

## R K NARAYAN'S THE TALKATIVE MAN; A STUDY

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R K Narayan, credited with a number of titles in the realm of fiction, is one of the most important names in the history of Indian English Fiction. *Swami and Friends* was the first appearance of Narayan in the horizon of fiction writing. It was published in 1935. The novel was followed by *The Bachelor of Arts* published in 1936 and *The Dark Room* published in 1937. *The English Teacher* which appeared in 1945 illustrates the pains and pangs of the personal life of Narayan which owe their genesis to his marriage with Rajam who died soon after giving birth to a girl child. Narayan himself confesses that novel is “autobiographical in content” and “very little part of it being fiction” (Narayan, *My Days*, 134-135). There was a smooth and quick release of the fragrance of fiction of the difficult enterprise of *The English Teacher* as *Mr Sampat* appeared in 1949, *The Financial Expert* in 1952 and *Waiting for Mahatma* in 1955. *The Guide*, published in 1958, culminated the process of internationalization of Indian English fiction. The novel earned wide critical attention across the globe. It won prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1960. *The Guide*, besides thematic boldness, also earned the credit of technical innovativeness. The succeeding novels of Narayan confirmed his reputation as the author of thematic boldness and technical innovativeness. “Technically,” says K R S Iyengar that *The Guide* is “an advance upon early novels” (Iyengar, 359). The novels that followed *The Guide* are *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961) and *The Sweet Vendor* (1967). The novels in conformity with the spirit of eighties are *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1980) and *The World of Nagraj* (1988).

Narayan has been writing short stories that can easily be put into three different categories from the point of view of techno- thematic development of the short narrative. *Malgudi Days* published in 1941 was the first collection of short stories of Narayan. It was followed by *Dodu and Oher Stories* (1943), *Cylcone and Other Stories* (1944), *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawley Road* (1950) *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970), A collection of the short stories of Narayan, anthologizing short stories from all the three phases of the creative span of Narayan as a writer of short stories- *Old and New* was published in (1984).

Narayan also deserves the credit of many technical innovations in the domain of fictional writing in India. It is unambiguous that the genre of short stories in Indian English Fiction owes much to Narayan for the growth of contents and form. All along the course of writing short fiction, Narayan has continuous been making experiments with a view to rendering new forms and new identity to Indian English short stories. The Talkative Man is unequivocally the most important creation of the master as far as his contribution to the development of the technique of narration of the Indian English short story is concerned. It is an easy inference that Narayan wrote in the age which is conspicuous for a number of changes taking place along political, social, cultural and even ethnic dimensions. The Talkative Man, the proud first person narrator bears a very close resemblance with the changing values of the country which puts before us a relatively more

complete picture of India than any other narrator (first person or third person), created by Narayan. The Talkative Man assimilates all the paradoxes of the post Independence India which define the cultural transition of the country. Narayan writes that 'he is a part and parcel of the Indian village community which is somewhat isolated from the mainstream of modern life.' Narayan thus makes us clear that the Talkative Man, in his essentials, is a representation of the rustic mind set of India. The idea is made clearer by providing the reader with the geographical details of the place where the Talkative Man resides. The author informs that he further says that the 'the nearest railway station is sixty miles away' (Narayan, *The World of Story-teller*, 03). He further says that 'rice fields stretch west ward and merge into wooded slopes of mountains.' It is further noticeable that the author 'presents him as a conservative intellect who traces the origin of every scholarly act in the ancient writings of Indian mainly *the Ramayana*, *the Mahabharata*, *the Vedas* and *the Upanishads*. He knows by heart all the 24000 stanzas of the *Ramayana* and all the 1000000 stanzas of the *Mahabharata*. Thus the Talkative Man in all his magnanimity is the author's attempt to re-establish the worth and function of the rustic and the rural in the backdrop of modern India. It is, however, ironical that, in the opening paragraph of Narayan's novel with same title, the Talkative Man introduces himself not only as the Talkative Man but also as TM. Narayan presents him as a character typical of the one found in the *chaupals* of the Indian villages. He admits that his 'impulse to share his experience with others is irresistible.' The Talkative Man is least bothered about the reaction of his audience. He says he does not 'care even if' the people 'sneer at' his 'back' (Narayan, *The Talkative Man* 01).

