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A Critical Study of R.K. Narayan Selected Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan is one of the best prior novelists in the Indian English literature. R.K. Narayan is considered the first and foremost an artist in his presentation of Indian life, culture and tradition. He covers the wide gamut of human experience from the innocent pranks of children to serious communal riots, misery of common man to filial relationship, superstitions and orthodox tradition to the supernatural elements. Generally it is found that R.K Narayan's short stories have the description of North India and imaginary place like Malgudi. The reason why generally Narayan's novels are known as Malgudi, is because all his characters are rich and poor, famers and feuds, teacher and student, old and young, dull and wise, good and bad, etc find their existence in Malgudi. In this research paper the researcher shall try to critically analyse the selected short stories of Narayan.

Key words : (1) An Astrologer's Day (2) The Tiger's Claw (3) Lawley Road.

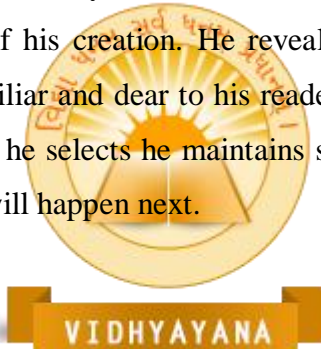


INTRODUCTION:

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan is one of the founding pillars of Indian English Writing. On October 10, 1906, R.k. Narayan was born in Chennai, India. He was interested in reading English writings. R.K. Narayan is famous for his the best collection Malgudi. Generally Narayan's short stories have the description of North India and imaginary place like Malgudi. In this research R.K. Narayan selected short stories shall be explored critically. Most of his short stories set in Malgudi. R.K. Narayan's short stories reveal a variety of human life. One can find artistic zeal, integrity, craftsman and imaginative power in his work. R.K. Narayan's short stories belong to the native Indian soil and are reminiscent of its culture. R.K. Narayan's short stories depict the Indian life and clearly express his view of the world. Features like simple but fascinating plot, lively characterization, strict economy of narration and subtle simplicity of language are found as the most outstanding of R.K. Narayan's short stories.



In his novels Narayan creates a recognisable Indian community peopled by various human types like astrologer, clerk, criminal, guide, dancers, painters, hotel owner etcetera. In addition he also gives a mythological dimension to Malgudi by naming the river there as Sarayu and by placing ruins, forest and mysteries at the heart of his imaginary town. In his short story Lawley road, he presents the theme of independence, corruption, power, loyalty and identity. It is the first person narration by the Talkative man. This short story satirizes the ways of municipalities. Whereas his in his An Astrologer's day short story, he satirizes the fake astrologer and credulous masses. It seems that as long as the people are gullible, the deceivers will continue to thrive. R.K. Narayan short stories of common folk with the characters from everyday life. He presents them with the little ironies and knots of satire. His short stories end happily and he comically reveals the life and yet does not allow the cynicism or mockery to enter the world of his creation. He reveals the ironies of life impressively. Narayan creates his Malgudi familiar and dear to his readers. His Malgudi are common men and women. Whatever the theme he selects he maintains suspense till the end and he makes his readers to wait eagerly what will happen next.



WHAT IS SHORT STORY: The short story differs from the anecdote the unelaborated narration of single incident- in that, like novel, it organizes the action, thought and dialogue of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot, directed toward particular effects on an audience. Short story is defined by M.H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary Terms as

A short story is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short story as well. (364). M.H. Abrams

The short story differs from the novel in the dimension that Aristotle called 'magnitude' and this limitation of length imposes differences both in the effects that the story can achieve and in the choice and elaboration of the elements to achieve those effects. Edger Allan Poe, who



is sometimes called the originator of the short story as an established genre, was at any rate its first critical theorist. He defined what he called ‘the prose tale’ as a narrative which can be read at one sitting from half an hour to two hours, and is limited to a ‘a certain unique or single effect’.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AN ASTROLOGER’S DAY: The astrologer is portrayed as a man who has always had to live by his own wits and on his luck. He pretends to be a learned astrologer but,

“An Astrologer’s Day” has a deceptively simple plot, although the full significance of the story becomes evident only after a second or even third reading. An astrologer is the central character of the story. R.K. Narayan describes his appearance, clothes, and all the materials he uses to ply. An astrologer is described as a vendor in India, who sits under the shade of a tree or a temporary shed and sells anything from vegetables to newspapers. This astrologer belongs to the same category although, given the nature of his trade, there is a need to dress and behave in a particular manner. He does not professionally act as an astrologer but does so by giving the impression of a holy man whose special powers enable him to act as an astrologer. The reader can see quite clearly that the astrologer is talking about the stars but is really using his own practical knowledge to get himself out of a tight spot with a man who would kill him if he recognized him as the man he is searching for.

In the story the protagonist’s nemesis, Guru Nayak, is not relying on his “own wit” he is going from one astrologer to another, believing that they will be able to answer his question. In any event, one gets the impression of a backward city which still retains a measure of its rural character. The reference to “municipal lighting” is one of the strategies employed by the author to suggest a sense of the place. In addition, the reference to other vendors who sell a variety of goods gives a sense of a bustling community in which the astrologer operates. The narrator makes it very clear that the astrologer is a Charlatan who knows nothing about the



future but is shrewd judge of character. The astrologer treats this client is unusually aggressive and mean-spirited. This client insists on his money's worth and states that if the astrologer does not tell the truth, he should not only return the money given to him but also give an additional sum for having lied.

