

A Study on Literary Works of RK Narayanan

Suman

Assistant Professor in English, D.A.V. PG College, Karnal (HR) (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 December 2018

Keywords

Novel, Writer, Narayanan.

ABSTRACT

R. K. Narayanan was born in October 10, 1906. His full name was Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami. He was an Indian writer, best known for his works in his fictional work of Malgudi. Some of the works of R. K. Narayanan are the semi-autobiographical trilogy of Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts & The English Teacher. Narayanan's work also include 'The Financial Expert' and 'The Guide'. 'The Guide' won Sahitya Akademy Award. The theme of 'The Guide' was also adopted for the movie 'The Guide'. Most of Narayanan's stories are set in the fictional town of Malgudi. His narratives highlight social issues of Indian society. He is, sometimes, compared to William Faulkner, who also created a fictional town. Narayanan also wrote some short stories.

1. Introduction

The writing style of short stories of RK Narayanan is compared to that of Guy de Maupassant. Both have an ability to shorten the matter without hiding main element of the story. Narayanan was also criticized for being so simple in his fictions. He wrote for over 60 years and he won many awards and honors.

These include the AC Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature, The Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan, India's third and second highest civilian awards. He was also nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's Parliament.

Narayanan's second novel 'The Bachelor of Arts' was published in 1937. In this novel, he shared his experiences at college and showed the role of teenager who was not careful and obedient initially, but as the time moved on, he transformed into a stable adult.

His third novel was 'The Dark Room' which was published in the year 1938. After that, he wrote the novel 'The English Teacher' which is an auto-biographical. In 1940, he tried his hands at the journal "Indian Thought". With the help of his uncle who was a salesman; Narayanan got succeeded to get over thousand subscribers in madras city alone.

But, He could not continue his job for a longer period. In November 1942, his first collection of short stories in the form of "Malgudi Days" came out. Then he wrote two more books "Mr. Sampath" and "The Financial Expert". Then, he presented a true story in the novel "Margayya" which was related to his brother.

Then, his next novel, "Waiting for the Mahatma" published which was a fictional work by Mr. Narayanan. In this novel, he imagined the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to his fictioned town 'Malgudi'. In 1953, he got honored when his works were published in United States by Michigan State University Press. In 1956, he went for a visit in United States and wrote his next novel 'The Guide'.

He published 'The Guide' after arriving to India. He also won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1958 because of this novel and a bollywood movie was also made on the subject of this book. In this novel, there was a character, Raju, who kept fast for many days to bring down the rain in the village because there was no sign of rain in the village for about twelve years. He did not eat anything for many days. Finally, his hard work was accepted by God and it rained in the village after a long time. After this incidence, the villagers started to worship him as Mahatma.

In 1961, His next novel 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' was published. After the publication of this book, he went to visit Australia and spent few weeks in Adelaide. In 1964, he published his collection of short-stories from Hindu epics and this mythological work was named as "Gods, Demons and Others".

In 1967, he wrote his next novel "The Vendor of Sweets". In this novel, he shared his experiences of visiting America. A comparative study is done between Indian and American culture in this novel. According to the author, Americans still believe that India is a country of snakes and myths, magics. The people of India are poor and they are not educated. They live in poverty.

Americans have a wrong perception about India in their mind and through this novel, he tries to overcome this wrong perception. He considers Indian culture better than the foreign culture. No culture can be compared with Indian culture.

In 1970, his next book 'A Horse and Two Goats' was published which was a collection of short-stories. In 1977, his one more book 'The Painter of Signs' was published.

In 1983, he published his next novel 'A Tiger for Malgudi'. In this novel, he described the relationship of a tiger with humans. His next novel, 'Talkative Man' was published in 1986 which was a fictional work and was based on an aspiring journalist from Malgudi. In 1982, he published two collections of short stories: Malgudi Days and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories.

In 1987, he published another collection of essays "A Writer's Nightmare" in which he raised the issues of caste system. Then he bought an acre of agricultural land in Mysore and did farming. In 1980, he was chosen as a member of Rajya Sabha. In 1990, he published his next novel 'The world of Nagaraj'.

