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PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECT NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN- A CRITICAL APPROACH

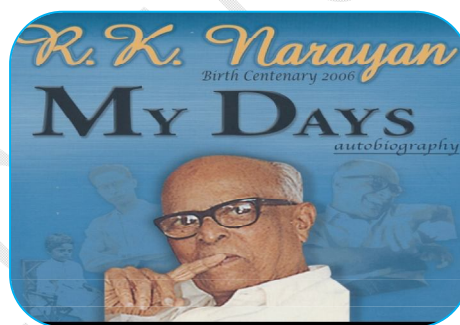
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ABSTRACT:

The true turning point in Indian English Novel occurred by the emergence of the 'Big Three' – Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan. These writers elevated Indian English novel to a very significant height. These contemporaries have adopted different creative sensibilities to represent India and Indians in their novels. Though the theme is common in some of their novels, the manner they have chosen to deal with it is varied from one another. They strengthened the foundation of Indian English novel with their creative outputs both in quantity and quality.



KEYWORDS: Indian English Novel , strengthened, arithmetic, mythology.

INTRODUCTION

Narayan was born on 10 October, 1906 in Madras which is now named Chennai. He was the third of eight surviving children. His grandmother called him Kunjappa (the little one). His grandmother was his first teacher. She taught him arithmetic, mythology, multiplication tables, the Tamil alphabet, Sanskrit slokas in praise of Goddess Saraswati and songs of classical melodies. He was allowed to have his dinner only after he had finished learning. In *My Days*, her strictness and passion is conveyed as follows, "Grandmotherhood was a

wrong vocation for her; she ought to have been a school inspectress".(Narayan, 11) Not only was she 'a key figure' in the Narayan household, but also she became an epitome of all the grandmothers in the novels of Narayan. She is clearly the original of those robust, dry, temperamental old ladies who flourish in Narayan's fiction. She was the person who laid the deepest influence on his life. Narayan's first novel was published in 1953 in the USA and his novels were published subsequently in the USA. He was appointed by the Government of Karnataka to write for the promotion of Tourism in

Karnataka. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha for his contribution to literature. He has spent the entire tenure of six years for the cause of school children. He fell ill and breathed his last on 13 May 2001. His demise was mourned by the lovers of novel all over the world. Narayan's writings rests on certain characteristic assumptions, which are basic to his world view and to his artistic practice. In his writings we find the concept of a stable universe underlying all human actions and evolutions. Indian English fiction is written in a language which is not the mother tongue of many Indian writers. It is also a fact

that the novels are not in their mother-tongue about whom they are written. The description of various aspects of Indian life through a language which is not of Indian origin, is quite difficult. Narayan has attracted a large number of readers, writers and reviewers. As a writer of social novels, he has a light approach of life. He is generally realistic and photographic. His perception of the conflict between the present and the past is more detached and impersonal. He has received excellent response from E.M. Forster, Graham Green and William Walsh. In this connection M.K. Naik comment is worth quoting, "Narayan's is the art of quiet surfacing and self-landing, not of headlong diving or vertiginous take off. His characters are entrapped in, and discomfited by a variety of illusions, self-deception; and miscalculations and mischance. They are made to have strange assignations with a circumstantial world which is full of ambiguities and ironies."(Naik, 34)

An objective analysis of Narayan's characters reveals a definite journey of the self from innocence to experience and finally to wisdom. His moral instance makes his characters discard their jaundiced visions and realize the reality of things. Through frequent rise and fall, they move until their experiences culminate in wisdom. After many adventures and misadventures in life the characters return to the all pervasive reality of Malgudi. In all the works of literature, we find that author makes an attempt to fight against the process of dehumanization and he attempts to assert humanness. It is, in fact, unending search for identity which is going on from time immemorial and still continues. Like everyone else, a writer is interlinked with his world and he ought to have meaningful relationship with the world his writings belong to.

The basic theme of his novels is the place of man and his predicament in this universe. Narayan himself has remarked in an article that "The mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of Psychological factors, are the necessary ingredients in fiction." He wants to suggest that life is illogical' and man is always trying to translate his fantasies into reality. So, through the reversal of fortune, Narayan completes the story of man's rise and fall and thus presents a complete view of life, Narayan is realistic, but his realism is different from the surface realism of the French Naturalists. He does not see the ugly side of reality. Extreme crudities, names sex descriptions and cruelties are ignored by him. He portrays the seamy side of reality. His situations and characters are realistic, and so is his language and style. The life which he describes is put before us with a wealth of detail and accuracy.

