

The portrayal of Indian life in R.K. Narayan's works written in Indian English Language

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Abstract: The culture and life of a country can be described in a foreign language. Here, a country like India, its culture, the way people live here and their mind-set can be explained in a foreign language like English, but there is always an emotion missing which cannot be shown in any foreign language, still R.K. Narayan with his art of narration has done this with a touch of languages like, Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit.

Index Terms - Indian culture, feel of a language, myths, language; medium to convey thoughts.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper studies about the way Narayan has portrayed India during those times when English as a language was supposed to be a foreign language. To pen down the life style of a country (mostly its rural parts) in a language which is hardly accepted by people of his country as their friend language is very hard. His narrative techniques in his novels, and short stories, such as in *The Guide*, the myths that he used in his novels, *The Bachelor of Arts* and in *The Guide*, the irony and humour in his *An Astrologer's Day*, all represents his artistic touch to showcase how education is still not able to overpower the superstitions they believe in, how even adult unmarried are not allowed to take their decisions on their own and their future depends on what their parents and elders think is good for them, how the ambitions of people of becoming rich and famous has turned them down to feet and then the thought of redemption makes them saints and henceforth people worshipping them. All these happenings were a common thing in generally everybody's life. Portraying all these through a language which is not "theirs" and still being able to transfer that feel in pages is a work greatly done by R. K. Narayan. Though still there is a feel to every language which is native to its people which cannot be described in a foreign language and which is why Narayan has used some words of Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the impact of Indian culture on R.K. Narayan and thereby its reflection in his works
2. To study the art of presenting Indian culture through myths and superstitions, sometimes keeping them the way they are believed and sometimes modernizing them to a bit.
3. To study the role and character of Narayan's women characters.

III. ANALYSIS

R.K. Narayan was born in Chennai, in a South Indian family and due to his father's frequent transfers, he spent much of his time with his grandmother named Parvati. His grandmother taught him arithmetic, Sanskrit and mythology. Due to his childhood spent in the care of his mother, he has wide knowledge of mythology and Indian culture and which can be seen in his most of the works. The title of his works also reflects the impact of Indian culture on him. His very first novel was *Swami and Friends*, this is the novel through which we got a fictional town of Malgudi which can be seen in many of his works, be it short stories or novels, and this town is inspired from the towns of South India. In this novel through the character of Swami, Narayan has shown the boyhood's carelessness, freeness, fears, and quest to get accepted. Just like the Indian way of telling a story in episodic form, take in that matter the example of *Panchatantra*, his story moves chronologically and in episodic form. For the Indian people, at the time of 1933, they were not aware or familiar with the classic English language and those who do understand English, is a form which is an everyday type of English, and Narayan has written his stories in a very simple language and without much use of jargons, also Indians have a habit of using humour in a flow of talks, similarly Narayan has also used light humour which does not hurt anybody's feelings. His characters are typical Indians in his initial novels, not just by name but by their spirit as well, they have notions and morals of India. Narayan has the base of most of his works from the two epics, *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*. Be the characters of Swaminathan, Raju or Krishnan, all are inspired from Puranic tradition. There are sadhus, sanyasis, common men, all struggling for a healthy life. All his characters struggle while growing up because of the social and religious framework. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran falls in love with a girl but could not marry her because she is a Manglik and in India it is believed that only a Manglik can marry the other Manglik otherwise one of the partners will eventually die, it is the social pressure due to which he could not marry her, in *The Guide*, Rosie belongs to a family of temple dancers, known as Devadasis. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran gets frustrated and tries sanyas for a short time and after some years marries Sushila, a girl of his parents' choice. Swami in *Swami and Friends*, Sushila in *The English Teacher*, and Raju's spiritual change in *The Guide* after he transforms himself into saint, all run away but later gets ready to face the harsh realities of life. Narayan's characters try to go against the untimely social customs and traditions but they simply cannot turn the situation and has to come back to reality, which is the reality with the most youngsters of India. His characters are dissatisfied with themselves and with the society, they are rooted with customs, yet they live their lives, and even if they give up, it is for a short period of time. Narayan's heroes are in quest for the truth, just the way Gandhi was, they were too hooked in Hindu culture, and hence his characters are very Gandhian in spirit. Narayan's way of writing has a native touch to it, the touch of Malgudi, the touch of India. Because of Narayan's constant switching of schools because of his father's transfers, he again and again has to build an identity of and which is visible in his characters. Indian culture in his writings can also be seen when in *The Guide*, he has shown river Sarayu, Mempi hills, and snakes, and these are some of the qualities of South India. It can be evaluated from the very words of Narayan himself that he fantasises with Indian culture, I like Madras because I was born there and because in Madras the ancient and Modern coexist. Some Madras are very orthodox. There are parts of the city where people with a traditional background in Sanskrit are still living (Narayan 236-37). One can

