

## **Scaffolding R.K. Narayan as a Nationalist through his novel “The English Teacher”**

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### **Abstract**

R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao were the three great pioneers of Indian English Literature belonging to the first generation. Among these I would like to discuss R.K. Narayan who can also be called a Diaspora writer, as he has passed his later years in the West. But here I am to discuss him as a nationalistic writer on the basis of his novel ‘**The English Teacher**’, and being a nationalist according to me he has always written about the East. Though he was born and brought up in India attained his schooling as well as his higher education in India he has worked for the west also got his books published through the west achieved fame through the West with the help of Graham Greene who could see in him the writer, but has always remained a nationalist this can be very well explained through his novel **The English Teacher**. Being a nationalist is just not by writing about the nation and serving the nation, but in true sense when one has a feeling for one’s own people and you serve them the truth by writing something which you have felt and portray the reality through your words. This is what R. K. Narayan has done in his other novels also, when one reads his novel a person gets deep into it and he feels as if he himself it acting. The Character of English teacher is himself, who lost his wife and how he faces the consequences and changes his entire work force and goes to the depth of making a better India. On the basis of this novel which is more of an autobiographical it completely changed his life style and profession.

**Key words:** Nationalism, reality, truthfulness, society.

### **Introduction:**

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanswami is the full name of R. .K. Narayan as we all know is one of the pioneers among the three Indian English writers Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand. Who is the best known Indian English writer of the Post Colonial and Pre-Independence Era. Besides this he is the most well-known and famous author for his fictional town Malgudi and other stories. Besides this he has written Swami and Friends, The English Teacher, and the list goes on. He was born and brought up in Madras and also had his early education from Madras, and later on for his higher education he went to Mysore as his father was posted there. He grew up under the care of his maternal grand-mother, being the eldest among eight siblings and having the sense of responsibility soon after graduating, he did take up a job of a teacher. But as he was appointed the duty of physical instructor, he quit the job

and took up to writing. As he was an Ovid reader he started writing about his childhood days and his first novel **Swami and friends** which was much ridiculed at. It was even rejected from several publishers even his uncles ridiculed him for his career but he still kept going with it. Mean time when he was on vacation at his sister's place in Coimbatore he met Rajam and fell in love with her but going against all odds married her. It is after his marriage with Rajam, he got a job at '**The Justice**' news paper as a reporter and it is here he even got an opportunity for his first novel **Swami and Friends** to be published as he had sent it to one of his friends at Oxford where it was shown to Graham Greene who just didn't appreciate his novel but also appreciated him and gave him a name R.K. Narayan and also became his mentor. Then R. K. Narayan went on and he wrote four novels all got published with the help of Graham Greene and within a period of five years of his marriage, his wife suffered from typhoid and she passed away leaving behind a daughter for R. K. Narayan he was much worried about her and this gave a thought to him to write his this novel **The English Teacher** which I am to show him as a nationalist writer.

### **Who is a nationalist and why a nationalist?**

A nationalist if we label an author it would not be good, for any writer as he can be writing on various topics and he is free to do so. I shall call a person nationalist who writes about the nation, for the good of his own self and also it can be said to show a longing and feeling for the nation. It happens that either people write some time to achieve a name for themselves or who are truly in love for their country. According to me my author R.K. Narayan was a born nationalist, who created a fictional village and wrote about it, just not for the sake of writing but relating incidents with his day to day affairs and later on they seem to be autobiographical. **The English Teacher** is his fourth novel which is very much related to his real life. This novel is also considered very much autobiographical as it relates with his real life incident, it is when the protagonist Krishnan was working with Albert Mission College and his wife joins him along with his daughter but due to bad luck Krishnan's wife Susila becomes a victim of the deadly disease typhoid in those days and passes away. It is said that this novel has a lot of resemblance with his real life, as he also at a very young age lost his wife in the same manner as he has mentioned in this story. Therefore it is considered as autobiographical novel also.

### **The English Teacher as a nationalist novel**

In the novel '**The English Teacher**' we have the protagonist Krishna who is the English teacher working at the Albert Mission College and in the beginning we find him staying at the hostel. But later on with a pressure from his family and his in-laws he calls his wife at his work place and starts living with his small family, wife Sushila and daughter Leela, they were a very happy family. It is only Sushila after visiting public lavatory when they had gone in search of a house, catches typhoid and soon within a short period of time she passes away leaving little Leela and Krishnan on their own. In the beginning we find Krishnan having suicidal thoughts but soon he over comes it, with the hope to survive for Leela the little one. No sooner Leela grows up starts going to a pre-school where the headmaster has priority for his students then his family, the headmaster one day as predicted by an astrologer was going to die therefore leaves everything. But nothing happens to the headmaster and Krishna learnt a lesson and becomes a spiritual on his own starts communicating with Sushila and heals himself.

