

MORAL VISION IN R.K. NARAYAN'S WORKS

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Abstract

R.K. Narayan is a novelist of international repute and his fifty years of fiction writing earned for him an immense reputation both in India and abroad. His fiction forms the matrix of triumph for Indian creative literature in English. The most fascinating feature of his personality is that he is a pure Indian both in thought and spirit despite his preference for English. His fiction mirrors microcosmic India caught in the crucible of tradition and change. He is the most essentially and comprehensively Indian of the Indo-Anglian novelists. His view of life and his world, of moral and ethical values is basically Indian.

Introduction

R.K. Narayan is regarded as one of the greatest of Indians writing in English. His sole aim was being to give aesthetic satisfaction and not to use his art as a medium of propaganda or to serve some social purpose with moral vision. Narayan is essentially an excellent artist who exquisitely portrays basic human sensibilities, such as morality, humanity, loneliness, etc. He depicts the middle-class men and women who are seen by him striving to be free from the slavery of the orthodox traditions. Sense of morality is the prime guiding factor in the lives of his characters in his works.

His novels acquaint us with a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent-openness before life and marked moral intensity. And his observations reveal his characters' ethical sensibility. Narayan describes trivial eccentricities of his characters to expose their moral weaknesses. Narayan's creations have deep roots in timeless values of life. His fictional world of Malgudi has a firm creative base built on certain traditions, values and ethos of life. Narayan uses irony as a technique to point out the moral digressions of his characters.

His main aim is to acquaint his readers with the ins and outs of the human drama that is always taking place in the lives of the Malgudi people.

It is a great achievement of Narayan's creative power that he has described the Indian people and the Indian way of the life with an abundant measure of success, without trying to moralize and philosophize their general tendencies. But Narayan has sympathy for his weak characters. Each one of his characters wicked or virtuous is drawn with an extraordinary delicacy and tenderness. In his sympathetic hands they turn into interesting and amusing figures and make the place very colourful by their presence and by their actions. There is no place for any great social, economic and political changes that have taken place in his novels. The present work is an attempt in the direction of studying R.K. Narayan's moral vision with reference to his three novels namely, *The Bachelor of Art* (1937), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962). Moral values give happiness and satisfaction in human life. Morality is a spontaneous instinct. He neither denounces them nor upholds them. But this kind of unbiased objectivity is not easy

to carry on. In the words of Graham Greene, "If he (a writer) allows himself to take sides, moralise propaganda, he can easily achieve the extra-literary interest but if he follows Mr. Narayan's methods he stakes all on his creative power."

Narayan's philosophy of life seems to be that we should not worry about the evils which we cannot prevent. Life's delightfulness and sadness do not depend on the real texture of life, but on the way of living and on the attitude that one has towards that one who lives with caution, sincerity, good sense, intelligence and understanding as does Srinivasa in *Mr. Sampath* or Bharati in *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) or Shastri in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962), sails his way through the wide ocean of life smoothly and finds life full of delight, but one who brings much sentimentality and selfishness stumbles and undergoes innumerable hardships and difficulties like Chandran or Margayya or Sriram and sometimes like Ravi or Raju he even goes under.

Review of Studies

Morality has been a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling throughout whole of the literature. Morality is an instinct in the Indian context. Indians follow their forefathers, ancestral ethical modes and thus the fountain of moral norm is constantly flowing. While reading Narayan's works we face some parenthetical expressions of the tensions a of single situation. But, on the other hand, we can perceive his innate and large moral sensitivity. Most of the interpreters or critics of Narayan's fiction have tried to account for the specious mixture of the serious and comic, which is the distinguishing feature of Narayan as an author. The essence of Narayan's comedy is the psychological complexity of human nature. His critical acceptance of traditional and religious values enables him to see his characters and caricatures in bright social and moral relief. His comic method discriminates between the humane and the absurd. Although he exposes pretensions and hypocritical attachments to traditional customs, he indicates that for the contemporary Indian the traditional way provides the best guarantee of happiness and fulfillment.

