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Style of writing in R. K. Narayan's writings

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Abstract

Style is the manner of linguistic expression both in verse and prose. The typicality of style of an author can be analyzed from 'diction' point of view. Style comprises figurative language, rhythmic pattern and rhetorical choice of lexicals. It also refers to the tone, diction and imagery in writing. The R. K. Narayan's style is graceful and contains elegance. It is straightforward and sans affectation and obscurity. His is a traditional and conservative style and avoids cheap ornaments. His fortes are structure and form. He has perfect grip over English language profusely to convey the essence of his thoughts in order to delineate social patterns of life. None can resist from reading his writings and the readers are enthralled by his wit. Moreover, his stories possess captivating feelings.

Keywords: R. K. Narayan

1. Introduction

Style is the manner of linguistic expression either in prose or poetry. It denotes how a writer says whatever he says. The typical style of an author can be analyzed in terms of 'diction'. Style includes choice of words, syntax, sentence structure, figurative language, the rhythmic pattern and rhetorical devices. To be more specific it refers to the tone, diction and imagery in writing. Narayan's style is also notable for its economy of detail and purity. It is never weighed with words. English has a virile force and a mastery which conveys the maximum of meaning in the fewest and simplest words. It is the stylistic features of his art of fiction that are analyzed by numerous critics. As an Indian writer in English, Narayan is unique. His education has been completely native. He had not been to England or any western country before he did the best part of his work. This innocence of alien influence is revealed in his original and un-self conscious handling of the language. Narayan's English is pure, sensitive but simple, yet without the distinctive colour and idiom of its native England. It is, sufficient and satisfying as a means of expression for Narayan. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand are still the most prominent names among the Indian writers. Anand with his debut novel 'Coolie' and Raja Rao with his maiden work 'Kanthapura' and Narayan with his openings of 'Swami and Friends' remain tall in the Indian writing in English literature even now. He has built up himself into the staple of a nation's literature. He is the professional writer, with a great combination of art and acumen.

Definition of 'Style'-----

The problem of defining and classifying 'style' is much perplexing. It is a task to define 'style'. Style is like the 'personality' and other abstract terms. Since it is tough to explain 'personality' and many other elusive terms, so it is difficult to define 'style'. Personality in man is the ultimate mystery, so is style in a writer. It is the essence of an aesthetic pleasure. Style is messy and tough to tell what constitutes style and how a writer cultivates style. Though it does not specifically identify with writer's body or heart or soul, we may define like the manifestation of the origin, growth and development of the structure of the tree itself. As mentioned by John Middleton Murray, "A discussion of word 'style' if it were pursued with only a fraction of the rigour of a scientific investigation, which inevitably cover the whole of literary aesthetics and the theory of criticism. Six books would not suffice for the attempt: much less would six lectures"¹. The present study focuses on estimating the works of Narayan by means of stylistic analysis. The term, 'stylistics' has been used a branch of linguistics. The term 'linguistic' has been employed both for language and the science of language. An attempt has been made to objectively analyze the novels and short stories of Narayan, keeping in mind the fact that in the ultimate analysis, the critical response is subjective and a stylistic approach can only supply supporting evidence for the intuitive judgments in literary criticism.

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What is 'Stylistics'? -----

The term 'Stylistics' has been in current use in German since the early nineteenth century. The first example recorded by Grimm's dictionary is from 'Novalis'. In English the noun-stylistics is registered as early as 1964. Stylistics is attested firstly in 1882-83(O.E.D). In our century, Charles Bally, regarding language as an intellectual, psychic and social system, reiterated the 'expressive value' of language. Recently, the term 'stylistics' has come to mean the linguistic study of a literary text, the scientific study of 'style', of language as a function, of the mode and manner and variety of literature oral or written. To be precise, stylistics is the study of the linguistic features of a literary text— phonological, syntactical and lexical, which directly affect the meaning of utterance. Hence, it is the study of expressiveness such as rhythm, euphony, emotive overtones, symmetry and also the so called 'associate' elements which place style in a particular register such as literary, colloquial, or slangy associate it with a specific milieu namely, proverbial, professional or historical etc., and explores the possibility of selecting between two or more alternatives — 'stylistic variants' which mean the same thing, but are different in their language structure: He came too soon and; He arrived prematurely. Modern criticism looks upon a work of literary art as an organic unity, in which matter and manner, thought and expression are indisputably one. The current day style studies depend upon the literary craftsmanship and verbal texture of the work of art. External literary history and conventional literary judgment has been cast off as an obsolete irrelevance. Precise analysis and reference have given rise to a new kind of stylistic criticism. Stylistics as a branch of linguistics has been widely accepted since long and as an important tool of literary criticism.

