CHAPTER VII
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ACHIEVEMENTS OF R.K. NARAYAN

'Probably no writer since Tagore is better known in the west than R.K. Narayan.'¹ He deserves both praise and appraisal in more distinguishing terms than he seems to have received hitherto; more so because he has never intended to exploit the fashionable modes of fiction-writing based on sex, violence and 'eye-catching topicality'.² Consistently in thirteen novels he has written during forty-eight years from 'Swami & Friends' in 1935 to 'A Tiger For Malgudi' in 1983 - he has confined himself to matters of ordinary everyday life. Yet he has proved interesting, the reason is not far to seek, he offers us so much interest that life itself can offer. Inspite of his limited range of middle class people, 'the spirit of the Indo-Anglian novel receives maturity in his fiction'.³ The earlier novels before him were devoid of impersonal as well as intellectual life. They were primarily designed to be an entertainment for the English serving class of India. But Narayan's emergence on the Indian literary plane brought a new change particularly in the selection of a novel kind of subject-matter and the portrayal of ordinary everyday life lived by the common man in India. Though his contemporaries, particularly Anand and Raja Rao, tried to confine their attention on depicting the problems of independence and ills of Indian Hindu society (as in 'Untouchable' (1935), 'Cooie' (1936) and 'Kanthpura'
(1938) Narayan made an attempt to explore the mood of comedy, crisis in the individual soul and relied on the detached observation as to offer a local, regional but at the same time a universal kind of atmosphere to the world of the fiction-reading public of India and abroad. Professor Stephen Hemenway rightly points out:

"Narayan, perhaps, by recognizing his own limitations as an artist, continues to produce highly readable, happy-go-lucky novels about the same people and place. He advances the genre of the Indo-Anglian novel considerably with his resolution of many linguistic problems, his unique handling of characters, and the Indianization of the East-West theme. His novels are most suitable vehicles for the presentation of ideas and characters capable of amusing westerners. His content and method are quite distinct — and thus increase the scope and potential of English-language novel of India."

Likewise, Ved Mehta has a high admiration for Narayan as a novelist:

"R.K. Narayan has no equal among Indian novelists writing in English. While his sense of this language is not particularly refined, he nevertheless manages by a miracle of perception and choice of detail to convey the Indian without a single false feeling or gesture. The India R.K. Narayan deals with is of ages and sages."
It breaks the bounds of cultural experience - the contact with the British. It overflows until all her people, in whatever occupation, are engulfed in the novelist's ink. 5

Professor V.V. Kantak finds it difficult to assess Narayan's achievement, because his "very simplicity, his naiveté, seems to set a problem." 6 One of Narayan's loveable eccentrics the Headmaster in 'The English Teacher' lays veritable stress on simplicity, "This is the simplicity to which all human conduct must be reduced". To describe this impression we may borrow this expression of the eccentric Headmaster and modify it slightly to read "This is the simplicity to which all art must be reduced". It would certainly constitute the main strength of Narayan's art which stands on its own, having no need at all of any stilts, crutches or props to support it. This is why, Narayan has been able to be left with a 'faithful following, a distinguished reputation' during fifty years of writing fiction. As William Walsh points out:

"- - - outside India, that is, where he has received pretty well every mark of that country's national distinction - at least the appreciation of novelists as different from one another as Somerset Maugham and E.M. Forster, each of whom has admired his low-toned, but distinctive individuality, his unaffected literary persona and his professional dedication". 7
William Walsh is right in his affirmation because Narayan is professionally a very disciplined writer rooted in the Indian tradition, the old Hindu tradition of the Gita and the Ramayana, which lays great emphasis on the maintenance of discrimination. According to this discrimination, man's will is directed towards one ideal. Lacking this discrimination, a man is bound to wander in all directions, after innumerable aims. From the outset Narayan had only one ideal before him, as Professor Iyengar points out:

"... to remain a writer. Anand at least has -- some political axes to grind, though these donot offensively intrude into his creative writing. But Narayan has no axes of anykind -- he -- is -- a man of letters pure and simple -- whereas Anand 'finished' his education in Cambridge and London, Narayan had his education entirely in India. He is of India, even of South India. --"8.

