

Certificate of Publication

YMER

Open Access | Peer reviewed | Scopus Active 2021 | Care UGC Group-II Journal | ISSN-0044-0477

Title

Humanism in the Short Stories of R. K. Narayan

Author

Dr. Narendra L. Gadge, Associate Professor

From

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, SMT. RAJKAMAL B. TIDKE MAHAVIDYALAYA, MOUDA DIST. NAGPUR

Has been published in

YMER, VOLUME 21 ISSUE 1, JANUARY-2022



Scopus



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये



Editor-in-Chief


(James Gaskin)

Humanism in the Short Stories of R. K. Narayan

Dr. Narendra L. Gadge

Associate Professor of English

Smt. Rajkamal B. Tidke Mahavidyalaya, Mouda Dist. Nagpur

narendra.l.gadge@gmail.com

Mob. 8087781317

Abstract:

This paper especially focuses on R. K. Narayan's contribution to Indian short stories as a short story writer. Probably he is the first Indian short story writer who has reached on world's literature platform. His unique style and the South Indian rural setting of his stories create the feeling of pure Indians. We see that the whole world has become materialistic and selfish. Now the people have become moneyed yet we find that they are so narrow mind. But what we find in the stories of R. K. Narayan that the protagonists are although poor, wretched yet they are philanthropists and compassionate towards the people like him or her. They treat the other persons as humans and endeavour to help them although they face the contrary consequences. But they never quit their pious path. Thus they show their humanism in them. Their humanism makes them extraordinary although they seem ordinary.

Keywords:

Stories, contribution, unique style, moneyed, selfish, protagonists, philanthropists, compassionate, endeavour, consequences, humanism.

Introduction:

Short story is one of the oldest genre of literary expression and an inseparable aspect of social development. We have experienced emotional purgation of happiness or sadness while listening to our grandmother's stories on cold wintry nights or summer afternoons and felt happy or sad. A story sometimes takes us to a world other than the one we are living in and are left fascinated by it. A short story gains popularity over other as it is easier to read and less time-consuming. But a short story is also perhaps harder to write as it has to create its effect in a limited space.

R. K. Narayan was born on 10 October 1906 in Madras (now Chennai). His father Rasipuram Venkatarama Iyer Krishnaswami Iyer. His mother was Gnanambal. His father was a person who had preferred modern ways and had come out of his orthodox family. He shortened his name as R.K. Narayan from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer on **Graham Greene's** advice was an Indian author whose works of fiction include a series of books about people and their interactions in an imagined town in India called Malgudi. He is one of three leading figures of early Indian literature in English, along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. He is credited with bringing Indian literature in English to the rest of the world, and is regarded as one of

India's greatest English language short story writers and novelists. The setting for most of Narayan's stories is the fictional town of Malgudi.

He was a vital and dynamic writer who explains human behavior by the means of comedy and simplicity. Narayan lived till ninety-five, writing for more than fifty years, and publishing till he was eighty-seven. He wrote fifteen novels, five volumes of short stories, a number of travelogues and collection of non-fiction, English translation of Indian epics, and the memoirs “**My Days.**” Yet it is neither the copiousness of output, nor currency of content or the lack of either- that gives Narayan his place among the finest story-tellers of modern English. Professor Srinivasa Iyengar remarks about him, “He is a rare thing in India, a man of letters pure and simple” **1. Iyengar, K.R.S. p.35**

Contribution of R.K. Narayan to Indian Short Stories:

Today we call R.K. Narayan the grand old man of Indian literature. In a writing career spanning seven decades, he has enthralled and entertained generations of readers with his deftly etched characters, his uniquely stylized language and his wry sense of humor. R.K. Narayan enjoys Indian popularity for his remarkable gift of Story-telling. He contributes much for the growth and development of Indian English Short Story. It is well recognized both at the national and international level. His narrative skill is superb. “His themes are creative, delightful, witty, humorous and ironic in nature. His stories bristle with innumerable Indian scenes and characters. He delineates his characters with a comic touch. His stories reveal the fullness and intimacy of his knowledge of everyday life. They are distinguished by the extreme simplicity and purity of diction. Stripped of Anand’s liberal sprinkling of Indian words and Raja Rao’s metaphysical meanings, Narayan’s medium is a ‘Bharat brand of English.’” **2. Taranath Rajeev p. 307.**

A storyteller par excellence, Narayan’s greatest achievement perhaps lies in creating and peopling the imagined landscapes of a town called Malgudi, located somewhere in South India, which has come alive in a story after story in such a way that it has now become a part of modern Indian folklore. Narayan presents a wide range of characters in his and short stories. As we know the setting or background of R. K. Narayan’s short stories is an imaginary town called Malgudi. No one will find it in India’s map and no other country’s map. Although the town is an imaginary but all the characters are very much alive. We can feel that they are wandering here and there in our surroundings.