It is thus clear that the fusion of scholarship and the urge to share his knowledge and experience renders accomplishment to the art and identity of the Talkative Man. The urge to share and express is made more explicit by offering a sharp ironic contrast to his scholarship by presenting him as a lonely individual. His children, as Narayan tells us 'could not accept his way of life and went their ways seeking livelihood in distant cities.' The loneliness and isolation of the Talkative Man in his personal life draws a very close and obvious contrast with his preoccupations with the common man practicing fond passion for narrating the stories. It is because of his passion for the art of storytelling that despite loneliness and isolation, he is 'completely at peace with himself.' Folk elements are undoubtedly the one of the conspicuous aspects of the technique of narration of Narayan and the Talkative Man is a pronounced representation of the pervasion of folk elements in Narayan's art of storytelling. Narayan confides that 'he lives upon the produce of these two acres and the coconut garden and gifts that are brought to him for storytelling-especially the happy ending of a long series-or when God incarnates himself as a baby of this world and marries a goddess in the course of the story' (Narayan, *The World of Story-teller*, 04).

Narayan renders the Talkative Man with characteristically rustic appearance and delineates him with the a number of associations that have their origin in the ancient knowledge. The author reveals;

When he shaves his head (only on the days prescribed in the almanac), he leaves just a small tuft on the top since the ancient scriptures, the *shastras*, prescribe that a man should wear his head no thicker than what could pass through a silver ring of his finger, a silver ring because that is also prescribed in the *shastras*. Every detail of his life is set for him by what the *shastras* say; that is the reason why he finds it impossible to live in the modern town- to leave his home where his forefathers practiced

unswervingly the codes set down by the *shastras* (Narayan, *The World of Story-teller*, 04).

It is of course another scintillating contrast that Narayan portrays the Talkative Man with a synthesis of and command on the ancient and modern ways of life. It is however more surprising that the Talkative Man in some of the stories narrated by him shows not only his familiarity with the modern ways of life but also with the many areas of scholarship and professional domains. Narayan expresses the irony and says;

Sometimes he may display amazing knowledge of modern ways of life acquired through perusal of brought to him by 'weekly' postman every Thursday afternoon (Narayan, *The World of Story-teller*, 04).

It is remarkable that the stories like *The Roman Image* and *Lawley Road* are knit around the action that is set in the pre-eminently urban backdrop which does not resonate with the primitive modes of life associated with the Talkative Man. It is an interesting observation that the Talkative Man is equally flexible in narrating both the modes of narratives. The stories narrated by the Talkative Man ratify the pervasion of the paradox in his art of storytelling. Most of the stories narrated by the Talkative Man are glutted with primitive faiths and beliefs that deny any evident logic of the modern world but are definable chiefly in terms of some intuitive logic which the narrator- the Talkative Man shares with the readers. "The Magic Beard" narrated by the Talkative Man is one fine instance of this kind of narration attributed to him. It is indeed noticeable that the point of view of the narrator is not always manifest along the dimensions defining fantasy but it is rationalized with the help of coincidence which is an important tool used by the narrator to convince the reader of what is seemingly illogical or intuitively logical. The elements of folk, seek apt participation as the Talkative Man also introduces a mother figure which can be attributed to the interaction between the narrator and the old woman. Coincidence is fused with simultaneity to render justness to the narrative as the blessings of his coin disappear immediately after he shaves his beard. He admits that he 'couldn't collect a pie.' The narrator also rationalizes the irrational by appending the word of astonishment that he 'was amazed that a little change in appearance should affect people so much' (Narayan, "The Magic Beard" *The Storyteller's World*, 130). The use of myth is always an important aspect of folk narrative in any form. It is again paradoxical that the myth is manifest in form of parody of the famous Greek figure Samson who owes his powers to his hair and as soon as his head is shaven he loses his strength. The protagonist of "The Magic Beard" recreates the same myth by subtle fusion of coincidence and synchronicity. The beard of the protagonist, reminds us of the hair and strength of the Greek hero which draws a close parallel with the beard and fortune of the protagonist of the story. The device of the Talkative Man thus serves the difficult crucial purpose of using myth in the narrative by drawing an ironic parallel between the modern and the ancient; between the east and the west. Irony however remains a poignant weapon of the narrator that determine various dimensions of the space of the narrative.

