



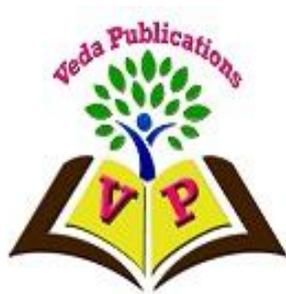
TRADITIONAL APPROACH IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF R.K.NARAYAN: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT



R. K. Narayan, one of the greatest Indian English writers and a world-renowned literary figure of the twentieth century, is among the founding fathers of Indian English fiction. Along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, he not only inaugurated the novel form in Indian English literature but also defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate so far its theme and characterization are concerned. Each of these three novelists — called the great trio - used his own version of English, freed from foggy taste of Britain, and transferred it to a new setting of brilliant light and purified heart. Among these Indian English writers R. K. Narayan is supreme and the best because his fiction reveals varied dimensions of Indian life, tradition and ethos depicted or represented through his unique individual talent.

Keywords: *Renunciation, Divine spirit, The Indian and The Universal, Temperament, Protagonist, Self Realization, Myth and Reality, Archetypal Figures, Reluctant Guru.*

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Narayan's fiction usually focuses on Gandhian concept of personality, concept of marriage, Indian philosophy, value system, characters, religion, superstition, myths, traditions, women, human condition, politics, human struggle, cosmic reality, supernatural, day-to-day living in India, Hindu Dharma Shastra, tradition, Man-women relationship, human relationship, East-west theme, portrayal of children, philosophy of life, quest for identity, socio-cultural processes and problems, perception of the psychological process and Indian make-up, spiritual quest, idea of love, sainthood, self-transcendence, men and women in Indian society, relationship between the individual and the community, new women with her struggle for independence, man's quest for wealth and acceptance of *Karma*.

There are critics and scholars who consider Narayan to be the third world's best writer in English and talk high of his finest achievements such as attaining a balance between 'the Indian' and 'the Universal', combining technique and 'temperament' exploring the ancient Indian culture embodied in the Indian epics, *Shastras*, *Puranas*, myths and mythologies. The Indian epics, *Puranas*, and *Shastras*, these critics establish, are the depositories of ancient values of life and moral codes of conduct used consistently by different Indian writers to delineate various facets of Indian Culture and Civilization; and Narayan being no exception exploits these treasure houses of Indian scholarship and wisdom in order to make it known to the world that India is traditionally the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. The values remain the same in every village, town or city. He is not only faithful to his national tradition but also his own cultural ethos and people.

Others have explicated the doctrine of dharma and karma in the novels of R. K. Narayan by focusing mainly on how the protagonists pursue the spiritual quest for self-realisation and self-understanding. According to them, Narayan's novels depict the genuine human condition by presenting such characters who go through a series of frustrations on the account of various involvements and finally end up in isolation. Narayan's treatment, they argue, lies in highlighting the fluid nature of the protagonist's characters and wicheed between different identities. Similarly, there are other critics who have explored

and eulogized R. K. Narayan's presentation of the national tradition, with particular reference to the questions of cultural fusion and racial consciousness (Bhagwat S Goyal. R.K. Narayan's India: Myth and Reality, New Delhi: Sarey & Sons, 1993 and Patrick Swinden. "Gods, Demons and Others in the Novels of R.K Narayan", *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, 261 (1998), pp. 1- 15).

According to these critics, Narayan's philosophy of traditionalism, which permeates all of his novels, is the fountain-head from which his other philosophical concepts — such as orthodoxy, superstition and the role of fate in life — gush out. There are critics who talk of Narayan's commitment to and faith in Hindu ideals and ideology arguing that Narayan deals consciously and repeatedly with Indian religious themes like renunciation, incarnation, rebirth, ahimsa, and the law of Karma, immortality of soul, its transmigration and the ultimate merger with the Divine Spirit. . Since these ideas and beliefs are an inseparable part of the Indian consciousness and way of life, Narayan's Malgudians too have a firm faith in these due to their deep rootedness in traditional family systems and moral codes of conduct against which they never revolt. According to Ved Mehta:

To be a good writer anywhere you must have roots both in religion and in family, I have these things - we find both religion and family have had an impact, one subtle, the other direct, on me and women in Malgudi. that has found some meaningful manifestation in novel after novel. (C. N Srinath."The Literary Landscape ". *Essays on Indian Fiction and Poetry in English*, Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1986, p.3).