His stories dwell on the value of village traditions and the lives of ordinary people. Although Narayan’s writing is sometimes seen as quaint and outdated today, his books accurately portray an India that hovers between unchangingly rural and the newly industrial and that is still filled with individualistic, often eccentric personalities that recall his imagined Universe. Once R. K. himself had said, “The material available to short story writer in India is limitless.” His short stories mirror microcosmic India caught in the conventions, traditions and social changes. His characters are lively presentations of common Indians. His heroines are replicas of common Indian women. Despite a pure Indian living absorbed in religion and

family, he achieved a feat to express his creative urge in an alien language and has become virtually craze in European countries.

Narayan shows a strong affinity to typically Indian tradition of storytelling. But he adopts his form and style from the West. He steers clear of a message or doctrine to his readers. "He is an analyst of individual feelings, emotions and action in an exploration of hidden human conflicts. Nowhere in his stories does he preach or pontificate." **3. Paul C. p. 139**

His way of writing gives the distinct impression of a South Indian community confined to a particular temporal and spatial setting, their deliberately pedestrian language completely conveys the feelings of restlessness and worry caused by sorrowful condition. 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.

R. K. Narayan wrote in English but attained popularity not only in India but in Europe for his sensitive observation of human nature. Most of his stories deal with Indian life and are written in a style which is both simple and lucid. The stories of R. K. Narayan are chiefly plot stories. Not so much emphasis was laid upon incidents and characterization but in depicting the happening of day in day out life. His stories are ordinary occurrences yet they are profound in their affect. He only recreates the atmosphere in simple language and collecting details and thereby creating a lively tale of human experience. The special characteristic of R.K. Narayan's stories is his humanism in the story. Because he writes about humanity and humanism. Although his characters are from lower strata but they have the sea of milk of kindness. R.K. Narayan usually writes about the semi westernized middle class people, who hold modern ideas and practice modern styles of living but who in times of stress are emotionally tied to traditional culture. His provincial protagonists often find themselves in conflict with a representative of traditional values.

R.K. Narayan is supreme and the best because of his fiction which reveals varied dimensions of Indian life, tradition and ethos depicted by virtue of his unique individual talent. While talking about the place and position of R.K. Narayan in contemporary Indian English Literature, Shiv K. Girila concentrates on his "use of the locale, his art of storytelling, plot construction and character delineation." **4. Shiv Girila p.54**

Humanism in the Stories of R.K. Narayan:

Narayan is a pure Indian both in spirit and thought, despite his preference for English over his mother tongue for the expression of his creative urge. His creative genius is deeply rooted in ancient Indian religion which attaches great importance to self-discipline, non-violence, incarnation, and doctrine of rebirth and the law of Karma. it is found in almost all his major stories and novels too. As **Britta Olinder** observed, "What appears more clearly and convincingly when reading a number of short stories than handful novels is the understanding of the human condition without a trace of sentimentality. Equally true of both kinds of Narayan's fiction is the sympathetic interest in the small, unimportant little man, the child or even an animal, an interest which never loses touch with the larger perspectives of life and

which is continually refreshed from the sources of gentle irony.”**5. Srinath C. N. p.190** Whoever have read the stories of R. K.Narayan; he must have found that his stories are about ordinary people and about day to day incidents. And we find the genuine Indian feelings in his stories. Most of his characters in his stories are from labour and poor classes. Some of his famous stories are *The Sweet for Angels*, *The Trail of Green Blazer*, *The Doctor’s Word* and *The Axe* . All these four stories are full of humanism and humanity. The characters in these stories are from poor class but they have a great trait called humanism which we do not find in the hearts of the rich and the sophisticated people. These people always find happiness in small things. They are interested more in giving than taking for they find satisfaction and genuine happiness in such things. As **Kapileswar Parija** has said, “In addition to the wide variety of themes and techniques, Narayan’s stories exhibit an immense variety of characters. R. K. Narayan is fascinated by the wide variety of characters around him and hence, he attaches more importance to character rather than the plot of a story. The commonplace characters come alive under the focus of a comic and compassionate vision. The essential comic irony of his vision bestows upon his art of characterization a spirit of detachment and good-humored acceptance of life.” **6. Chhote Lal Khatri p.13**

We find the humanism luminously in the stories like *Sweet For Angels*, *Trail of the Green Blazer*, *The Axe*, *The Doctor’s Word* etc. In these three stories we find such characters who is actually the protagonists help the other people in spite they are poor and incapable just because they are real human and they have learnt the lesson of humanism in their lives. And that’s why they help the other people by risking their lives. Now let us poke our nose in these three stories in order to find the real humanism in life.

In the story *The Sweet for Angels* we meet the protagonist whose name is Kali. He lks rather ugly and rowdy. We also me to know that he is unmarried. He lives in a hut and he usually eats at the dhaba which is in front of a school. Kali is a porter and his earning is very meagre. One day is eating his meal and at the same time he is watching the small children who are coming out from the school. He wishes to make children happy. He thought for a while and then he bought the sweet for children and stood in front of the gate of the school with sweet in his hand. As the children came he offered the sweet to them. He did this act only because he liked the children but he does not the repercussions of his good act. Eventually he is beaten as the people assumed him as a kidnapper and he is hospitalized. Thus Kali’s act shows his selfless nature, his love his affection and above all his humanism towards the children.