It is after this he realises that what education he had been imparted and what he was giving was not proper therefore this shows there was a nationalistic feeling given birth in R.K Narayan's mind. It had become very clear that this type of English education was just going to ruin the mind of youngsters and it would no longer allow the young minds to think for them, and it was the British culture which would take them away from their own culture. The protagonist Krishna even goes and tells Mr. Brown the then Principal of the Albert Mission College who had been there for more than thirty years as a principal **"I revere them (i.e. the English dramatists and poets) and I hope to give them to these children for their delight and entertainment, but in a different measure and in a different manner."** Unquote He knew that the principal who had been for three decades would not realize what he wanted for their self development and inner peace. **As he says "His western mind, classifying, labelling, departmentalizing"** Krishna the protagonist could understand the Native conqueror and who knew that the Indians would vehemently resent him. As he says **"...I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis...while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage."**

From the above statement it is very clear that according to R.K. Narayan perceiving English education wouldn't benefit and the British culture would also not be helpful to the Indians on the contrary it would only oppress and abject the people which would refrain them from doing something good for their self as well as for their country man. This shows R. K. Narayan's true sense of nationalism as he doesn't want the Indians to follow the wrong path. He is quite aware about the English education which would benefit them but according to Krishna the protagonist, he feels the youngsters would drift from their culture getting influenced by the British culture and ultimately it would harm the society in coming time. He tells the Principal Mr. Brown who had been there for 30 years would also not be able to understand the idea of self development, inner peace and service in the Indian sense though he had lived in India for three decades. As Krishna had understood the western conqueror mind and the need for the nationalism view, during that period it required to overcome the devastating conditions prevailing among the Indians. And the Britishers were trying to suppress the Indians, as they had the superiority attitude in themselves.

His writings and his language is simple which can even be understood by a young school going child as it has simple language with a nationalistic culture which gave the Indians new English called the Indian English. He is very much straight forward in thoughts and ideas with unique narrative technique, with profoundest thoughts of nation and nationalism. He feels that as he has been brought up in Indian culture but imparted English education and it didn't hamper his life style, but due to the dominant prevailing English society would leave its impact on the new generation therefore he wrote with a nationalistic view portraying Indian stories with good simple English having traditional background and religious outlook. As he is shown to be having a word with his dead wife in which he gets solace and comfort. He writes with a motive for art sake and not for ulterior motives besides, they are free from didacticism, it is rooted in religion and family values, also we find inescapable from the essence of Indian sensibility, he begins with realistic settings and everyday happenings with a nationalistic approach, characters also come from all classes as ours is a very vast nation irrespective of any particular class. Being a nationalist he follows Gandhiji's idealism as

Gandhi he also doesn't like to show difference between classes unlike Gandhi he also belongs to an upper class and gets married to a girl from different caste, going against his family and same has been portrayed in his novel 'The English Teacher.'

### **Family values with a nationalistic approach:**

The manner in which R. K. Narayan portrays family values is typical Indian style or rather nationalistic, he doesn't give it a little of English behaviour also the wife shown is very much Indian full of Indian values in bring up the daughter Leela taking care of her as well as of her husband. Also looking after the house its cleanliness is shown very much Indian, both husband and wife have great respect for each other and at the same time care for each other. The manner in which there is sexual feeling developed is shown in a very mature and uplifting manner with respect. One never sees sex also in a derogatory manner. As according to Hindu culture it is believed that marriage should live beyond death, as Sushila falls sick he takes great care of her and soon after she passes away he too wants to die with her but the thought of the little one allows him to survive and he finds solace in himself by talking to Sushila in spiritual manner. At every step or at every little act of Narayan seems to be an Indian with this it seems that R.K. Narayan was purely a nationalistic with national views and that is why he even wants to impart English education but not teaching Shakespeare and Milton but on the contrary he developed writing English novels with all Indian themes having plot which are connected to day to day life and all of his novels are so much deep rooted with the nationalistic views.

No doubt people in his own relations made fun of him and didn't give him importance, it was only Graham Greene an English writer who could understand his stories and gave him a platform by getting his first book published and it became famous. This is what later on gave him courage to produce new things and new stories and that is how he got fame. This is not what makes him a nationalist in spite of him not getting importance and fame from his country he didn't drift from his writing, nor did he start writing about the west. Though he got an opportunity to work in the west and also was praised in the west, he could have started writing stories about the west and achieved fame and more prestige through the west. Or thinking that Graham Greene had favoured him he could have obliged him but with his this approach of Nationalism he remained firm in his decision and kept on writing about the Nation and become a well known writer for his own country. He has portrayed various themes and plots with various characters from all types of classes, as ours are a huge nation with varied culture, caste and religion. Irrespective of all these things his themes have lot to be conveyed for all classes, there is a message for each and every citizen of the nation. His books have even been translated to different languages though they were written in English. He being a south Indian from Madras has just not written for the people of South in Tamil but wrote for the Nation. R. K. Narayan follower of Gandhian philosophy had a vision like Gandhi as he said... "I do not know whether I am a karma yogi or any other yogi. I know that I cannot live without work. I crave to die with my hand at the spinning wheel." R.K. Narayan also followed this ideology and developed a realistic approach towards life, he had realised the importance of labour in life was to earn the living for bread and butter. Also the ultimate objective of every profession was to earn money and make a living.

### **Conclusion:**

As and when the novel was written it was in 1945 when the entire globe was undergoing turmoil, as it was the period when Second World War was going on. Everyone was under a

turmoil due to which the western civilization was in a trauma and the east had a very different trauma of Independence. Where R .K. Narayan focuses on the transformation and the modernisation with a nationalistic fervour which brought in transformation not in the lives of Indian society as he believed that as the globe changes why not a nation but keeping the Indian views in his mind with Gandhian philosophy, he has tried to be very much nationalistic in his views through the art of his teaching. Through the character of Krishnan the protagonist of the novel **The English Teacher** by teaching English but not Shakespeare and Milton but stories written in Indian English, having Indian aesthetics and beauty as well as the places and themes based on Indian culture and society in mind. Therefore I consider this novel having nationalistic views with settings about the nation along with characters all well knit in Indian culture and places also belonging to the village set up as our country has seventy percent of its population residing in the villages during those times. Thus I label it as a nationalist novel.