The heroines of Narayan's novels are flimsy. He has himself revealed this fact in his interview with Onlooker: 'Why was it he had no heroines but heroes in his novels?' Narayan corrected Onlooker: 'I have no heroes, only non-heroes and of course no heroines'. It is because he finds women determined, patient and self controlled. Their life is controlled by set of rules and regulations and they are basically clearheaded, at least in the small town world of his novels and short stories. Men have an inclination to fumble and become not reliable as Narayan could observe through his insight in human beings and they are usually uncertain. He found women more stereotyped than men. However some heroines are very impressive and enchanting. He has depicted contrast characters. One who is traditional and deep rooted in Hindu culture appears in his early novels - Swami's mother and Grandmother (Granny) are tradition-abiding, self-complacent, habitually very obedient, cooperative, traditionalist and passive women. Chandran's mother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, Savitri and Janamma in *The Dark Room*, Srinivas's wife and Sampath's wife in *Mr. Sampath*, Margayya's wife in *The Financial Expert*, Raju's mother in *The Guide*, Nataraj's wife in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Jagan's wife in *The Vendor of Sweets*, Sriram's Granny in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the ascetic's wife in *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Raman's old aunt and the Bank Accountant's wife in *The Painter of Signs*, Nagaraj's wife Sita and his mother in *The World of Nagaraj*, Grandmother in *Grandmother's Tale*. All these female characters are designed as the bodyguard of 'Custom and Reason' who judge what is morally right or wrong. In such a traditional-bound in which the character is placed, the middle class concept of women as second to man holds sway. Hence woman is condemned to the everlasting slavery of domestic boring task, suffering and breeding of children, dedication dutifulness towards her husband who delight in the unchallengeable command and rule over her as one does in case of one's household commodities. They are nothing more than a shadow of their male counterpart. The slightest contravention of the accepted social principle of honesty and

decency creates a number of problems to them whereas man enjoys a relatively free life not restricted by anyone. Their conduct and behaviour are free from boundations. Women as wives, mothers, aunts and grannies largely portrayed the passive feminine. They are mostly not named, known by their family relationships.

The other class of Narayan's memorable women characters are Shanta Bai of *The Dark Room*, Shanti of *Mr. Sampath*, Bharti of *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Rosie of *The Guide*, Rangi of *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Grace of *The Vendor of Sweets*, Daisy of *The Painter of Signs*, Roja of the *Talkative Man*. This class of the female characters is also present in almost all the novels of Narayan including the latest one *Grand Mother's Tale*. In contrast to traditional characters, the modern set of female characters of R.K. Narayan's novels are known by their relationship with men. Such relationship is subtle and varied. These women are further known by the characteristic of modern civilization which cling to them as dangerous endowments. They simultaneously electrify their environments by the enthusiasm and desires they show for life and independence. The hypnotism of modernity outweighs their insert desire to follow tradition. In the early novels the character of women are depicted just as they were in the pre-independence era. Alteration and disagreement of tradition and modernism is visible in the novels of the middle phase. In his later novels modernism has finally enslaved Malgudi and its people shaken the roots of tradition. The alteration of Narayan's women from Savitri of *The Dark Room* to Daisy of *The Painter of Signs* 'fortifies foregoing' statements. And one of the most important characters is Malgudi that has perpetuated in all the novels and short stories so far. Professor K.R.S. Iyengar correctly suggests that it would be - interesting to advance the theory that Malgudi is the real hero of the novels and the many short stories, that underneath the seeming change and the human drama there is something - the 'soul' of the place? - that defies or embraces, all change and is triumphantly and unalterably itself." (Iyengar, 363) Apart from these chief characters, there are equally a variety of minor characters in Narayan's novels. It is obvious that Narayan has depicted a large variety of excellent characters who emerges from the soil of south India and in course of their knowledge and experience develop a sense of belonging to the whole humanity. They are amalgamation of virtue and vices as all human beings are.

In the gallery of women characters portrayed in the novels of R. K. Narayan, we encounter different facets of women. Sometimes they submit themselves to the dominant discourse for substantiation, and sometimes they favour inner corroboration in search of their free selves. It is true that R. K. Narayan conforms to his times and during the period he wrote, there was radical change in the status of women. Moreover, he maintains an objective detachment from his themes and characters. So, it is risky to draw any conclusion from his novels about his point of view and value system. What makes it more difficult is that Narayan seldom comments on his works or is generally reluctant to speak about his inner convictions. But however detached he is from his characters, it is possible to draw out conception and portrayal of women characters taking definite shape through his novels. Narayan's concept and understanding of women in the Indian society has given new dimension to his novels. Including granny, wife or a mother, Narayan also probes into synthesis of traditional and modern women, their strong concept of individuality and uncompromising attitude. His women discover their identity in the Indian middle class society.

This study of portrayal of women in the select novels of R.K. Narayan enables us to say that R. K. Narayan knew the undeniable presence of women in the society. He has established himself as a master of fictional technique. Contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan makes a remarkable triad, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist and a short-story teller. R. K. Narayan portrayed his women in a kind of a realism which is something more than reportage; he grabbed the Indian mentality fully with its superstitious comprehension of life, its bewildering contradictions and its sarcastic comic irony. He is pre-occupied with incompatibilities rather than possibilities of human predicament. His characters dwell in the reality of our existence and the events narrated are like the occurrences of real life. From his novel it is possible to analyse his attitude towards women and he brilliantly captured the changing scenario in the status of the women with changing time.

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