



R.K.NARAYAN'S NARRATIVE SKILL IN PRESENTING RURAL SCENARIO IN HIS THE GUIDE: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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It is generally held that R.K.Narayan has few equals among modern novelists. As Santha Rama Rao has put it, "he is the best novelist that India has produced and probably among the most entertaining and distinguished of contemporary writers anywhere" (P32). R.K.Narayan is a novelist never pretending to be known as an idealist or a scholar or a propagandist. He is always pure and simple, concentrating mainly on the quality of readability in his novels. Like Jane Austen, R.K.Narayan's range of subject-matter is very linked. He is rooted in Malgudi and it is the life of the middle class people which he describes and analyses in his novels. Narayan is the creator of Malgudi, some imaginary south Indian local. It is like Hardy's 'wessex' – "a dream country in which physical features of various places, intimately known to the novelist, fuse and mingle, and are re-arranged, modified and magnified"

Narayan's greatest achievement was to make literature. The Guide considered as one of the best novels of R.K.Narayan published in the year 1958. The daily life of the Indians, the traditional of the land and indeed the superstition and values of Indian gains a form in the remarkable novel, The Guide. R.K.Narayan quite consciously in his novel The Guide echoes more about Rural Life of Indian society amidst his literal symbolism. His chief concern is to give an artistic expression of Indian life. The Guide depicts Indian religious belief, superstitions and rural local rather richly. The blind faith of the Indian masses in Sadhus and religious men is depicted in their acceptance of Raju as a Swami. However, by becoming a Sadhu and accepting the traditional belief in Sacrifice, Self-discipline and purification, he brings harmony and order to his spiritual life.

Narayan gives a realistic picture of the plight of Indian villagers. He authentically portrays the problems of a country dependent on agriculture and monsoons. Drought leads to the inevitable famine, dying cattle, lack of water, hoarding by merchants, riots, penance, pujas and sacrifices to appease the rain-God. He is a detached observer concentrating on a rustic scene to sense the atmosphere of the place to show a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities. In the words of K.N.Joshi,

"His province was the South Indian middle class which he knew how to handle fiction. He was a prudent of Hindu middle class, sharing the beliefs, superstitions and the prejudices of his class, in a small town and viewing it going on with sympathy but also with a keen eye for comic in life around him, and so he had qualified himself to be a writer of his own class and provincial town" (P 127).

There is nothing in his works about the angry reformist feeling which forms the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand, with his passionate concern for the villages and rural scenario, with the ferocious poverty and crucifixes of caste, with orphans, untouchables, urban laborers. Narayan's work contains no scaled sense of social justice, no anguish, no colonial indignation and yet he is clearly on Indian as any other writer. His is a realistic portrayal of Hindu ethos and eccentricities rather than in sustained exploration and searching examination of tragic conflicts. He fails to give an adequate picture of the agonized feelings of either Rosie or Marco after they part their ways. As Dr.Gupta observes,

"It is my strong skimming the surface of life and capturing the idiocies and idio syncracies of the men and women of his fictional world, just seems to shrink from the responsibility of delving deep into their hearts and souls when they are caught in the grip of tragic emotions" (P19)

A well-known critic V.Paraduranga is therefore absolutely right when he observes

"Narayan is a writer with a full commitment to certain spiritual and religious values and ideas, with which Indians are normally familiar, Narayan's vision is essentially normal, for the problems he sets himself to resolve in his novels are largely ethical" (PP 99-100)

Narayan observes complete objectivity in his novels and describes and judges the contemporary life in an unbiased and detached manner. His descriptions of things, events, situations and characters evince his dispassionate interest in them. He



does not profound any particular theory of ideology like nationalism, socialism or alike, in him novels. He presents the rural scenes, situations and characters of life as they are, without any distortions. He presents life as it is. He confines himself to a particular region of South India that is, the town and district of Malgudi. Just as Thomas Hardy lays all his novels upon the background of Wessex, Narayan weaves his novels on the background of Malgudi. This town figures in almost all his novels. It also plays an important role in the development of his characters and action in his novels. Srinivasa Iyengar writes.

“Narayan’s is the art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration, he is content, like Jane Austen, with his little bit of ivory, just so many inches wide; he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul, catch the Uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic, Malgudi is Naryan’s Casterbridge but the inhabitants of Malgudi – although they may have their recognizable local trappings – are essentially human and hence, have their kniship with all humanity. In this sense, Malgudi is everywhere” (P 63)

Narayan’s Swami and Friends is the story of ten year old Swaminathan, a boy full of innocence, wonder and mischief and his experiences in growing up in the fictional town of Malgudi. He is a student at the British established Albert Mission school which Christianity, English literature and value of education. Life changes dramatically for young Swami when Rajam, symbol of colonial power – joins the school and becomes a close friend. The description in the first page starts with Swami considering Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. Life for Swami consists mainly of having adventures with his friends. Graham Greene wrote: “It was Mr.Narayan with his Swami and Friends, who first brought India in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life alive to me. Swami is the story of a child written with complete objectivity, with a humor as strange to our fiction as close to Tcheckov than to any English writer, the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness” (P7) As part of description of rural scenario, River Sarayu has been pictures by Narayan as the pride of Malagudi and its sanbanks cure the people of the town.

The Guide, Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, is the most famous of his novels. As most of his novels, the Guide has Malgudi as a fictional town in Southern India. Raju, the central character, grew up near a railway station and becomes a shopkeeper and than a resourceful guide. He presents his concept of traditionalism through the middle class life of Malgudi, In the Guide; Narayan takes up the rural life through various characters. Rosie is artistically inclined young wife of ‘Marco’ the eccentric art critic who meets Raju – an enthusiast tourist guide at Malgudi Railway station and this meeting gives a new turn to her life. Rosie’s married life with Marco was woefully incompatible unfulfilled and tedious so much so that Raju couldn’t help marveling at glaring contrast between the two-one full with promise of life, vibrant and aglow whereas the ‘other appeared a grotesque’ creature, preoccupied with dead and longlost things like cave walls. In his initial meeting with Rosie, Raju profusely praises her art:

“I spoke my mind, I praised her dancing,
I spoke out my love-what glorious snake
dance! Oh, I kept thinking of you all night
world’s artist number one!” (P 84)

C.D. Narasinhiah, for instance, considers Raj as a transformed man in the end, someone who has attained authentic sainthood,

“With all his limitation, Raju’s is a rich and complex life-achieving integration at last” (P186)

R.K. Narayanan differs from both Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in his treatment of rural life by concerning himself mainly with the conflict between tradition and modernity. However, the depiction of rural life is fraught with certain built in limitations. The man who had gone to the source of river spoke all right about it. “It must be the source of Sarayu mentioned in the mythological stories of goddess Parvathi jumping into the fire. The carving on one of the pillars of the shrine actually shows the goddess plugging into the fire and water arising from the spot” (P57)

In this novel, the readers’ attention is drawn to the rural society in ignorance. R.K. Narayan shows rural India which is predominantly agricultural society. It is pertinent to understand the life of the people of the country as a whole. It is more specifically true about India even today as it continues to be predominantly rural. The novelist delineates how the villagers



become a prey to the vagaries of nature, face the loss of crops, famine etc. This reflects the wretched condition of life that any Indian rural village faces every year.

To conclude, it may be said that The Guide presents a rural society with all its predilections, beliefs in ancient customs and disruption of the life caused by nature. Velan and the villagers are the true representatives of rural society with all tradition, culture, rites, and rituals.

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