The traditional world of Malgudi does not sanction romantic love but adheres to the convention of arranged marriage; man and woman living together as husband and wife, without getting married, are regarded as sinners. This traditional society has its own sexual ethics according to which sex aberration or perversion with any motive is bound to end in frustration and misery. As a result of this, critics have commented on Narayan's traditionalism or the way tradition dominates and overpowers modernity whenever there is a clash between them. Narayan, these critics argue,



promotes blind acceptance of the traditional values of life and seems to point out, overtly and obliquely the value of heritage, of a past: what the *Shastras* have prescribed is good for everybody for a peaceful and harmonious and happy life as a result of which any revolt against the set system or tradition brings despair and frustration, which amounts to their ultimate defeat.

It is important to note that one of the concerns of Narayan has been the study and exploration of the nature of evil in human life as was done by such great writers as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Melville, Henry James and Conrad. Narayan believes that the evil is within us and it is to be fought not only by the individual alone himself but also by all human beings. He has been preoccupied with the challenging problem of evil in life and the possible solution for it. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, for example, Vasu's identity as an evil force is established fully for the people of Malgudi. His anti-social activities erupt like venomous weeds which threaten to choke the green wheat lands of an otherwise peaceful Malgudi. Nataraj and Vasu are not merely two individuals, but two opposite forces of society representing the perpetual struggle of Good and Evil. Even in *The Financial Expert* and *The Guide*, Narayan portrays social menaces and rogues in the characters of Margayya and Raju, though as compared to Vasu they are lesser evils. However, taken together the three constitute an excellent evil -trio of Narayan whose preoccupation with evil as a tenacious enemy that affects the characters in particular and the society in general constitutes one of the main subjects of these three novels.

A good number of critics have very seriously looked at Narayan's archetypal figures. They believe that in his fiction these archetypal figures appear frequently. According to Ashok Kumar Jha the plots of Narayan's *The Guide* and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* have archetypal patterns. In *The Guide*, Narayan explains the archetypal drive working within every individual towards acquiring the knowledge of the true nature of the self and the hindrances created in this process which form another archetypal pattern in the novel. Archetype of the serpent woman forms the essential part of the main archetypal pattern. In another novel, *The Man Eater*

of Malgudi, archetypal pattern of "inevitable triumph of good and the destruction of evil" which also forms the pattern of myth, is enunciated. It is also important to note that the archetypal conflict between good and evil and the inevitable triumph of good and destruction of evil, as enunciated in Classical Mythology too, forms the pattern of *The Man Eater of Malgudi*.

In his essay "The Reluctant Guru" Narayan recounts his constant resistance to the role that seemed to be foisted on him—the role of an authentic exponent of the mystic East, a guru or a sage, a role that he was most uncomfortable with, but which he could not entirely shake off. Going by the flimsy evidence of texts like *The English Teacher* and *The Guide*, his audience often demanded doses of Indian spirituality and mysticism from him. Narayan confesses "I felt myself in the same situation as Raju, the hero of my *Guide* who was mistaken for a saint and began to wonder at some point himself if sudden effulgence has begun to show on his face." (Paranjape, Makarand. *Decolonization and Development: Hind Svaraj Revisited*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993 p.108).

CONCLUSION

Thus the analysis reveals on one of the greatest writers, a world famous literary figure of the twentieth century, founding father of Indian English fiction –R.K.Narayan, his fiction dealt with varied dimensions of Indian life ,tradition, myths and reality, ethos depicted through his unique individual talent. The researcher has analysed critic's comments on his best achievements such as attaining a balance between "the Indian universal, combining technique and temperament" and his novels *Dharma* and *Karma* focusing mainly on how the protagonists pursue the spiritual quest for self-realisation and self-understanding. Gandhian concept of personality, concept of marriage, Indian philosophy, values, characters religion ,superstition, myths, traditions women human condition and struggles, politics, cosmic reality, super natural, day-to-day living in India human relationship, East-West theme, children philosophy of life and quest for identity are analyzed in this chapter.

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