Soon after, Narayanan fell ill and was sent to Madras to his daughter's family. In 1994, his daughter died of cancer and his grandmother 'Bhuvanewari' started taking care of him. The last and final book published was 'Grandmother's Tale'. This book is an auto-biographical about his grandmother who travelled a lot to find her husband.

2. Literary works of RK Narayanan

Narayanan's first publication was a book review of Development of Maritime Laws of 17th Century England. Later he wrote Swami and Friends which was centered on the fictitious town of Malgudi. After getting married and joining the newspaper The Justice as a reporter, he came in contact with Graham Greene. Graham helped Narayanan publish Swami and Friends and his subsequent works like The Bachelor of Arts and The Dark Room.

His books have always portrayed social problems, from corporal punishments at school to male oppression in marriages. After his wife's death he wrote The English Teacher, a book that translated his grief.

The work actually turned out to be a part of an unintentional trilogy that includes Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts. His works are to a great extent autobiographical with characters named differently and the story set in the fictional town of Malgudi.

Swami and Friends is R.K. Narayanan's first and autobiographical novel dealing with Swami's dreams, friends, cricket and a typical boyish world full of innocence and humors. A very important theme is introduced in the slim first novel and in the very first paragraph and so unobtrusively we need to take a good look. 'It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline.

We see Swami throughout, at home or at school, resisting 'discipline', asserting 'freedom'. Freedom is a genetic mutant especially in the heroes of Narayanan's early novels. Swami's rejection of two schools is more than mere impulsive action: it is an assertion of his spirit of freedom. The role of the family is also introduced in Swami and Friends. More than any other character in Swami and Friends, it is granny who symbolizes the enduring family ties. Swami's bond with his grandmother lends considerable grace to the novel.

The Bachelor of Arts is a novel in which the hero remains Bachelor of Arts though many times he thinks of higher education. The family plays a more significant role in Narayanan's first novel. Childhood is presented in dynamic though subtle transience; in the second novel we witness youth

in full flow, a young man on the move. The theme is the education of a young man. Love and friendship, the two attractions of youth, both came under review in this novel. Chandran graduates at college, at home and in the world at large; he matures throughout psychologically; he does a Bachelor's in life. This modest book is elegantly planned.

The Dark Room is the only novel of Narayanan's with a woman holding the center, until A Grandmother's Tale (1993), Narayanan's last book, which is a novella. After the delicate weaver of familial rapport of the first two novels, we witness in The Dark Room a spectacle of domestic discord rising to a rage of violence unique in Narayanan's early comedy, a painful experience for the reader coming from Narayanan's first two novels.

The Bachelor of Arts ends on a note of marital harmony of engaging youth; the crisis in The Dark Room is built on adultery. To cap it all, the heroine, having quit her home in protest against infidelity, of all Narayanan's characters pushed closest to suicide, returns home in a helpless compromise, with more than a residue of bitterness that makes the ending of the novel unique in Narayanan, far from 'happy' or 'comedic'. The heroine is left trapped in a predicament of unrequited moral struggle, close to life in death'.

Narayanan tells the story of Savitri and Ramani with economy and with impressive psychological and social realism. Narayanan said: 'I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of Woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the 'women's Lib' movement....A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances'. The Dark Room is the only novel in which we find Narayanan obsessed-as much as the central character is.

The English Teacher and Mr. Sampath, the two post-crisis novels, are outstanding for preoccupation with self-education. Mr. Sampath enlarges and concludes it. The narrative technique of Mr. Sampath makes it distinctive. Analysis of the structure convinces us that Mr. Sampath is the story of Srinivas. Srinivas comes to Malgudi, and starts his own magazine, gets involved with various people and things and when enough is enough, identifies with what he now discovers to be his real interests. What is unique to Mr. Sampath is that the narrative focus generally follows Srinivas's fortunes, Mr. Sampath, his restless rajasic friend, captures our imagination equally.