Professor Iyengar’s clarification signifies Narayan’s position as a well-determined and disciplined writer who has Indianized the novel. Really, the novel is a western art form. But Narayan uses it with a sense of discrimination. How did he acquire this sense of discrimination still remains a riddle to his whole-hearted admirers and bitter critics as well? He is a writer immersed in his material, having no sideways like his contemporary writers. His one ideal and whole-hearted
concentration on it enabled him to remain the novelist as novelist. Narayan's world-wide popularity is the result of his simplicity, purity, perseverance, patience and love, the symbols of greatness which ought to bring about glorious success and fame he, continues to enjoy since the publication of his first novel. William Walsh aptly distinguishes him from his fellow novelists and throws a great deal of light on his immense popularity both at home and abroad:

"If Anand is the novelist as reformer, Raja Rao the novelist as metaphysical poet, Narayan is simply the novelist as novelist. R.K. Narayan, now in his seventies, has produced a sizable body of work — which makes him one of the most respected novelists at present writing in the British Commonwealth. Over a period of fifty years of compositions he has built-up a devoted readership throughout the world from New York to Moscow. — — His writing is a distinctive blend of Western technique and Eastern material, and he has succeeded in a remarkable way in making an Indian sensibility at home in Western art."

This distinctive blend of "Western technique and Eastern material" makes Narayan the Indo-Anglian writer without any doubt, whatever may be a dispute about the use of terms — Indo-Anglian and Indo-English. But like Tagore he tries his best to make East and West meet together. Edwin Gerow clarifies this point.
"Narayan is part of a very small group – perhaps alone with Tagore – which has spoken with a literary genuineness that transcends cultural boundaries and which actually says something to post-romantic western man (Sir William Jones, Goethe – and others seemed to react to the novelty of the recently discovered Indian literature."

Narayan is rather a 'unique figure in modern Indian letters' on account of his unflinchingly traditional outlook. He has gone a step ahead of the great giants of Bengali fiction–Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore – both of whom were also rooted in Indian tradition, yet they could not escape from adapting the structure of their stories from western romanticism. Bankim's 'Krishnakanta's will' consists of a plot which is partly based on the old motifs of 'error and chance, infatuation' and salvation but the way it steers the characters is harnessed to such fantastic ends as the destruction of the family hastened by murder, adultery, abjuration of duty and some other evidently imported western sins. The book even lacks a happy ending in the approved Indian terms. There is no doubt that the protagonist Gobindlal returns eventually to his wife's death but he is hardly re-united with her. He is inclined, or rather forced by his conscience to spend the rest of his life for the atonement of his sin. This is the real function of his character. Gobindlal appears more like Oedipus than Natraj in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi', who comes to enjoy freedom in the end.
Narayan's whole-hearted devotion to his profession, his consistency of universal vision, his artistic detachment, simplicity of content and form, traditional outlook, his mastery over the presentation of ordinary everyday realities, have enabled him to achieve a great name and fame in the annals of Indo-Anglian fiction. Though Narayan was born in the ordinary family of a school-Headmaster, he has undoubtedly achieved greatness by dint of his dedication to one ideal, and this ideal is to let the individual set out in his fiction on a quest for his identity. This identity of the individual is revealed at last. To make personal as impersonal in art requires a great deal of patience, serenity, broad-mindedness, the extinction of personality or ego and great skill to win the attention of the reader or the audience, and Narayan has all these qualities whereby he enriches his fiction. Catering both to the East and the West, Narayan in his fiction seems to have done a great deal of tight-roping dancing in Malgudi circus for which we cannot escape from complimenting him for his superb performance.

