of his novels.