In the story *Trail of the Green Blazer* we meet Raju and R.K. Narayan shows how he goes on with his activities how he stops and dogs his pray before pickpocketing their money. The story starts with how at a fair a green blazer catches everyone’s eye and how Raju waits while he assesses the man in the green blazer, all goes well for Raju and at the right moment he goes for the kill and gets the purse. Trouble begins when Raju is about to dispose of the wallet after taking out the cash, he sees the balloon the man in the green blazer has bought for his motherless child. This makes Raju emotional and being a father himself, he is filled with

pity for the boy. He decides to put the wallet back with the balloons in it. He also knew that there was a risk. Yet he takes the risk only for the child which shows his humanism. But while doing so he eventually gets caught and sent in prison. Thus we see that Raju although a thief; he is not cruel on the contrary he is humane and that's why he is having humanism.

The next story in the category of humanism is *The Axe*. This is simple story of man whose name is Velan who tries to find his purpose and place in life who is forced to find his own way after his disowned by his father. Undeterred, Velan embarks on a journey to find his independent footing in the world and he is able to procure a job as gardener at an old man's house. The owner of Velan allows Velan to excel at his work and at the same time, find happiness and satisfaction. While working at old man's house and working as a gardener Velan develops a beautiful relationship with flowers. He grows them and prospers with them. The love of garden and plants makes him humane and his heart fills with humanism. During the long stay at old man's house Velan loses his father wife and children and also his senior owner. But he accepts the tough truths of mortal life. As we all have our breaking points and weak spots. Velan's weakest part was his devotion to his plants. The new owner ordered to remove the whole garden and also trees in it. But Velan could not see his beloved trees are being cut. So he requests the cutters to be generous to his life's worth of hard work. The cutters delay the cutting of Velan's trees until he goes far away from the house. In this story we see glaringly Velan's intense love and affection for the garden and trees. It also shows his humanism towards flora and fauna.

The next story wherein we get to see the humanism is *The Doctor's Word*. This is the story of two bosom friends. Dr. Raman is a famous doctor. He speaks very frankly about the patients' condition. He does not believe in consoled words. That's why people come to him when the patient is on the last stage. If Dr. Raman sees any ray of hope of patient's survival he would bring back the life of the patient from the clutches of Yama. One day in the afternoon he sees his bosom friend's son in his hospital. He told him that Gopal's condition is not good. Dr. Raman immediately goes to Gopal's house to see him.

Dr. Raman knew that Gopal's condition is very critical. He has the principle that he would not hide anything about the patient. Although he performed his operation but Dr. Raman is not sure whether Gopal would be alright or not. But he could not tell this plight either to Gopal's wife or to Gopal. Because both they were his close. And again he couldn't give them false consolation for it is against his principle. After performing the operation he asks nurse to keep an eye on the condition of the patient for he might collapse at anytime. When he came back Gopal comes into his senses and he asks the doctor to tell him everything freely and frankly. Dr. Raman is in dilemma as what to do. Eventually he goes against his principle and just says that he is going to live ninety years. Gopal and his wife easily believe on the words of the doctor for they know that Dr. Raman never speaks lie. From that incident Gopal recovers from his serious illness. Even Dr. Raman couldn't believe what he had done. He just goes against his principle and consoles Gopal and his wife. His action against his principle shows his humanism and love for his nearest and dearest friend, Gopal.

Conclusion:

Narayan presents a wide range of characters in his and short stories. As we know the setting or background of R. K. Narayan's short stories is an imaginary town called Malgudi. A storyteller par excellence, Narayan's greatest achievement perhaps lies in creating and peopling the imagined landscapes of a town called Malgudi, located somewhere in South India, which has come alive in a story after story in such a way that it has now become a part of modern Indian folklore. He only recreates the atmosphere in simple language and collecting details and thereby creating a lively tale of human experience. The special characteristic of R.K. Narayan's stories is his humanism in the story. Because he writes about humanity and humanism. Although his characters are from lower strata but they have the sea of milk of kindness. Most of his characters in his stories are from labour and poor classes. Some of his famous stories are *The Sweet for Angels*, *The Trail of Green Blazer*, *The Doctor's Word* and *The Axe*. All these four stories are full of humanism and humanity. The characters in these stories are from poor class but they have a great trait called humanism which we do not find in the hearts of the rich and the sophisticated people.

Works Cited:

1. Iyengar, K.R.S.: *Indian Writing in English*, Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1973, p.35.
2. Taranath Rajeev: *The Average as the Positive - A note on R. K. Narayan 'Critical Essay on Indian Writing in English*, Silver Jubilee Student Edition, Macmillan 1977, p.307.
3. Paul : *Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English*, Somaiya Publishing Ltd Bombay, 1971, p. 139
4. Girda, Shiv.R.K. *Narayan's: World of Values*.Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad, 1984. Print. p..54
5. Srinath, C. N. *R. K. Narayan , An Anthology of Recent*. Delhi Pencraft International, 2005.Print. p. 190
6. Khatri ChhoteLal, *R. K. Narayan: Reflections and Re-valuations*, Sarup& Sons, New Delhi, 2006.Print. p.13