**His Views About Art & Literature.**

In his writings as well as personal interviews R.K. Narayan has revealed his views about art and literature. In his 'Gods, Demons and Others' (1965) Narayan has expressed his views about literature, which
"-- is not a branch of study to be placed in a separate compartment, for the edification only of scholars, but a comprehensive and artistic expression to benefit the literate and the illiterate alike. A true literary composition should appeal to an infinite variety of ways; any set of stanzas of the Ramayana could be set to music and sung, narrated with dialogue and action and treated as the finest drama, studied analytically for an understanding of the subtleties of language and grammar, or distilled finally to yield esoteric truths.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore, literature to Narayan is a variation on the eternal theme of personality and this personality can be studied through diversified ways. His own fiction has several qualities - it can edify the scholars, it is also replete with comprehensive and artistic expression. It would certainly be an exaggeration to compare his novel with the Ramayana, which appeals to an infinite variety of ways, but it is certain that Narayan's work can be analysed in manifold ways. His language is clean. Alan Warner points out that 'Narayan writes admirably clean English'.\textsuperscript{12} His style is direct and straightforward, characterized by an economy of expression and vocabulary adequate to deal with the range of subject-matter, and South Indian sensibilities. He seldom uses Victorian literary prose, verse rhythms and English public school slangs in his novels. He seems to have been gifted with the English virtue of
understatement with a subtle touch of irony, which the English reader can easily appreciate more than sentimentality and ethical preaching. He establishes rapport with the foreign reader on the pictorial level, offering scenes and situations typical of India: a temple festival (as in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi'), a doll-display (in 'The Dark Room'), Mempi caves and forests (in 'The Guide'), 'Mr. Sampath' and more comprehensively in 'A Tiger for Malgudi'), classical myths, just to give a glimpse of eternal India. As style is the man himself, Narayan sounds extremely sincere not because he has a tendency to retail authentic information about the people and the landscape of Malgudi, but because he has inhaled the atmosphere of the place to such an extent that he is able to exhale it for the edification and the benefit of his readers.

Narayan points out, again in 'Gods, Demons and Others':

"The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. Every story has implicit in it a philosophical and moral significance, and an understanding of the distinction between good and evil. To the story teller and the audience the tales are so many chronicles of personalities who inhabited the world at some remote time, and whose lives are worth understanding, and hence form part of human history rather than fiction".  

13
Narayan moulds these epic characters in his novels. The perpetual fight between the supporters of evil and that of good continues in the world of Narayan's fiction. But there is hardly the Greek tragedy in the end as goodness triumphs at last in almost every novel of Narayan. The meek and the saintly have to suffer temporarily; the triumph of the man of evil is also ephemeral; and everything is bound to come out right at last. The Law of Kæma determines a series of births of the mankind. They suffer because of their previous actions, unless they come to realize their evil nature and mould themselves to be good enough to their fellow-beings. In 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' Narayan introduces Vasu, as a strongman of evil, and allows him to continue as a reckless being until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. And these misdeeds have a demonic design. Natraj and the people of Malgudi are terrorized by this giant. In the epics also,

"Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction. And however frightening a demon might seem, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities - a profoundly happy and sustaining philosophy which unfailingly appeals to our people, who never question, 'How long, Oh, how long, must we wait to see the downfall of evil?" (P.5).

This profoundly happy and sustaining philosophy is conveyed similarly in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' through Sastri who is well-versed in Indian Hindu mythology. Sastri consoles Natraj:
"Every rakshasa gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him." 14

Sastri's information is encyclopaedic. His philosophical thought is considerably induced by Vasu. Natraj who appears to be the replica of his own author is confident enough to hope that -

"...everything would pass and (his) attic would be free." 15

All these mythological references and the subtle understanding of people about their validity signify that Narayan is deep-rooted in the literary values of India's great past. He interprets the contemporary Indian cultural scene in accordance with his acceptance of a range of cultural values. Narayan himself writes in his introduction to the Ramayana: 16

"In areas of military, political and economic power, we see the Ravana, the evil antagonists of today."

According to Narayan,

"All imaginative writing in India has come from the ancient epics, from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata." 17

Such statements clearly align Narayan with classical literary tradition. In this way, "Narayan's is classical art". 18 This classicism can be seen in the
following principles which occur through Narayan's analysis of his art in 'Gods, Demons and Others', the single major source for his thought about novel form:

(1) Narayan is like a village story-teller whose daily life is based on the authority of the Vedas, which have in them not only prayer and poetry, but also guidance in minor matters.