"The claim of stylistics rests essentially on the preposition that the farthest ranges of a writer's art, the depths of his emotional experience, the heights of the spiritual insights, are expressed only through an animation of his verbal art".²

Most of the writings of Narayan were published in England and have drawn much appreciation from renowned authors and critics such as Graham Greene, Walter Allen, E.M.Forster, Pearl S. Buck, V.S. Naipaul, Ved Mehta etc., Many of his followers in America consider him to be on of the World's three giant modern writers, the other two being William Faulkner and Earnest Hemingway. In most of his novels, Narayan simply selects a protagonist and weaves a story around him depending on his intrinsic ability to make situations and characters, but definitely not on the plot, that clearly strike a chord in the heart of the reader. While "Swami and Friends" explored the psyche of the school-going hero Swaminathan, "The Bachelor of Arts" had for its nucleus Chandran, a youth, his vicissitudes of fortune interwoven with his romantic capers. The prominent forte of Narayan's writings is his comic vision, which is universal in appeal without losing the essential fragrance of its Indianness. He is the most authentic and artistic of all Indian writers in English and presents people as they are unbiased. He presents a pardoned moral vision in his works sans didactics. Moreover, his foresight has its roots in an ageless heritage of tradition and culture. The secret of Narayan's amazing success is linked with the aesthetic pleasure that he provides to his readers. He interprets Indian life solely from

'art for art's sake' point of view, maintaining complete objectivity and impartiality. Many of his short stories and novels have a common backdrop of the imaginary town of Malgudi and his both male and female characters are generally the masses who inhabit the little town. The best examples are "The Painter of Signs", "The Talkative Man", "The Financial Expert", "The World of Nagaraj" etc., which deal with the ups and downs of the lives of the denizens of the colourful town, Malgudi.

The technique of 'Impersonality'.

The first and the foremost characteristic feature of Narayan's style as a writer is his dispassionate way in which he judges the Indian-life of his contemporary times. He too like other authors, possesses the exceptional quality of being 'impersonal'. He is very much particular about humanity and therefore, never takes sides. All his works contain neither didacticism nor propaganda. He interprets Indian life purely on the basis of aesthetic sense with unbiased objectivity. He is considered to be the most authentic 'stylist' of Indian writers as he presents the people as they are without any personal bias. Thus he is often compared to Anton Chekov and Jane Austen. Just like Chekov, he too addresses the reader in his own person as a dispassionate observer. His prime motto is to present a scene formed in his mind very convincingly. He takes utmost care in not touching the issues such as social, economical and political. He does not uphold nor denounce any cause. His writings are away from ideological prejudices. With his own temperament, he holds himself aloof, not as an actor but as a spectator sympathizing but not sharing in the interests of the world around him. He does hold mirror up to nature like William Shakespeare and does not give distorted version. Moreover, the middle class family life in a South Indian ambience has remained a common ingredient in all his writings.

Narayan's novels resemble the novels of character as written by Dickens, Smollett, Thackeray and Henry Fielding. In the similar manner of their works, Narayan's characters too are not conceived as parts of the plot, they exist independently and the action is subservient to them. The part of 'structure' is too loose and rambling like that of picaresque novels of character. However, the Narayan's 'Picaro'- Sampath, Vasu and Margayya hardly travel wide and breath in space of a single town. Nevertheless the characters of Narayan unchanging and static, they are the creatures of flesh and blood. Like Thackeray's characters, he can also say— "I know the people utterly — I know the sound of their voices".³ He drew the characters both as individuals and types. Strictly speaking, he portrayed the species in terms of the individual. Nataraj is a typical printer, Margayya is a typical financial wizard and Daisy is an enthusiastic activist for the cause of family planning, still they are fully individualized characters with their own idiosyncrasies, entirely different from the other persons of their class. One of the significant features of Narayan as a novelist is his rare descriptive art.

