PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to examine Tradition, Culture and Environment in the novels of R.K. Narayan.

R.K. Narayan’s outlook is primarily comic. It is comic in a broad philosophic sense, which enables him to weave all the bizarre events into a beautific vision of life, in which every small event, every small acquaintance, however, insignificant and absurd it might seem, turns out to have a meaningful role in the eternal scheme of things.

Narayan’s vision is shaped by a strong Indian sensibility that precludes any possibility of Tragedy, because man here is safely placed in a comic hierarchy with relations extending not only to his fellow men but also to Nature and God, not only in time and space but also beyond time and space. In the scheme of things man is responsible to God as much as God is responsible to man. In hours of human helplessness God’s grace comes to help, as it is a symbolically affirmed in The Man Eater of Malgudi. In such a universe man is never driven to the boundary situation so as to feel
completely abandoned. The Indian world view holds that the world and the human attachments are Maya; and failure on the mundane level does not necessarily bring and awful sense of tragedy. For the Indian man is finally not alienated from but united with the universe or with the source of creation. With the cycle of cause and effect operating from Birth to Rebirth, and man assured of the ultimate spiritual reunion no final pessimism is possible. Moreover, the Indian traditional society by means of its rigid social and moral codes maintains a keen sense of social cohesion thus making any alienation or disintegration impossible.

Malgudi comedy underlines this traditional Indian belief in the ultimate integration. This also corroborates the views of critics like Potts and Northrop Frye with regard to the comic.

Characters like Sampath and Vasu are dismissed because they become absurd in the Malgudi Setting. At the heart of Narayan's comedy there is an awareness of absurdity. Even though in his novels there is a perceptible moral bias. In Narayan's comic world
the characters are purged of their absurdities and are integrated with the society.

But through these absurd characters-printer, poet, Maneater, guide, financial expert, sweets vendour-Narayan weaves his Malgudi comedy that follows the tradition comic pattern of order-disorder-order. Narayan's heroes, notwithstanding their stupidity, rebel against all social constrictions which thwart their freedom. Their actions embody their existential defiance against a hostile universe. But in the process they fall into incongruous and absurd situations in relation to their society.

If the disorder is due to man against his society, the ultimate order in the cosmic frame work is due to man wedded to his society. In Narayan's fiction man and society are symbolically related and the bliss that comes at the end is the outcome of this relationship. Not only man alone emerges chastened; the society also gets affected in the submission process. Narayan's comedies register this movement from illusion to reality and in the process character as well as the society are born into sort of new life.
Narayan's novels can be said to be in pattern of the new Comedy. The individual traverses along a path of follies and misadventures seemingly throwing the social stability into peril, and at last expiting for his blunders, returns to the fold of the society. In view of the assured security of the Malgudi society, the apparent disasters resulting from the unbridled impulses and instincts of the comic hero only serve to build up the comic tension. The narrative implies this sense of social security, and in the context of this awareness the erratic acts and adventures of characters in the Narayan's Fiction arouses laughter.

In all the chaos and confusion, in all the disorderliness that we perceive in this fictional world Narayan systematically shapes the emotional response of his readers towards the final end. He weaves the disorderly episodes into significant pattern within a frame work of moral or aesthetic awareness. Narayan's comic vision like the magician, gives us the assurance that all shall be well despite all the follies and misadventures of his heroes.
Narayan uses irony as a rhetorical weapon to wake his characters out of their dreams and thus to bring them back to the fold of the society. Narayan does this by an affectionate understanding of the various existential compulsions which confront his characters. Narayan’s irony aims at correction and intergration.

There is a distinct low mimetic bias in Narayan’s comedy. It operates within a definite social framework with roots in traditional and moral values. The historical and geographical details about Malgudi and the behavioral details of its people convey a vivid impression of Malgudi’s small, docile society. The characters who are brought to the stage of Malgudi are ordinary men and women with common human ambition and flaws.

Narayan’s comedy does not of course, ignore the sad things of life which are as the very root of human existence. But these are woven into the very soul of comedy. It admits the painful process of ageing or the death of a grandmother, wheather it is the sad disintegration of Jagon’s dreams and ideals or the compelling ordeal of Raju—all these are woven into the fabric of comedy and as
inevitable facts of life, these are accepted not with bitterness but with humility. The comic always ensures a triumph of life over death, separation over all that negates life in a social context. The sorrows make the characters humble and wise and this is the vision that the cosmic spirit reveals.

Before closing this brief Preface, I must put on record my deep sense of gratitude to several institutions and individuals without whose courtesy and cooperation I could not have completed my present project. I am profoundly obliged to the members of the library of B.N.K.B. P.G. College, Akbarpur. It is not possible for me to forget their cooperation.

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(Kiran Bharti)