(2) Legends and myths, as contained in the puranas -- are mere illustrations of the moral and spiritual truths -- in the Vedas.

(3) In every story, since goodness triumphs in the end (Barring 'The Dark Room' every novel of Narayan signifies this fact -- virtue is rewarded at last), there is no tragedy in the Greek sense.

(4) Over an enormous expanse of time and space events fall into their proper perspective. There is suffering because of the need to work off certain consequences arising from one's actions in a series of births determined by the Law of Karma. ('Second Opinion' and 'A Tiger of Malgudi' testify this fact).

(5) The events in Indian myths follow a calendar all their own, in which the reckoning is in thousands and ten thousands of years, and actions range over several worlds seen and unseen. -- In his waking (Brahma) creates the universe, which passes through four well-defined epics -- Then Brahma falls asleep, and there is a total dissolution of everything. (He) wakes up and the business of creation begins all over again.
(6) For certain purposes this Timeless Being descends to the practical plane in the form of a trinity of gods --- Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the protector, and Shiva is the destroyer; and all of them have important roles in mythological stories, along with a host of minor gods (whom Indra heads) and an even larger host of evil powers broadly termed demons—asuras and rakshasas; added to these are kings and sages of the earth. The pressure exerted by these different types of beings on each other, and their complex relationships at different levels, create the incidents and patterns of our stories.

(7) All the tales have certain elements in common, sages spend their lives in the forest, seeking a life of illumination (as Narayan has shown in his recent novel 'A Tiger For Malgudi' --- the tiger --- Hermit lives in Mempi Forest of Malgudi) through austerity and concentrated meditation. Demonical creature also undertake intense penance, acquire strange, unlimited powers, and harass mankind and god-kind alike until a redeemer appears and puts them out.

(8) While the evil-minded Pursue power and riches, idealists renounce everything, including the ego, in their search for an abiding reality. Renunciation is ever a desirable means of attaining a higher life, and at some stage every character adopts it. (Jagan in 'The Vendor of Sweets', Raju in 'The Guide', and Sambu in 'Second Opinion' are living examples).
(9) Though circumstances and details may vary, personality alone remains unchanging and makes sense in any age or any idiom. For Narayan phenomena are but Maya (cosmic illusion), prakriti, glancings, gleamings, refractions—myriad as they happen to be—from an eternal static supreme Being holding infinite, forever unrealized potential. Narayan, like his home and family, is Hindu in attitude, conversation, custom, demeanour and practice. The world is not more important than the shadows of the forest or the white radiance on waves. Narayan is a storyteller, who takes delight in repeating the work of the gods in idly making and dissolving endless spheres for mere amusement of the process itself. He refers at least once to Supreme Reality of this Universe—Narayana, God of infinite creation.

Most of these general patterns of cosmic Illusion are plainly discernible in his novels as the cycle of creation, dissolution and rebirth. His protagonists start from innocence to knowledge resulting into experience, the realization of their own self. In the end, they appear to be changed beings, forgetting their past misdeeds and emerging as new beings with maturity and true understanding of life. In this way, Narayan's art is classical.

In his interview with Sunil Sethi of 'India Today'
Narayan clarifies:

"Every writer has his own theory, method of practice of developing his art like every doctor who has a different way of arriving at a diagnosis".
According to him, 'it is the academics who tend to generalize, professors who think that literature must be carefully boxed and labelled'. Here Narayan criticizes his critics who tend to judge his work on the principles laid down by old critics of the past. Perhaps the best critic in Narayan's opinion should be the creative writer, and one who is a mere critic is not fully acquainted with the canons of creative writing. R.A. Scott James points out:

"The facts of which the artist is sensible must be facts to which the critic also can penetrate, and these are to be found not only in life in the more obvious sense, but in that whole order of facts which furnish the mind - the knowledge, the memory of the past, the culture the common possession of which makes intelligent conversation possible and exchange of ideas fruitful". 20