The greatest property of Narayan as a descriptive artist is his graceful and simple style. There are very few Indian writers who are able to handle English with so much purity and elegance as he does. In both dialogue and narrative he is

expert. It is to the ease, the naturalness and refinement of his prose that we owe a large part of our pleasure in reading him. The very distinct quality of Narayan's prose style is its transparency and simplicity. It is straight forward and free from obscurity and affectation. It is neither dull nor showy, rather marked with accuracy. Simplicity and clarity of his style is due to the result of his use of the very language of everyday life and his adherence to the accepted patterns of sentence structure and the diction. His is not an experimental one but a traditional and conservative style. He rarely uses Hindustani words and phrases in his narrative and so he does not need any glossary and his English is not jerky. Narayan expression aims at grace and ease rather than artificial picturesque and glow. He avoids cheap ornaments and rhetoric. He does not crave for effect. Unlike the Victorian prose writers, Ruskin and Macaulay, he never tests our patience with purple passages of digression and irrelevant description. As is said of Thackeray, words seem to flow from his pen without any effort "like snow water upon the mountainside". It is this which makes his style clear and forcible. Although he rarely uses 'figures of speech', he makes them very appropriate and suggestive. His similes are simple, effective and exact:

"The summer sun shone like a ruthless arc lamp _____ and all the water in the well evaporated and the road-dust became bleached and weightless and flew about like flour spraying off the grinding wheels". 4

Narayan's style and his use of the English language and idiom have been world-wide acknowledged as the greatest achievement of his technique. He sincerely conveys different shades of speech of a middle class South Indian or a lay man spending time across the bazaar streets of Malgudi in simple and plain style. He wrote in English and had served his purpose admirably conveying in a crystal clear manner the thoughts and actions of personalities who grew in a small town in a corner of South India. Commenting on Narayan's handling of English language P.S.Sundaram says:

"The notion that there is some virtue in an Indian's using of an Indian Language --- even though it may not be his mother tongue--- and it is a fraud and a sin for an Indian to write in English or French or Russian has nothing to do either with one's natural inclination, or reason or common sense --- and one may be thankful that Narayan at any rate is free from it". 5

Before India attained Independence Narayan published four novels, of which three must be treated as a group : "Swami and Friends" (1935), "The Bachelor of Arts" (1937) and skipping "The Dark Room" (1938) which apparently stands by itself, "The English Teacher" (1945) which were published in the U.S.A. The novel "The Bachelor of Arts" was written in a formal structure so as to grab the attention of the older readers. It was proved very popular among the young people and the central theme being the 'youth stage'. The central character Chandran is twenty-one years old when the story is opened is found with full of hopes and aspirations besides with his dreams, plans and prejudices. When the story is about to end, he is twenty-five and has had his rub with life, has had his share of 'antics and hysterics'; he is grown-up now and able to order his life, with a philosophy of his own. Chandran, with his misdirected energies and

unguided courses plays a pivotal role in the story. The crux of the novel is Chandran's revolt against his failure to wed the girl whom he has first seen on the banks of Sarayu river one evening. Although he has not spoken to her since they first met, he has loved her so passionately. He abandons house out of dejection and after a period of listless wanderings under the guise of 'sanyasin', returns, marries normally and settles down, as people usually do. To those who ordinarily believe that the Indians are other-worldly, the novel must be a sort of revelation. It suggests a vision which reiterates that life must be gratefully accepted and joyously lived. The charm of the book derives from this vision of life and from Narayan's treatment of the invariable pattern of the human existence and the passage of Time.

"The English Teacher" is an unusual love story: it celebrates wedded love, and the reunion of the couple at the end is psychic. The work is basically a story of triumph amidst strife, of fulfillment out of failure, of man triumphing over the modality of life and death. All other characters except Krishna are merely incidental to his spirit's struggle. In order to consolidate his married happiness, Krishna loses all: his wife's Suseel's infection and death result from their visit to a house which they were planning to buy after their child's third birthday. Krishna is dazed with woes. While he was glancing at his wife's funeral pyre, he reflects: 'For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else ___ nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter' .6 But the human spirit has dormant powers of resilience; life asserts itself and sets afoot the healing process. In cleansing his mind of sorrowfulness Krishna is helped by his wife's incarnate spirit. The demanding process of his psychic development too aids him to perceive the reality all men have to face one day: 'A profound, unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life.' 7 He is rewarded finally when he 'meets' Suseela's spirit. ___ for which he is grateful to life and death'. It is evident that Krishna practises some form of yoga. Although he does not call by names, he passes through all the usual stages of Raja Yoga, particularly, the last three stages of dharma, dhyana and Samadhi. The ultimate aim of the practice of Raja Yoga is self-realization which leads to mental concentration and self-control. The narrative authenticity of the novel is so immense that it is the most intimate of Narayan's novels.