"Around the Temple" is another story which is based on the antithesis between the logical and the intuitive. The Talkative Man very meticulously designs the denouement when he speaks about the faithless and arrogant officer who 'certainly checked his temper and tongue when he was in the vicinity of the temple' (Narayan, "Around the Temple" *The Storyteller's World*, 133).

"Old Man of the Temple" is a ghost story, the ideal kind of narrative for the art and skill of the Talkative Man. It deals with the supernatural in its purest form. It has a fairy tale opening with emphasis on time. The tone of the narrator is vibrant with mystic elements at every point. The narrator however adopts a balanced approach as he fills the narrative with the mystic and at the

same time he delineates the driver with skeptic overtones because he doubts whether the driver was drunk or he was not' (Narayan, "Old Man and the Temple" *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*, 53). The use of myth is another very prominent aspect of the narrative design structured by the Talkative Man. The Talkative Man makes use of the myth of *parkaya pravesh* and also the concept of union after death. It is noticeable that in this narrative, both the myths used by the narrator are purely of oriental origin with even the remotest reference to the west. The fantasy in the narrative is manifest purely in form of the supernatural and unlike the previously discussed narrative, there is no shred of the elements of synchronicity and coincidence. "The Snake Song" is another prominent short story of Narayan which makes good use of the supernatural and is structured on the ancient Indian concept of *atithi devo bhav*. It is thus a pronounced ratification of the author's debt to classical Indian volumes of knowledge and learning.

"The Roman Image" and "Lawley Road" offer a sharp ironic contrast to the narratives discussed above. In either of these narratives, the Talkative Man is not a mind confined to rustic and rural life of a distant village quite away from the highway, but, on the contrary, he is a man with handsome participation in the urban world with ease and comfort without any hesitation or withdrawal. The stories are narrated with obvious satirical overtones. The narrative is structured around a stone image which is thought to be of great archeological importance having 'an entirely new set of possibilities' (Narayan, "The Roman Image" *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*, 33). The narrative satirizes the research activities related to archeology and the Talkative Man discovers that the stone image is nothing but a contraption of a local image maker ultimate leading to the painful realization of the officer that they 'have made' themselves 'mighty fools before the whole world' (Narayan, "The Roman Image" *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*, 37). Lawley Road in the same cadence is a mockery of the bureaucratic process followed by the high officials for the trivial and insignificant tasks. The Talkative Man is again an urban mind and the protagonist who eventually proves to be a ridiculous victim of the bureaucratic processes. In both these narratives, the story teller is a sophisticated but vigilant urban intellect sensitive to the discrepancies prevailing in the respective system. The Talkative Man does not pick up the myth from the ancient books of knowledge and learning but focuses his satirical motif on the what he has experienced, enjoyed and suffered. It seems somewhat antithetic to say that the knowledge gained by intensive reading of the newspaper suffices for the structuring a satirical narrative but it is also worth noticing that the Talkative Man is very much a part and parcel of the modern urban set up and restricting his experiences to rural and rustic life does not seem convincing. The easy inference that can be drawn from the experiences enshrined in the stories narrated by the Talkative Man are the experiences that pervade across numerous planes of India.

It can easily be inferred, that The Talkative Man is not just a fictional off spring of Narayan's creative faculties but he also represents the fictional world of R K Narayan in micro-dimensions. Narayan's thematic preferences and technical innovations seeks apt representation in The Talkative Man. He fuses the paradoxical implications of the rustic and the sophisticated; of urban and rural of adherence to the primitive and conformity to the modern. Technically also The Talkative Man shows unusual fondness for the use of irony and paradox which confirms his identity as a miniaturized representation of his creator.

It is thus clear that the Talkative Man of Narayan is a great creation attributed to the master who performs many paradoxical functions at precise simultaneity. He is a rural soul who often puts on an urban mind and functions in the urban set up as comfortably as he sits amidst

the rural folk and narrates the story. He believes in intuitive logic and hence takes into account various faiths and beliefs that contribute to the making of man's mind in and around Malgudi and he is also the man with frequent inclination towards logic and order that eventually creep into. It can thus easily be inferred that the Talkative Man makes use of all those elements for which his creator is known around the globe.

**References;**

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