John Updike is the only critic whom Narayan favours with commendation. He has admired Narayan's sense of community and regarded him 'a writer as citizen'. He is himself a renowned novelist of American fiction, endowed with perceptive understanding to 'feel exactly the same way' Narayan is 'many things to many men', like true reality, but he is very much pleased with Updike:

"I was particularly interested by the point Updike makes about the writer as citizen since I feel exactly the same way. It made me feel good to know that Updike understands my involvement with people - as individuals and as a community". 21
And here lies a true rapport between the creative writer and the discerning critic.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL HONOURS CONFERRED ON HIM

R.K. Narayan was first recognized as a writer of merit and intelligence by the West. He has pointed out in his memoir (My Days) how he acutely faced the problem of the publication of his first novel. Had there been no Graham Greene to support him in respect of publication, R.K. Narayan would have also slipped into the ‘slough of Despond’, and his curiosity would have died down. But as it happened, it proved to be a fluke to him. Narayan writes about his first novel, 'Swami & Friends' how it was rejected by several publishers until Graham Greene came to his help:

"When I had completed the novel (Swami & Friends'), I faithfully despatched it to Allen and Unwin, and when it was returned, to another publisher and then another. I had got used to getting back my manuscript with unfailing regularity once every six weeks - two weeks onward journey, two weeks sojourn on a publisher's desk, and two weeks homeward journey with a rejection slip pinned to it. -- The last publisher to return it to me was Dent, and I had advised them in my covering letter to forward the manuscript to Purna (his neighbouring friend in Mysore') at Exeter College, Oxford. I sent a parallel letter to Purna advising him to weight the manuscript with a stone and drown it in the Thames".
But Purna never did so. On the contrary, he encouraged Narayan 'not to despair', but wait for sometime. Somehow, by some instinct Purna approached Greene and gave him the manuscript. Narayan tells us:

"Graham Greene recommended my novel to Hamish Hamilton, who accepted it immediately."

The novel was published in 1935. Inspite of its instant appeal, 'it had no sales'. Hamish Hamilton rejected his option for Narayan's second novel, 'The Bachelor of Arts' with the words that 'Swami & Friends' 'was a sad failure'. The first publisher doubted Narayan's literary future. Again 'The Bachelor of Arts' was published on Greene's recommendation. 'The Dark Room', once again read and approved by Graham Greene, was published by Macmillan. Narayana had the unique experience of having a new publisher for each book. Thus his novels were first published in the west and only then they were known in India. It was only after 'The Guide' (1958) that Narayan became famous and also earned money which solved his all problems. 'The Guide' won him the National prize of the Indian Literary Academi, the country's highest literary honour. 'The Guide' was accepted for a popular Hindi film, and this film has never failed to draw packed houses. Soon he was included in the 'writers and their works Series' published by the British Council. But he had already been honoured by well-known novelists like Greene, E.M.Forster and Somerset Maugham, the literary giants of their time.
As early as in 1938 Somerset Maugham who came to India and stayed in one of Maharaja's mansions in Mysore, was curious to meet Narayan:

Maugham asked:

"How is it that I have not seen anywhere the famous writer living in this city—Narayan?" Sir Charles (Private Secretary to Maharaja of Mysore) turned to his assistant in consternation and asked, "Find out if there is a famous writer in Mysore. Consult the University Vice-Chancellor, if necessary." 24

Narayan mentions in his autobiography that 'he even did not possess the right dress for visiting a diwan'. In those days he could afford to wear 'a dhoti and a cotton jacket' which were his main outfit. He had resisted the Western style of dressing many years. Though Narayan was reluctant to participate in Somerset Maugham's engagement, he was persuaded by his friend Purna to take advantage of this opportunity. He went to meet Maugham but felt diffident as if he was wrapped in a bath towel.

It was really in 1956 that Narayan was introduced to the U.S.A. (United States of America) by the Michigan State University Press. During 1953–1954 this press had published his five novels which were well received by the critics and the readers alike. In 1956 he accepted the invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation and visited the United States
for the first time. It was not only his first visit to the United States, but really a first trip outside India. He delivered lectures at several universities there, meeting persons from Aldus Huxley to Greta Garbo and staying in Berkeley for three months during which he did most of his writing on 'The Guide'.