In "Swami and Friends", the hero is little Swami is an incorrigible dreamer, campaigning against conventional discipline at home and school. The charm of Swami's adventures has an endless appeal as the novel succeeds in creating the diverting world of boyhood. This work is an unpretentious one that makes a promising beginning. This story indicates wisdom bent on survival and a long innings. It also portrays the character of Malgudi, with its woods and hills as well as river and untidy lanes. Though the town expands gradually the character will never alter, that of a 'small town located in a corner of South India'. The personality of Swami is a comic mixture of weakness and virtue ---- weak, naïve but sensitive and completely human, with 'a luminous core of innocence'. The novel has a basic plan; "a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order___ followed by a return, a renewal, restoration of normalcy". 8

In "Waiting for Mahatma" Narayan treats the subject of India's awakening under the benign influence of Mahatma

Gandhi as the myth of the Mahatma, a treatment which presupposes faith in the promise of God to come to the protection of the humble and to sublimate evil. In "The Man-eater", the theme is universal and it is the conflict between Faith and Reason, and ultimately Faith prevails. Thus in "The Man-eater", the problem of the harmful effects of modern civilization, which is prominent throughout Narayan's work is finally resolved. Narayan's use of the English language answered many questions that are raised on the adequacy of a foreign language being the medium of Indian writers. Every writer of Indian English himself faced with the problem of adapting and using the English language for literary purposes. Narayan has got the command of English language profusely to convey the quintessence of his thought as to describe the intricate social patterns of life. His grip of simple, conventional style makes him to delineate the characters and situations with assurance and ease. One is struck with the impression of beautiful simplicity of language. He is accustomed to cling to the conventional idiom. His diction has been characterized by simplicity and purity. This quality of his style is the direct result of his attitude to the English language. He scarcely finds any difficulty in handling the English language, and so his short stories present no difficulty of language to his readers. It is not out of context to quote William Walsh while giving interview to the B.B.C. he says:

Until you mentioned another tongue, I never had any idea that I was writing in another tongue. My whole education has been in English from the primary school, and most of my reading has been in the English language. The language and literature of this country flourished in Indian soil until lately. It still remains the of the intelligentsia. But English had been with us for over a century and a half. I am particularly fond of the language. I was never aware that I was using a different, a foreign language when I wrote in English because it came to me very easily. I can't explain how. English is a very adaptable language. And it's so transparent it can take on the tint of any country. 9

Narayan as a story – teller -----

Narayan's short stories are distinguished by naturalness. He employs simple style of a story- teller. The narration of very ordinary events in the lives of his characters is done in an unaffected prose, a 'plain prose'. The narrative holds up a mirror to the simple and the relaxed way of living of people in Narayan's fictional world. The form and content exist in a symbolic relationship with each other providing us with an impression of life in a very plain, down-to-earth manner without any emotionalism. Incidents flow naturally, one out of another, in the same way as they would actually happen in life. The story just tells itself. Events happen and characters live in innumerable equations of human relationship. During the course of the narration one hardly perceives the presence of the writer. Even a lay man who has got only a working knowledge of English can read most of the stories of Narayan. This simplicity is what strikes the mind of the readers most. His language belongs to the everyday world of ordinary people. It is the language in which a common man dreams, loves, laughs and laments. His way of writing gives the distinct impression of a South Indian community confined to a particular temporal and spatial setting, their

manners and musings, conversations and instinctive reactions to things. His style is distinctive for its razor-sharp precision. The sentences are short and pithy. The shortness of the sentences brilliantly relates his ironic portrayal of a situation or a character. Besides, it gives an eloquent expression to an intensity of feeling and builds up a world of make-belief:

This is all beside the point. Let me get on with the story. One day I had gone to the river for a bath. It was an exhilarating evening. I had done a good day's work. (An Astrologer's Day, P.37)

In his style, Narayan 'displays his own unique signature'. 10 Through the skillful use of language, he successfully captures the rhythm of life that is peculiar to Malgudi and its people. The most striking characteristic feature of his style is its lucidity. His sentences are short and intensely communicative, for instance, he delineates the thoughts of Subbiah in a simple lucid style:

This seemed, for a practical purpose, a region beyond life, death and Change. It might have been so for the war. It frightened him. It seemed at first to be the end of all things. But after the first shock was over, it proved not so unwelcome after all. (Lawley Road, P. 44)

Narayan has written dialogues meticulously keeping in view of the occasions and situations. By stylization, arrangement and judicious selection, he has turned the simple talk into the art of beautiful conversation. With the help of his powerful and scintillating dialogues and witty conversations, he has been able to suggest continuity between his fictional world and the real world. His dialogues are sustained and appropriate. He maintains a perfect balance between his dialogue and description. The dialogues used in "Uncle's Letters", "An Astrologer's Day", "Fellow Feeling" etc. are crisp and realistic. For example in "An Astrologer's Day", Narayan brings out the overwhelming enthusiasm of Guru Nayak:

"You were left for dead. Am I right?" said the astrologer. "Ah, tell me more". "A knife has passed through you once?" said the astrologer. "Good fellow!" He bared his chest to show the scar. "What else?" "And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead". "I should have been dead if some passer by had not chanced to peep into the well," exclaimed the other... (An Astrologer's Day, P.5)

One of Narayan's favourite stylistic devices is the short passage of a digressive nature. The inner wandering is used both as a narrative device to link the past with the present and the present with the future and also to explore the character's state of mind and indicate his metaphysical attitudes and responses. It means the writer gives his characters an inner life while retaining his objectivity as narrator. The inner wandering conveys more than a state of mind and feelings. Narayan employs the suggestive style in order to present the mind of Ramu's mother in "Mother and Son" when Ramu he has not returned home at night. The

deliberately pedestrian language completely conveys the feelings of restlessness and worry caused by sorrowful condition. The best examples for this style is, 'the old Agrahar Street looking deserted', 'the tonga driver's faint song', 'the blast of a night constable's whistle', 'the twinkling of electric light' etc. The digressional method is also noticed in the stories such as "A Shadow", "The Roman Image". Here the author weaves a story to narrate an incident so as to drive home a point. In the story "The Roman Image", the villager provides an account of how the image of the 'dwarapalaka' had been thrown into the river. In the same manner, in "A Shadow", Narayan tells the story at a great length of the Tamil film "Kumari". The apt digressional method of revealing adds to the charm of the story. It builds up and also contributes to the total effect of the story. While sketching persons and places, the writer maintains strict economy and concentrates on concrete details. The following description of the Golden Street in the story "Seventh House" goes like this:

The old house had pyols, pillars, railing, and were painted in garnish colours, as the houses of prostitutes were reputed to be in former times, but the signboards on the houses indicated that the occupants were lawyers, tradesmen and teachers. The only relic of the old days was a little shop in an obscure corner that sold perfumes in coloured bottles and strings of jasmine flower and roses.
(A Horse and Two Goats, P.141)

Narayan was endowed with simplicity, precision and directness. The influence of his early stint in journalism has to be considered in analyzing his style. What he aims at in his expression is grace and ease sans artificial glow. He avoids rhetoric and cheap ornament. He never gives the impression that he is striving to produce effect. His style has a remarkable alertness and lucidity. He rarely uses figures of speech ; but whenever he uses them, he makes them very appropriate and suggestive. Many Indian – English idioms which have become common currency appear in Narayan's writing and his similes are brief but expressive.

"Truth", Sekhar reflected, "is like the sun".
(Lawley Road, P.156)
"Your engine fits it like a cork".
(An Astrologer's Day, P.202)
"I will pulp you down with an old rotten sandal".
(An Astrologer's Day, P.56)
"I'd love to take the devil under my skin if I can kick these walls and bring down this miserable ramshackle on the head of whoever owns it".
(Old and New, P.20)

On the whole, Narayan's style comprises lucidity, liveliness, simplicity and humour. He is such a stylist that his style is filled with idiomatic expressions and naturalness. Thus his way of writing is delicate and elegant. His description of incidents is down-to-earth and pleasing with the natural impulse. With the help of agility of style, he passes into humourous, tragic, ironic and realistic portrayal of life. He is very much particular about purity of style and moral quality. He finds the plain language as a vehicle of truth. His style and technique have compatibility with the theme of the story. Narayan himself told about the cultivation of this unadorned style:

"I am very conscious of style, and I wish to make the style as unnoticed as possible --- style should not be noticed. The idea must be more prominent than the style in which it is written. That's is a very difficult style you know--- you have that kind of thing only in the Bible. It means you have to remove things which are extraneous; an ornament here and there. You have to have a watchful eye to make your sentences just right. It's very hard. That's what I try to do. I'm aware of this style which is one that abolishes style".
11

Thus, style is not a decoration on the subject-matter, but the very medium in which the subject is turned into art. Style is the embodiment of an author's vision. Since Narayan's comic vision embrace an intense humanism and his comic mode constitutes of the language of everyday world, of a style that simply and honestly tells the story of lay men as they reside in the small town of Malgudi. His language and narrative style regulate the tone of the story. The reader instead of remaining away from the happenings, gets involved in it and becomes a citizen of the fictional world. Narayan treats the actions, hopes and aspirations of the common man in a common language. The style and the language provide an impression of acquaintance and there is a nostalgia which springs from its unpretentious simplicity. In Narayan's stories, there is a moderation of style that corresponds to the flow of life. His language has got a charm of ordinary speech. It goads the readers to realize the fictional reality on account of our intimacy with the language. While reposing his faith in human life, Narayan records beauty of the layman's existence:

"It was four hours past the Muhurtam on the day of the wedding. A quiet had descended on the gathering. The young smart bridegroom from Delhi was seated in a chair under the pandal. Fragrance of sandal, and flowers, and holy smoke, hung about the air. People were sitting around the bridegroom talking".
(An Astrologer's Day P.14)

Most of his essays expound Narayan's sustained loyalty to English and its need for India. In "A Story-Teller's World" "he openly espouses English for all across length and breath of the country. With a spurious claim that English is Indian, or 'swadeshi', and yet arguing that English should be Indianised. Narayan is evidently undisturbed by the fact that the structure of a language dictates the structure of one's thinking, a fact that rises the question. Although his formal education was discouraging, Narayan's personal reading was avid but desultory, with the most emphasis on English writers and little attention to the stories of his own ancient heritage. None the less, he seems to have read an incredible number of books and magazines for his age; and while his reading was desultory, his writing habit was marked by discipline, method and a clear destination. He was elated to roam about in outside nature and also in noticing people meticulously and made notes about the types of characters he met. Passion does not have place in his scheme of presentation. Every indication towards utterance of narration brings the best of natural temperament or the depth of natural inquisition from the individual. The range of a realized form is normally at the disposal of the person who happens to command and enjoy a good relationship with the immediate environment. We can say that emotive context is explicated

through realizable nuisance of the life. There cannot be the effective indictment of any suppression of any intensive event or warmth. In “An Astrologer’s Day”, one really has an opportunity to understand what Narayan wants others understand:

“This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to himself next minute”. 12

Narayan’s characters are of every day, his novels and short stories are comedies of the kind that require a limited social setting with well-defined rules, and “Malgudi is a creation of art”. Narayan is thankful to India, whose material for short stories is infinite. His Malgudi stays with him; it stays with him even when he stays in New York. “I can detect Malgudi characters even in New York, for example, West Twenty – third street, where I have lived for many months at a time off and on since 1959, possesses every element of Malgudi, with its land marks and humanity remaining unchanged”. 13 His work demonstrates a sanguine acceptance of present – day India. His stories have the brevity and limitations of fables mixed with a certain slickness, limited, perhaps, from the fiction of those English magazines like the ‘Mercury’. Many of his works deal with people to whom a few rupees --- even as little as one rupee a day --- means the difference between starvation and survival. For example, “Naga” narrates the predicament of a boy somewhat more than ten years old whose father, a snake charmer, has abandoned him, leaving him eight paise in small change and a snake too enfeebled by age to impress the street crowds. “No one is afraid of you”, the boy tells the snake, “and do you know what that means? I starve, that’s all”.