even notice the Indian culture in the failure of the love of Chandran with Malathi in *Swami and Friends*, Chandran falls in love with Malathi and wanted to marry her, which is very unacceptable in the Indian society where marriages used to take place with parents' concern. Narayan writes a different type of English which has Indian colour to it, the presence of Indian culture can be felt in his writing style, he uses the words of Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Tamil, such as; "Dhoti", "Jutka", "Pyol", these words were not translated into English because the essence they produce in their own language cannot be felt in translation. Narayan has also made translations of Tamil expressions, such as; "sitting plank", "Stitching master", "red tapists", "foreign returned people" and some Indian idioms such as; "To the dust pot with your silly customs", "My professor will eat me up", etc.

When we talk about myths, myths are generally stories made in ancient times which people blindly believes in. myth comes from the Greek word "Mythos" which means verbal tale. Many myths give explanation to natural as well as unnatural events, these are stories which make a person feel comfortable as well as prisoned. Generally these stories are made to make people not do any harm to natural beauty of nature and to not harm other fellow humans and animals but people in India have taken them in the wrong way, instead of people feeling safe these stories are main people feel unsafe and due to which superstition is spreading. Narayan is a modern writer, but to show the Indianess in writings he has used several myths in almost each and every work of his' be it a short story or novel. Most of the myths that Narayan has showcased in his novels are taken from the Indian epics, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, BhagawatGeeta and also from a series of tale known as Panchatantra, the stories which are known to the world in the form of animal stories. Through the use of myths, Narayana just tries to show the Indian mind-set and wanted to evoke comic feeling and a light humour. Narayan is a writer who may or may not believe in Indian myths and spiritual ideology but he is deeply rooted in the Indian culture, and he even got penetrate in the core Indian life without being involved in the problems of religion, caste or class. Through his presentation of the myths, it can be said that he is deeply rooted with the beliefs of karma, soul and reincarnation.

In *Swami and Friends*, Swami is known by the name Chandran, who during one of his' wanderings in the street falls in love with a girl named Malathi sitting near to the Sarayu river. The love was an infatuation because he did not able to see the girl's face, he just fallen in love with her hair and the way she sits. His love did not turn into a marriage because Malathi was a Manglik and in Indian it is believed that a Manglik can only marry a manglik otherwise one of the partners will eventually dies. Chandran's mother did not agree to his marriage with Malathi. According to K.V.S. Murti, a literary critic, it is here that one notices the mythical parallel—that of Tara and Sasanka (The Moon God). Sasanka or Chandra as he is more commonly known, falls in love with Tara, wife of his Guru (wife of his teacher). As it is out of bounds of the ethical code, it proves unsuccessful. Chandran too falls in love with Malathi, and their love proves unsuccessful. In the same novel it can be noticed that frustrated Chandran practises Sanyas (a stage of renunciation), but he fails to be a sanyasi because he was not at peace in himself and Sanyas is a stage which can only be entered when cleared the initial three stages which are; Brahmacharya (bachelor), Grahasthya (householder), and Vanaprasthya (renouncer of the world).

In *The Guide*, the theory of Karma is presented through the life of Raju, he initially being a Railway Guide, falls in love with a married woman, starts living with her, manages her work and when gets greedy forges her signature to get the diamond. Due to his wrong doings he got caught and was imprisoned. After completing his punishment in the jail, where people used to like him, he had no place to live to and he therefore enters into a village and was mistaken to be a saint because he used to tell the village people stories of Ramayana and used to advise the cleanliness and godliness. One day Velan's brother mistakenly reports that Swami will not eat until it rains and the things then went out beyond Raju's thinking, Raju also did not eat and on the twelfth day he falls sick and fell on the ground during the same time people could hear the sound of the clouds. This is a novel which represents Narayan's belief in renunciation and karma.

In *An Astrologer's Day*, is ironic that people believe who so ever calls him a saint and follows what he asks people to do, also the thing which is ironic is that Guru Nayak pays the astrologer to tell him where to find the man he is looking for, he was unaware of the fact that the man he is looking for is the astrologer himself.

Another noticeable myth in *The Guide* is that Rosie is supposed to be a snake girl, Raju conducted a research about the king cobra with the help of Gaffur when Marco was busy in finding meanings out of Ramayana on the walls of the Iswara Temple in North Extension. When he returned, he found Rosie "standing apart with every sign of boredom in her face." But she "looked delighted" when Raju told her about the king cobra that danced to the music of a flute. When Raju reached home he found Rosie dancing on the sound of the flute giving company to the king Cobra and Raju's mother called her as "a snake-woman" (Narayan). Also when Raju got caught for the sins he has committed of forging Nalini's signature and doing other financial misbehaves, he was arrested by one of his old friends, a superintendent of police at the time when Nalini was giving a dance performance, when she gets to know of Raju's wrong deeds she commented, "I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is karma" (Narayan 193). It is said by critics that in the end he does become a Guide in the final times of his life. "When the mirror of understanding is cleansed of the dust of desire, the life of pure consciousness is reflected on it. When all seems lost, light from heaven breaks, enriching our human life more than words can tell." (Narayan 36).