'The Guide' was published by the Viking Press in 1958. It not only proved a tremendous success but also caught the attention of Dev Anand, the actor-producer and one of the most popular personalities of the film industry in Nineteen sixties. Though the film proved a box-office hit, it brought little financial gain to the author. Narayan mentions in his autobiography:

"I was told finally that the film of 'The Guide' had failed to make any profit. They wrote to me, "we wish to assure you, however, that the moment we make any profit, your share will come to you automatically.""). The picture was supposed to have cost them nearly ten million rupees, but much of it was spent on themselves, in fabulous salaries and princely living while producing the film. Now and then they summoned me for vague consultations or to participate in a meet-the-press party, where they proclaimed their grand intentions and achievements after benumbing their guests with free-flowing alcohol."
However, Narayan had an opportunity to dine with Lord Mountbatten at Government House, and to persuade him to request Queen Elizabeth to attend the World Premiere of "The Guide" in London. He

"... was taken directly from the airport to the banquet hall at Government House. It was a fantastic proposal - which perhaps originated in the imagination of late Pearl Buck, who was a partner of Dev Anand in the production of "The Guide". After a regal banquet, our hostess, who was the Governor of Bombay, discreetly isolated the film unit from the other guests and piloted them to the presence of His Lordship, seated in a side verandah ..."

Whatever be the bitter experiences of R.K. Narayan, there is no denying the fact that Dev Anand introduced him to public, and made his name immensely popular in India. Though his fifth novel, "Mr. Sampath" was also converted into a popular Hindi film in which the well-known actor Motilal played the role of Sampath, it had failed to make Narayan a novelist of the people.

In 1960 Narayan was awarded the A.C. Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature and in 1981 the American Akademy and Institute of Arts and Letters made him an Honorary Member.

"... the American Akademy of Arts and Letters elected him to an Honorary membership ... the second Indian
so honoured, the first being Sitar maestro, Ravi Shankar — Narayan was in New Delhi to receive the citation from the New J.S. Ambassador, Harry G.Sarnes".

At the age of seventy-eight R.K. Narayan is at the zenith of his fame, and there has been hardly any decline in his creative powers. He has already been awarded Padma Shushan in 1964; he has been conferred D.Litt. by the University of Leeds to be followed a course by the Universities of Delhi & Mysore respectively. He has an honour to have his books translated into several languages - Polish, Hebrew, Russian, French, Italian, Dutch, German and Swedish. Upto 1978 his 'The Guide' had a sale of over one lakh copies. As soon as it was published in Indian edition in 1958, five thousand copies of this novel were sold upto 1962. In 1963 eight thousand copies were republished and since then its demand has been rising again and again. Besides England and America, Narayan's popularity is rising in Russia also. There he has been included in the series of 'Writers and Scientists of the East' published by Nauku Publishers. Elina Kalinnikova calls him the 'Singer of Malgudi'. Several of his novels and short stories along with sketches have been broadcast by the B.B.C., a rare distinction to be added to Narayan's solid achievements as a living and loveable author. His 'The Guide' is prescribed in several Indian Universities and researches are being done on his work both at home and abroad. It is very often said that a genius is seldom recognized at
home, in Narayan's case it may be true to some extent but
his rising popularity belies the common saying. He is at
present the greatest fiction writer of Indo-Anglian litera-
ture, and one of the most popular author to be read abroad.
Khushwant Singh, who very often visits Europe or the United
States, points out:

"Whenever I am in Europe or the United States,
I spend a considerable time in visiting book stores --
Authors whose work I see most are Narayan, Jhabvala,
Mulgaonkar, Marikandasaya and Shattacharya in that order."

A STUDY OF THE NOVELIST AS A LIVING AUTHOR:

R.K. Narayan points out in 'My Dateless Diary':

"English studies work on the basis that a dead
author is a good author. He is passive and still while you
explain and analyse him in the classroom; having a living
author on hand may be like having a live lobster on your
plate."