Narayan has made use of the ladder of social observation to scale the moral and aesthetic heights in

his novels. There is a clash of castes, classes the interests and persistence of the time-honoured customs and the old values on one hand, and the weakening of the modern social and moral structure on the other. All this is concretely realized in terms of interaction of characters in his novels.

Result and Discussion

The socio-ethical life portrayed in the novels of R.K. Narayan is rooted in the ageless past of India, of which the myths are the objective correlative. Narayan depicts two types of characters in his fiction. On the one hand, characters like Swami, Chandran, Krishnan, Srinivas, Nataraj and Jagan are representatives of moral and social values. On the other hand, we have Sampath, Margayya, Raju, Mali and Raman who care only for the present gains without caring for others. They don't hesitate to break the established bonds of customs and conventions. And, by doing so, they destabilize the accepted moral pattern of life surrounding them. Thus, the battle between good and evil runs through Narayan's works. And finally, the evil is overpowered by goodness.

Narayan presents order-disorder-order trend to expose the weaknesses of his characters. And by doing so, he guards the traditional morality. In each of his novels, the usual order of life, that is normalcy, is disturbed by the arrival of an outsider into the sheltered world of Malgudi or by some flight or uprooting, but in the end, there is always a return, a renewal and a restoration of normalcy. The normal order is disturbed temporarily and by the end we see the usual order established once again and life going on as usual, although some of his characters violate the code of conduct and surpass the moral grounds, yet he gradually sets the order by bringing them to the real ground.

Conclusion

It is distinct that Narayan is not a direct preacher of morality. It is through the action and behaviour of the characters that he emphasizes the need of moral and ethical belongings. As Pramod Kumar Singh observes, "He exposes the ills of society and probes them too, but never for sadistic pleasure or for scathing disgust in readers. Narayan's main aim is to expose hypocrisy of ideals, ambition and pride and not to guide the society in any particular direction

but simply to make us realize the social evils and ills."2 Nataraj's resolution of his personal crisis in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962) in relation to Vasu is distinct from other characters. The author treats the theme of tradition versus modernity in a very striking manner. Vasu totally neglects the traditional value of life. The most highly cherished values of the traditional Indian society are mercilessly ridiculed and attacked by Vasu. Respect for life, sexual ethics, poetry, sentiment and common decencies of life are just stupid sob-stuffed to this 'man-eater'.

Narayan's handling of myth as technique turns this novel into a most powerful exposition of the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. Vasu's evil deeds put a moral cast on the triumph of good over evil. The cosmos prevails over the powers of chaos and Nataraj's problem is solved by the inexorable moral law. Thus, it can be said that morality is necessarily a social institution evolved by mankind. "Man", as Aristotle stated, "is a social being and he always lives in some kind of community or society." In fact, Narayan is a penetrating analyst of human passions and human motives, and this makes him a great analyst of human conduct. Human relationships—relationship within the family circles and relationships centring round sex and money? are his ever recurring themes. And we can learn from them how to establish right relationships. Whatever disturbs the norm is an aberration and a disorder. Sanity lies in the acceptance of the normal. Life must be accepted and lived despite its many shortcomings, follies and foibles. This social need of harmony gives rise to the need of morality. Morality is must for the development and progress of the society.

Narayan's major characters come into conflict with traditional morality as they seek to realize their aspirations. The result is that the accepted order is disturbed and there is chaos and disorder. The individuals violate the code of conduct in one way or the other and thus are guilty of immorality and corruption. When the both sexes establish their

relationship out of accepted norms, they violate the conventional morality, and there is displeasure all around. The objective of socio-moral well-being is the larger side of the well-being of the individual. Society is nothing but a well organized group of the individuals bound together by the need of mutual help and co-operation. And this mutual understanding is entitled as moral principles. Normally, people abide by these principles for their smooth existence.

References

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