

R.K. Narayan's Fiction - A new phenomena of Indian sensibility and culture in Indo-Anglian literature

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Abstract

The present research paper is the modest attempt to explore the concept of Indian sensibility and culture in Indo-Anglian literature through R.K. Narayan's fiction. Indian writings in English are relatively a new phenomena to capture the pulse of Indian sensibility amidst the cross-roads of multi-cultural and ethnic influences. This is a matter of great interest in the present context because the Indian literary tradition is rich in itself. But its flow through English language produces a curious pattern hybrid literature of unique beauty. R.K. Narayan has created the Indian sensibility cultural identify – cum- ethnicity through English tongue. Narayan's "The Guide" and "The English Teacher" pervades with Indian sensibilities and culture. The writer takes us on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey through the characters of Raju, Rosie, Marco, Krishna and Susila who are typically Indian. Narayan has portrayed Indian sensibility, culture and traditions by reflecting a true social image of India.

Keywords: Indian sensibility, culture, tradition, society, Malgudi.

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Introduction

R.K. Narayan was a prolific writer. All his pre-independence novels are biographical and family oriented. His characters are from middle and lower class society. His writings with style of writing, characterisation and narrative technique add various hues to Indian English literature and expand its horizons. His characters are unique. He has given special importance to casteism, inequality, injustice, spiritualism, superstitions and relationship themes and has evolved them in his novels. Like other regional novelists, Narayan depicted Malgudi as an Indian landscape. Malgudi is the city of his imagination. A critic has rightly described Malgudi as a "country of the mind". Srinivasa Iyengar called Malgudi Narayan's "Casterbridge". To know about the traditions, culture and human values of India, we need to plunge in the depths of his works.

“The English Teacher” and “The Guide” truly reflect the concept of sensibility. In “The English Teacher” Narayan has portrayed typical Indian characters, Indian sensibility and symbols of Indian culture and traditions. It is an autobiographical novel and is related with Narayan’s own life. He was married in 1935 with Rajam but unfortunately she passed away after five years. He wrote about his love for his wife, his wife’s death as the deepest sorrow of his life and other happenings linked with it. It is the story of a college lecturer Krishna who teaches English language and literature in Albert Mission College, Malgudi. He’s married to Susila but lives in the college hostel. Susila and her daughter Leela lived with his parents-in-law. Every day he read Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare. But soon he moved to a rented house in Saryu Street with his family. The married life of Krishna and Susila was a happy and contented one but this compassion and bliss of their married life was transient. On the third birthday of Leela, Krishna’s father offered money as a gift so that they could buy their own house. The dreams of own house in a well-to-do Lawley extension turned to be an ill fate. Susila was locked in a lavatory full of dirt, flies and foul smell. This disgusted her so much that she fell seriously ill. The doctors failed to diagnose her illness. With passage of time, her illness pushed her in the lap of death. Krishna’s life turned void and empty. He lost all his interest in life. The only ray of hope was his daughter Leela. Soon with a band of spirits, Susila’s spirit communicated with Krishna through a rich landlord of Tayur village. This

changed Krishna's life. He now started taking interest in Leela's school. He becomes friendly with the headmaster. The headmaster presents the darker side of married life. The headmaster says, "You may treat me as dead or as one who has taken Sanyasa Ashrama."

Krishna is very impressed by the educational theories of the headmasters. He resigns from his college job and joins the school of the headmaster to experiment with education of school children. He is now able to communicate with his dead wife directly. His dreams turn into reality. He starts feeling the presence of Susila near him. An everlasting joy descends upon his soul.

"The Guide" received the Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1960. It was also adopted for a movie starring Dev Anand as Raju and Waheeda Rehman as Rosie. It is considered as a masterpiece of R.K. Narayan by many critics. It consists of a series of flashbacks. The hero Raju lived in the fictional town of Malgudi on Sarayu River. He goes to the Mangala village after his release from the jail and stays in a desolate shrine on the bank of river Sarayu. There he meets a villager Velan who drags Raju in a life of endless troubles as a spiritual guide. Later Raju narrates to Velan the story of his past life as a tourist guide and a food vendor. He was known to the tourists as 'Railway Raju'. One day Raju as a tourist guide meets an odd tourist couple Marco and Rosie. Rosie has a passion for dance while Marco for ancient monuments. Marco lived at forest bungalow