No doubt, it is really a ticklish job to pursue
the work of a living author, at least to a researcher who is
ever curious to know all kinds of intimate details about him.
It is very often said that Narayan 'hates publicity' and
dislikes being interviewed. S.Krishnan, one of Narayan's
old friend, clarifies this point:
"The fact is that while Narayan genuinely enjoys people and derives emotional and artistic sustenance from his contacts, he has an overwhelming reluctance to talk about himself. This reluctance is compounded of many factors - a natural reticence about all aspects of his private life that have no bearing on his public persona, and a truly honest conviction that whatever he has to say he has already put into his books".

That Narayan is shy by nature and a sensitive person can easily be inferred after reading his novels and short stories. The inward glance of the author testifies this fact which can be confirmed more when one gets the opportunity to come into personal contact with him. But what is the main reason of this shyness and sensitivity? Perhaps his early failures 'in his intermediate and degree examinations have something to do with his perpetual tendency to retreat into himself. One of his earliest stories, 'Iswaran' clearly throws a great deal of light on the impression of the failure in examination which hastened a poor student to drown himself in the Sarayu. How he felt about it is described realistically:

"He combed his hair with deliberate care, the more so because he knew everybody looked on him as a sort of an outcast for failing so often. He knew that behind him the whole family and the town were laughing. He felt that they remarked among themselves that washing, combing his hair, and putting on a well-ironed coat, were luxuries too far above his state: He was a failure and had no right to such luxuries".
'Breach of Promise' the story of a youth who had sworn to commit suicide, if he failed in his examination, indicates how failures affected Narayan so extravagantly and made him diffident for the rest of his life to come. In his interview with Ved Mehta Narayan disclosed that 'Breach of Promise' "almost his first tale" was "very truthful - autobiographical, you know".

Tyranny of Fate and irony of prevailing circumstances troubled Narayan time and again until he got rid of 'distracting illusions and hysterics' by dint of meditation after the sudden death of his wife. Though he had already written three earlier novels and a collection of short-stories before the demise of his wife, an admirable author emerged in him after the publication of 'The English Teacher', which is more an autobiography than a novel proper, from 1945 to date. Narayan has undergone bitter and sweet experiences of life and has remained a man of fortitude and forbearance. The life of a widower is seldom happy especially in the middle class families where people are always engaged in solving their personal problems more than paying attention to the perpetual crisis going on in the individual soul. Hence living amicably with other members of his family, his mind always remained busy in solving greater problems and making life free from all types of illusions about Fate and the place of man in family, society, and the universe.
Narayan believes in discipline. That is why, his novels are pieces of perfection, artistic finish, and unfailing artistic detachment. Inspite of any pressure and wayside liabilities, his daily-routine is fixed. Ved Mehta points out:

"He considers his morning walk his office hours, because he stops and talks to people, many of whom chat with him freely about their doings or their troubles — he observes their ways closely".33

Like his protagonists Nargayya, Natraj and Raju it is his Nature to get involved in other people's interests and activities. He remains close to his locality and problems of the people living there. This involvement is the best means of providing material for his fiction and reading human nature realistically. That is the reason we find in his fiction the convincing revelation of human nature, without any false gesture and fantastic imagination. Everything appears to be balanced and systematic, of course, with some repetitions which highlight Narayan's sense of continuity in respect of life, this universe and permanent values existing from time immemorial. The portrayal of perpetual struggle between permanent and temporal in his fiction indicates that Narayan manifests greater sparks of wisdom which are of valuable help to the common man to reach his ultimate goal and thus achieve freedom at last.
Narayan's unquestionable immersion in his material signifies his sincerity towards his vocation as an artist. His complete detachment from the world of prevailing illusions is a solid proof of serenity which can balance anyone's mind and enable him to judge the human drama being played on this earth with a perfect sense of balance. In fact, he is endowed with a solid power of Indian Hindu wisdom, that paves the way to realize the reality of this world and the world beyond it. In this way, he belongs to the line of great harbingers of humanity, who speak the language of common people but impart greater messages to divulge the mystery of human existence on this earth. The well-known Hindi poet Gopal Das Neeraj sings in his verse that half of the life of man is spent in being chained deliberately and the other half in getting rid of them. Nothing remains after that - the human soul is seldom free from the tangles of birth - dissolution - and re-birth. But Narayan signifies through his protagonists that chains of human existence can be broken by dint of following righteousness, discipline in all walks of life, and best performance of one's duty. Those who shirk from their own duties and try to run after alluring temptations are bound to be lost in distracting illusions, and hysterics. The best way to avoid such an unwanted confusion is to perform one's own duty whole-heartedly, however ordinary it may appear to the performer. Narayan is rooted in the philosophy of 'The Bhagavad Gita' that reveals the profundity of the yoga of renunciation.
"Action rightly renounced brings freedom:
Action rightly performed brings freedom:
Both are better
Then mere shunning of action."