Narayan’s tale-telling impulse carries his readers along, providing them with protean variety of incidents, funny and sad (as in the case of Ramanujam of “The Missing Mail” and of the Lawley Extension patient who turns the corner despite the doctor of “The Doctor’s World”). The blind man’s insatiable thirst for money and for exploiting the loyalty of the dog in “The Blind Dog” and Rajam Iyer’s behavior in the third-class compartment (in “Fellow Feeling”), are realistic pictures. Some of his stories commence with monologues such as the utterances of the Talkative Man in “The Snake Song”, a man playing the flute with such inspiration that god Nagaraja appears and forces him to play all night long. A certain benign fate guides these characters in their little town; their lives are brief and appear flimsy as, for illustration Raja, the pickpocket of “The Trail of the Green Blazer”, who is portrayed sympathetically. Off and on Narayan’s well-known works such as “A Horse and Two Goats” and “An Astrologer’s Day”, that are included in “Under the Banyan Tree”. In “Horse and Two Goats” a Tamil poor farmer sits by roadside attending his goats when a passing American vehicle runs out of gas. When the American intends to buy the mud horse under which Muni sits. Initially, Muni believes that the American wants to have some conversation and then that he wishes to purchase two goats. While the American in English, Muni in his informal Tamil which led to misinterpretation in gestures as well as speech. The clash is evident as Muni being the village folk in India and the American, being a cosmopolitan from New York. The

surprise thing is that in spite of the fact that the Western reader of this story knows the world of the American best, he or she will be inclined to see the encounter through Muni’s perspective. Narayan cleverly builds up an understanding of the details of life for the Tamil peasant, we are forced to look at this American with new eyes; in effect, to look at ourselves and our own assumptions. The writer hardly chastises Westerners. It proposes that the misunderstandings are based on goodwill.

The spoken charm or oral quality of Narayan’s writing is unmistakable. Majority of his works come from first-person narrative. Whether it be somber collection, self-justifying reverie, comical recounting, poignant nostalgia or a compulsive talk, it has the intimacy of the talking voice. It is distinctly not the voice of a distant and stern adjudicator of human predicament; rather, it is confiding, spontaneous ---- as though unedited, full of warmth and verve. Moreover, Narayan’s world is very much like the world of his storyteller in “Gods, Demons, and Others”

“Everything is interrelated. Stories, scriptures, ethics, philosophy, grammar, astrology, astronomy, semantics, mysticism, and moral codes ---- each is part and parcel of total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four-square understanding of existence. Literature is not a branch of study to be placed in a separate compartment, for the edification of only for scholars, but a comprehensive and artistic medium of expression to benefit the literate and the illiterate alike”. 14

The characters in Narayan have intimacy, assurance, and honesty. His humour and his stories are of the tradition of the “Panchatantra” and the “Hitopadesa”: they are didactic and in places downright funny. Humour abounds in a language of vitality and of living expression. In Indian writing in English, humour acquires connotations different from those of the West. If Chesterton’s bishop had slipped on a banana-skin in an Indian street, people might attribute it to demonic possession, but they would laugh before rising to help him up. Narayan’s portraits never go outdated in a country like India. Ramy, of “Mother and Son”, who could not pass the intermediate examination or even twenty rupees, is pressurized by his mother to marry her bother’s daughter; he leaves home after dinner. The mother spends a sleepless night, chanting the sacred name of Sri Rama and imagining that her son may be drowned in a tank. In the wee hours, she discovers, to her discouragement and fear, that he was sleeping on one of the stone benches on the tank side. This work proves to whisper that there is a limit to what we can bear and that sometimes an insignificant event can crush us. The Ayah of “A Willing Slave”, gets two meals per day, with five children. Kanna, who had not a quarter of an anna played dice at the Mantapam, losing all the money stolen from his son’s box”. The sacredness of the lay man is bound into the substance of the characters. Literature should entertain and uplift the society. Narayan never loses his hold on those perennial things of literature. He is successful to achieve in all aspects. Among the writers in Indian Writing in English, Narayan has a distinctive voice. As a lively storyteller, he tells his stories humorously and withholds the derisive sting. While portraying the failing and foibles of the town folk, he never fails to extend to them his humane indulgence. His bond with the reader strengthens as he

writes about the living world he witnesses. The subject matters of Narayan's writings can be described in his own word: "The material available to a story writer in India is limitless. Within a broad climate of inherited culture there are endless variations: every individual differs from every other individual, not only economically, but in outlook, habits and day-to-day philosophy. It is stimulating to live in a society that is not standardized or mechanized, and is free from monotony". 15