near Mempi Caves while Rosie stayed at Anand Bhawan Hotel, Malgudi. Belonging to a family of devdasis, Rosie had a passion for dancing but her art is sneered at by her husband. This leads to a rift between Rosie and Marco. Raju takes advantage of this rift and compliments her art, flatters and seduces her. When Marco learns about the illicit relations of his wife with Raju, he leaves Malgudi without her. Rosie has to seek shelter in Raju's house. In spite of warnings of Gaffur, Raju entraps in love for Rosie. Raju's mother leaves the house in protest. Raju and Rosie started staying together like a married couple. Rosie practices dance and soon Raju manages to put up her show at the annual function of Albert Mission School. He helped Rosie in transforming her dreams to reality. Rosie becomes a professional dancer, rich and famous. Raju becomes over-possessive of Rosie and her wealth. When Marco sends certain papers for Rosie's signature on an application for the release of jewellery from a bank, Raju forges her signatures and sends the papers to Marco. Marco drags Raju to court for his illegal act. As a result, Raju is imprisoned for two years and his life is doomed. After being released from the jail, we find Raju outside the temple of Mangala village. It is here we see the transformation of a tourist guide to a spiritual guide. Instead of considering Raju as a fake person, Velan believed him to be a light of hope for the poor and simple villagers of Mangala. When a drought hits the village, Raju as Swami is forced to observe a fast and exert his spiritual powers by the simple minded villagers. It is at this point Raju confesses

his past life of sins and temptations to Velan. He persuades Raju to fast. Raju says, “If by avoiding food I should help the tress bloom and the grass grow, why not do it?” (The Guide ch-211)

Soon Raju was changed to a real saint. He went on a twelve day fast. The scene of fasting by Raju looks every bit of it Indian, with people flocking to have a darshan of the Swami: The roads were choked with traffic, country carts, buses and cycles, jeeps and automobiles of all kinds and ages. Pedestrians in files with hampers and baskets cross the fields.....the air rang with the music of a few who had chosen to help the Swami by sitting near him singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of a harmonium and a tabla. (The Guide ch-214)

On the eleventh day, the exhausted, famished Raju collapses. Thus a railway guide transforms into a spiritual guide and undergoes an act of self-sacrifice for the poor rustics. His journey of regeneration made him a spiritual martyr for the welfare of rustics of Mangala.

It is clear that Narayan has used a foreign language to exhibit typical Indian culture, traditions, thoughts, feelings and emotions. India has a rich varied culture and it is clearly depicted in his novels. His thoughts, feelings and sensibility are deep rooted in the soil of India. The locale of R.K. Narayan novels is invariably Malgudi, a fictional town in South India. In both his novels we find Malgudi but in ‘The Guide’ another

locale is added and that is Mangala village in South India. The main action of these novels is in Malgudi. The landmarks are all Indian i.e. the river Sarayu without which Narayan's novels are incomplete is linked with the emotions of the people of Malgudi, Anand Bhawan Hotel, Srinivasa Temple, the Mempi Hills, the Peak House Forest Bungalow, Railway Station of Malgudi, Colony of snake charmers, Albert Mission College, Albert Mission School, Board High School, lotus pond, ruined temples and so on are all typical with typical Indian names. People are poor, illiterate, ignorant, superstitious and simple minded. The characters are also typically Indian. Raju is a boy of Malgudi studying in PyroI School. Rosie who has a western name is purely Indian. She is a devdasi and studies Bharatnatyam and snake dance. Marco, an archaeologist studies Indian caves and temples. He writes a book titled 'The Cultural History of South India'. Velan and the villagers of Mangala have blind faith in sadhus, swamis and other religious men. Krishna is a lecturer of English in Albert Mission College. His wife Susila is a typical Indian housewife. Susila's mother is a superstitious woman who thinks that some black eye has befallen on her daughter, calls a swami, and smears sacredash on her daughter's forehead. The headmaster who believes in astrology does not die on the day predicted by the astrologer. Family relationships, education, bliss of married life, money, degeneration of relations etc. are the themes that weave the plot of his novels. The married life of Marco and Rosie, the extra-marital affair of Raju and Rosie, Marco's

criticism of his wife's dance, the sourness in the married life of Marco and Rosie, separation of Marco and Rosie, Rosie a devoted wife, Rosie entrapped in love for Raju due to his appreciation for her dance, the blind faith of villagers shows the sensibility of Narayan in which he treats the relation of characters. Similarly in "The English Teacher" the married life of Krishna and Susila is a song of love in marriage, the death of Susila that makes the life of Krishna void and empty, the communication of Krishna with Susila's spirit, the role of jasmine flowers that link Krishna and Susila, the estranged relationship of headmaster and his wife shows how his characters and their relations play a vital role to exhibit his sensibility and indianness. Narayan's characters are both types and individuals.

Srinivasa Iyengar very aptly remarks, "Narayan is of India, even of South India: he uses the English language much as we use to wear dhotis manufactured in Lancashire-but the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness are all of the soils of India."

His novels are suffused with an Indian sensibility. The theme, the characterisation, the locale, the use of language, his style of writing, family relations and his symbols had added flavour of India to his novels. Narayan has given a beautiful presentation of India. The suffering of villagers, their ignorance, illiteracy, superstitions and spiritualism is the root cause of sufferings in India.

His literature is a treasure for posterity with gifts of rich Indian culture and traditions. His works are appreciated in India and abroad. Indo-Anglian literature stands indebted to R.K.Narayan.

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