"The Financial Expert" was Narayanan's masterpiece till "The Guide" appeared. The novel tells the story of the rise and fall of Margayya. The first of Narayanan's post independence novels. The Financial Expert has its share of the spirit of the period. Margayya's rajasic guna- with a little mischief from Fate- wouldn't let him be; the greed wouldn't let him. A morality play in five acts (neatly divided into five parts) the story builds up to a mythic inevitability. The novel is the first of Narayan's synoptic tales with a classical moral balance.

Margayya is strategically placed between rural India (represented by his early clients, the indebted villagers and

Kanda) and urban India (Dr. Pal). Dr. Pal is the first of post-Independence series of modern 'intellectuals' who do not command Narayanan's respect. The novelist is not anti-intellectual; he is only anti pseudo-intellectual.

Himself an orphan, Margayya is also the first of the post-independence failed fathers. The father-son relationship calls for comparison with an early novel, the Bachelor of Arts. The trace of antifeminism in the novel too goes with the rajasic temper of the post-independence hero. The conclusion of the novel is characteristic of the novelist; as the beating up of Dr Pal was the first step in Margayya's reformation, the reaching out for his grandchild at the end is proof of his return to sanity. It is a comedic resolution in the spirit of Gunas Comedy.

The Guide, written entirely in the USA, was the first Indian novel in English to win the Sahitya Akademi Award. Once again in Narayanan villagers educate a hero; as we have seen as early as The Bachelor of Arts a young man is reformed and cured of his romanticism. Rural India for a hero of Narayanan's novels is moral India. The post-Independence heroes each suffer, as we have seen, from a rajasic weakness; in Margayya of The Financial Expert it is Avarice; in Waiting for the Mahatma, Sriram's Sloth. With Raju, as with Sampath earlier, it is overpowering Desire.

In Waiting for the Mahatma, the benign Mahatma spurs change in Sriram. Vasu is the very antithesis of Gandhi; he is Anti-Gandhi, he is a man with a gun'.

In the placid pool of Malgudi Vasu is nemesis as well as catalyst; but Vasu is no effigy: scenes with him are invariably

engaging. In a certain mood, he even makes sense: 'It would be boring to be steadfastly good night and day'.

The novel has a well-marked chorus: Nataraj's assistant, Sastri alone had maintained a haughty aloofness'. And 'Sastri proved to be the shrewdest'. When things get too uncomfortable, Sastri goes on a long pilgrimage, a tactical retreat Mao would have approved; once Vasu dies accidentally by his own hand, Sastri returns quietly to Nataraj. It is the retiring Sastri who gets the curtain line. The conclusion is typical of Narayanan's religious optimism in the later novels. It is an Indian story: the myth of Bhasmasura modernized, yet another 'detached, synoptic view'.

3. Conclusion

The Painter of Signs is the biggest surprise of Narayanan's career. Two idealists fall in love; one of them, the 'weaker' one, lands in trouble. Bewilderment and retreat to a simpler life; modernity produces the same reactions in The Painter of Signs(1977), where Daisy, a young woman, comes to Malgudi-the time is Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency- with a fanatical mission to control India's population.

Raman, another of Narayanan's post- independence young drifters, is both attracted and perplexed by her sense of individuality and high responsibility, and attaches himself to her as she travels around the countryside, impatiently trying to root out what she sees as superstitious prejudices against contraception among illiterate villagers.

References

1. Kain, Geoffrey (2013). R.K. Narayan : contemporary critical perspectives. Michigan State University Press.
2. Khatri, Chotte Lal (2008). RK Narayan: Reflections and Re-evaluation. Sarup & Son.
3. Pousse, Michael (2014). R. K. Narayan: A Painter of Modern India, Vol. 4. Lang, Peter Publishing.
4. Prasad, Amar Nath (2013). Critical response to R.K. Narayan. Sarup & Sons.
5. Ramtane, S. S. (2008). R.K. Narayan and his social perspective. Atlantic Publishers.
6. Rao, Ranga (2014). R.K. Narayan. Sahitya Academy.