Through these words of Narayan it can be interpreted that Narayan has faith and belief in the mythology of "Karma" or for that matter it shows his upbringing, when he says "light from heaven breaks", it shows his commitment of his thoughts towards God. Not just the story but the words that he uses in the middle of English words which are of Hindi, Sanskrit and Malayalam, to not change the essence reflects his Indian nativity. These myths give flavour to his story and keeps the interest of the readers. Narayan uses Hindu mythology combined with realism and that is the reason why he stands different from other Indian English writers.

When we talk about Narayan's women characters, his female characters are neither too traditional nor too modern, they are a blend of both, they know when to sacrifice their wishes for the betterment of their family and relatives and know when to take a stand for what they feel is right for themselves. It can also be said that Narayan has introduced the concept of "New Women" in the Indian writings in English. This somewhere also represents his thinking about the condition of women. The one thing that can be noticed in his works is that women are the sufferers, though they know how to stand up for themselves, they are always suffering. It can also be interpreted that it is because of a woman that a man is able to do something and it is the same woman who is the reason behind the destruction of a man, in short he has shown women as strong characters. The story/ plot may not revolve around a women but is not able to move forward without a woman. In *The Guide*, Rosie is the character who leaves her husband Marco because she knows that he is not worth her life, and it is the same woman who is the reason behind Raju's success and again his downfall partly. Also it is shown that Rosie is the one performs and Raju manages her finance and other works. This breaks the myth that only men can earn, here Rosie is an example of a new women. On the other hand if we notice the behaviour of Raju's mother towards Rosie and calling her a doom for the family and a snake-woman, she is a woman who is a generation old and through her character Narayan is presenting how women earlier were and how the thought and life of women has changed now. On the other hand Narayan has also shown the typical Indian housewife who bears the frustration of her husband in *The English Teacher*, where when Susila asks her husband if their son should go to school in a fever, and her husband bashes her saying that he knows how to handle a teenager and she should not interfere.

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, it is because of Malathi that Chandran has wasted many years of his life in Sanyasa, and it is because of the same incident that Chandran is able to know that he is unable to fulfil his other responsibilities and thus he moves on with some other girl. In *A Horse*

and Two Goats, when Muni is unable to get the ingredients for drumsticks sauce, he sends his wife wishing that she could earn an amount that would get them an evening's meal. This incident shows that even in villages of India, women are capable of earning and serving their families at the same time, when men are not able to do much, they depend on their wife's earnings, and this breaks the myth that women are supposed to know only house work and are not capable enough to go out and earn, this is another example of Narayan's New Women.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the study and research done, it can be said that from Childhood Narayan has been brought up in the lap of his grandmother who used to give him teachings of Mythology, The Ramayan, The Mahabharata and teachings of Sanskrit and since he has been brought up in the lands of South India which is full of culture and myths, he has inscribed his knowledge in his works. By showing the culture, Narayan has made it open to the reader whether they want to criticise some rituals and beliefs or they want to live in them. Through the language used by the author, it can be interpreted the amount of inscribed Indian culture in him, to not change the essence of words which can hardly or partly be understood in English, he has not translated them into English. And with this the first objective of the research has been answered.

With the presentation of myths, Narayan shows us the double faced society and how people according to the wish of their own changes the meanings of myths. Through the presentation of myths, Narayan has shown us the clash between realism and myths. Myths turn out to be a greater force or as a character which makes up the storyline. It is myths and unacceptable forced culture that Chandran is unable to get his love and has ruined his life for many years. Through the character of Raju, we are introduced with the Psyche of Narayan that he believes in fate and Karma. Not just with words, title and story line, Narayan has shown the myths involved in Indian culture through the use of symbols like King Cobra, the mountains, the Pyol, and sound of flute that makes Rosie dance. The use of myths are another main character of Narayan's works and with this the second objective of the research came to proof.

When we talk about female characters of Narayan, he has given u both traditional as well as modern women, he has kept the characters of earlier generation to bring to us a concept of "New Women". His female characters do sacrifice, love, adjust, breaks the custom, takes a stand for themselves and maintains a balance of life. His women characters may not be the protagonist of the story but are the ones without whom the story and the plot will not move forward and are the reason for the downfall and the success of men in the story. With this the third objective of the research has been concluded.

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