When Western critics write about the work of Narayan, they are likely to mention the way in which he has made the English language and a European literary form, the novel, seem Indian --- at least, to Western readers. They are likely to comment that Narayan's success lie in the use of one cultural medium to convey the atmosphere of a quite different culture. Indian short story writers were deeply influenced by the Western short story writers. The magnificent model of writing the tales were provided by such works as Richard Burton's "One Thousand and One Nights, Sir Arthur Doyle's detective works about Sherlock Homes. Then there are grand masters like Maupassant of France, Chekov and Tolstoy of Russia Somerset Maugham of England and O. Henry of America. It is noticeable that Indian writer is in the direct line of Maupassant with whom he shares certain innate qualities -- "uninterrupted narration, preservation of curiosity, and the resulting clear picture of life". 16 Moreover, the freedom struggle infused in the mind of Indian writer a sense of love and pride for his mother land. He presented the predicament of people, their problems and triumphs etc., in a language that can be comprehended by the ordinary reader. Many of Narayan's short stories are the recollections of the protagonists; they are narrations which express the quiet wisdom of hindsight. This is radically different from the time-reversed, attention grabbing technique of plunging headlong into the fray at a point of conflict, developing a complication and manoeuvring a resolution.

In "Uncle", the little boy's attachment to Uncle and his growing awareness of the sinister history of that adored elder is told from the contentment of an easy chair. The narrator himself is the beneficiary, the inheritor of Uncle's presumably wicked spoils. As a young man supported by the gentle of souls, the god-loving imposter, he hates with moral issues with convenient speed. When he reveals the story, he is lazy and indulgent as well as surely not given to either self-doubt or self-blame. It is typical of Narayan and explains partly, the importance of "Uncle". In terms of outer action, his works are designed traditionally. Usually the progression is chronological and mostly presented as incidents recalled by the protagonist. The English teacher, Raju, Talkative Man, the nephew in "Uncle" are some of them. Though there is a deliberate self-awareness, there is not back-swirl of the stream of consciousness. The narrative moves along naturally, without any effort in a quiet yet lively tempo of natural expression. Even though we randomly open any page of Narayan's writing, we are assured that his style and wit are not lost but enthrallingly present. Here is the specimen of the introductory lines from "Talkative Man":

"They call me Talkative Man. Some affectionately shorten it to TM: I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with

others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back, I don't care. I'd choke if I didn't talk...perhaps like Sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst". 17

A multi-splendoured personality, Narayan has been a novelist, an essayist, a short story writer and a writer of travelogues. His literary output is substantial and his works have the honour of being published in innumerable languages of the world. It is note-worthy how an unpretentious and simple author like Narayan, rooted in his fictional world of Malgudi, has created, in over five decades of incessant writing, a veritable world of fiction that is enjoyed, loved and admired universally. In spite of such international reputation, Narayan remained a modest person who hesitated to talk about himself. Fortunately, his writings and interviews provide us a complete picture of this outstanding writer of India. He is primarily a story-teller, one of the very few in the context of Indian English short fiction. The air of apparent disengagement and delicate charm invest his stories with a perfect artistic unity. Like his novels, the short stories too reveal the hand of a delicate and subtle artist who excels more in reproducing life as it is than in finding a meaning behind it. In his portrayal of character and situation Narayan's microscopic vision provides the readers an insight into the delicate and subtle details which would have escaped our normal vision. Narayan was more interested in sketching people with small eccentricities as these characters undergo little development and remain essentially the same beings. Such characters engage the creator's sympathy, yet there is little involvement. "I don't take them seriously. I have ample sympathy for them, still there is no involvement. I am detached". 18

Conclusion

Narayan's writing style was in fact, unpretentious and simple with an element of humour. It focused on lay men and women comprising the readers of next-door neighbors providing a greater ability to relate the topic. Unlike his contemporaries, he could write about the intricacies of Indian society without modifications of his characteristic simplicity to conform to trends in fiction writing. He has also been considered to be the Indian Chekhov on account of similarities in their writing which include gentle beauty and tragic situations. Even Greene too had opined the same, commenting that Narayan's style similar to Chekhov than any Indian writer in realistic portrayal of life. In accordance with Jhumpa Lahiri, the Pulitzer winner, Narayan's short stories as well as novels possess captivating feelings. She also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for their ability to compress the narrative without losing the story, and a common theme of middle-class life written with an unyielding vision. Critics have concluded that Narayan's works are based on more descriptive and less analytical. His attitude coupled with his perception of life catered an unusual ability to combine characters and actions and ability to use ordinary incidents to create a connection in the reader's mind.

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