The astrologer begins by recounting the story of the client's past and describes how a long time ago he had been stabbed and thrown into a well and left of dead. The client, who is tremendously impressed by this revelation, is stunned when the astrologer addresses him by name, calls him Guru Nayak, and advises him to go back home and stop looking for the man who stabbed him since he had died in an accident.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TIGER'S CLAW: In The Tiger's Claw we have the theme of reliability, fear, ego, pride and honesty. Taken from his Malgudi Days collection the story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that the Talkative Man not be a reliable source of information. Though he holds narrator's attention throughout the story it seems to be a case that he is taking credit for another man's work. The three claws that the Talkative Man claims to have cut from the tiger may be part of a ritual that some of the forest tribes carry out. It is also noticeable that throughout the story the Talkative Man favours himself. That being Narayan does not really give the reader any insights into any possible flaws that the Talkative Man have. We know that he likes to talk a lot which may suggest that he also likes to make up stories which show him in a favourable light.

In reality it is possible that the Talkative Man is no more than story-teller. As to whether his stories are true is another thing but it is certain that his story about the tiger attacking him in the station master's compartment is false. It did not happen and the Talkative Man is taking pieces of knowledge he has from other incident about tigers and developing a story for himself. The story holds the Talkative Man in high regard with others. Another down side of the Talkative Man's story is the fact that he has no witness to the actions he states that "he



has done.” The tiger on the arrival of the station master and then the train ran back into the jungle. Never to be seen again. Unless of course the reader believes the Talkative Man the in that case the tiger has been killed and is being brought through the village. However this is highly unlikely considering what the narrator learns about how the forest tribes treat tigers.

The real issue in the story is not as to whether the Talkative Man is laying but rather why he might want to lie. As mentioned he may be seeking attention to sooth his own ego or fill a void in his pride. It is also interesting that the Talkative Man tells his story to children. Children are more susceptible to lies and would not necessarily know it the Talkative Man is lying or not. It is also possible that the Talkative Man likes to see if he can instil fear i others through his story. Using this as a maker as to whether or not he has succeeded in telling a good story. There is little doubt that if the Talkative Man had told his story to adults who knew about the forest tribes traditions that he would not have been believed. If anything people may have laughed at him which would have deflated an already deflated ego. It is better for the Talkative Man to find a younger audience because then his story has a greater chance of being believed and spread by others. He may have fooled the narrator while he was telling the narrator the story but by the end of the story the narrator most likely will have discovered that the Talkative Man has lied.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LAWLEY ROAD: ‘Lawley Road’ is a satirical short story. In this story we can find the theme like arbitrariness, corruption and showy nature of the Municipal Chairman of the town of Malgudi, a factitious but typical Indian town. The main theme revolves round the Municipal Chairman. He is good for nothing fellow. He is neglihent to his duty. His only aim is to retain his office somehow. But on the occasion the celebration of the Indian independence, he woke up and thought to do something great and to mark off his this great event he undertakes some measures of tasks to attract the attention of the nation which would prove whimsical and arbitrary. First, the Municipal Council swept away the streets, cleaned the drains and hoisted the flags all over the place. One day he called up an



extraordinary meeting and decided to nationalize the names of all the streets in honour of the birth of independence.

In this short story we have the glimpses of Post- independent condition of india. The Chairman became restless and decided to shift the statue of Sir Frederic Lawley. But after that the problem arise that the statue was some twenty feet high. The statue than had been shifted in reporter house. On the suggestion of the reporter Chairman compelled to the whole house and declared as a National Trust. We can see that the author has brought into a vivid account of the follies and Whimsical Council in a satiric vein giving rise to humour. The dialogues employed in the story is very logical as he uses them economically but all the dialogues have taken his story a step ahead and unfold the inner nature and motives of his characters. In the story author has expressed his philosophical life directly or indirectly and suggested that the political leaders are full of corruption and the nation can hope nothing good from them.

In the short author has described the incompetence of local authorities. As we can see that the story is composed after independence and still the subject of the story remains relevant today. So, Narayan has chosen a universal subject which would always remain a burning issue and Lawley Road can easily be branded as another good feather in the honorary cap of Narayan. A mix with brilliant comic timing!

CONCLUSION: As per the above discussion we can see that R.K. Narayan short story present the various problems of Indian society. Mostly his short stories are set in North India and an imaginary place like Malgudi gives his story a unique charm. In his short stories we have the themes like vivid life from historical observation of common place incidents and humdrum life. He covers wide gamut of human experience from the innocent pranks of children to serious communal riots, misery of common man to filial relationship, superstitions and orthodox social tradition to supernatural elements. What one gets from his short stories



is, perfectly illustrates the gentleness and humanity of his country. Narayan's short stories are simple of common folk with characters from everyday life. The themes of Narayan stories seem to be of perennial interest especially to a sensitive mind interested in human beings.

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