(The Bhagavad Gita; Sri Ramananda Math; P. 123).

When lust and hatred are removed through the power of serenity, man's renunciation does not waver. He is never upset by contradictions in life; neither longing for one thing nor loathing its opposite. The worldly chains which delude his mind are soon cast off. For wise people there is no difference between knowledge and action. And Narayan is unmistakably an illumined soul who has purified his self through the power of meditation.

Now grand old man, Narayan is a happy person enjoying world-wide popularity and still busy in exploring the mystery of this human life in the universe. It is none else but Narayan whose heart is full of the milk of human kindness which can induce him to perceive the existence of soul even in ferocious animals, not to speak of the human body. The latest fiction purports this fact convincingly and highlights that to solve the problematic secret of this life is certainly a better piece of work than to narrate a simple humorous tale having no problem of this type at all. Living in his Yadavagiri home situated at the outskirts of Mysore and enumerating both losses and gains of his life, Narayan's personality is replete with the Indian axiom - "Simple living and high thinking".
Susan S. Croft is right in her statement that "the best word to describe Narayan would be ‘simplicity’. -- Narayan ‘just happened to become a writer, to invent Malgudi, and to gain fame as one of India’s best-known novelists. He has proved extremely adept at managing the lot fate gave him.”

However, it does not mean that the author is totally worryless and lives altogether in an ivory tower. The travails of writing do perturb him and at times pangs of uncertainty trouble him considerably. Narayan points out about this all:

"It is really a nuisance writing a novel. It ties you down so completely for a year or two. This one ("The Painter of Signs") took a whole year. And you are not quite sure it will be received".

Narayan enjoys good health and still writes fictional books with equal enthusiasm and interest, he has shown for the last fifty years. His novels which have around two hundred odd pages are the essence of the material selected and ordered painstakingly. He is really a hard task master as he points out:

"I just write and revise a great deal ... I don't have a complete plan, just a broad outline, and the book simply grows".

He has a tendency to write fairly and regularly everyday, mostly after lunch, in a placid atmosphere he has
created in his Yadavagiri home in Mysore, or in Coimbatore
where his only daughter, Hema Narayan lives with her husband
and children. His Yadavagiri home is situated at the out-
skirts of Mysore, surrounded by the countryside and the
beautiful view.

Narayan enjoyed very much reading 'Kanthpura' but
Raja Rao's 'The Serpent and the Rope' appeared to him "too
much philosophy and theory". He likes some of Milk Raj Anand's
books, because

"... he is full of social awareness and confronts
social values". 36

But he is disgusted with the new generation of writers
who are not close to their background. He likes regional
writings:

"Except we can never get it in translation. But I
do agree that potential young novelists get diverted, lose
touch with their background, and are not close enough to the
people nor disciplined about their writing". 37

Such is a picture of this born novelist who still
occupies a top most place in the annals of Indo-Anglian fiction,
and is happily alive to enjoy immense popularity.
NOTES & REFERENCES


15. Ibid


23. Ibid... P. 116.

24. Ibid... P. 121.

25. Ibid... P. 172.

26. Ibid... P. 173.

27. Interview of the Fortnight: India Today: P. 59.


32. Vard Book: John Is Easy To Please: PP. 142-143.


36. Ibid... P. 32.

37. Interview of the Fortnight: India Today: P. 52.

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