Chapter VI

Summation

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

(Proust 2)

In a critical assessment of the Bible or anyone of its books, several critical norms have been applied. The inferences drawn, and the conclusions arrived at depend upon the researcher's approach to the text. The content of the text is only one part of it. The present study has provided a narrative-critical approach to Luke's Gospel, exploring the currents of the story world in it. It began with the assumption that the vital messages of the past could be recoverable only in the degree to which they can be discerned within their literary forms, and that the bearing of the literary form upon interpretation is the vital factor in drawing the meaning of the Gospel. Luke's Gospel narrative, with a significant story in it, lends
itself to a thoroughgoing analysis from a narrative-critical standpoint. Since
the Gospel employs a literary method with narrative as its form, the
narrative-critical approach has served as an appropriate tool for the literary
generic identity as Gospel, has lent itself to a critical scrutiny of the Gospel.
Narrative criticism is an umbrella format, making room for a variety of
literary approaches to different features of the text. The present thesis has
focused on the narrative act, the causative factor, that fashions the story-
line.

As the most vibrant offshoot of new criticism, narrative criticism
strikes a self-assertive, independent posture in regard to the parameters
involved in literary evaluations. It dispenses with the theory that the
societal, cultural, historical, and racial background, and the impress of
authorship on the literary work are factors a critic should reckon with, in
order to arrive at precise, pertinent inferences. Narrative criticism stands by
the view that the text has its own identity and merit. As the meaning and
the merit reside within the text itself, narrative criticism considers the text
in its final form as the finished whole. Therefore, this study, undertaken
from the standpoint of narrative criticism, has not concerned itself with
such extraneous factors as tradition, history, and the methods thereof, and
views pertaining to form, and redaction criticism. The antecedents of the author, the compositional history of the Gospel, the political climate, and the contemporary trends and attitudes have not been considered relevant to this study.

The story-line, with which this study is concerned, is made available in the narrative itself. This study focuses on Luke's Gospel, as it stands, in its entirety, as self sufficient and comprehensive for the purpose of research. No attempt is made to make a comparison between this and the other three Gospels, because they have no bearing on the content and scope of this research. A text-oriented study that views the narrative as a coherent whole, this study has attempted to give the true import of the Gospel, applying the narrative-critical norms. The text provides it own context, and individual passages are considered integral to the whole and reviewed as such.

From the literary point of view, Luke's Gospel is taken to be the story of Christ, the son of God, who assumes humanity as Jesus, overcomes Satan during the temptation, establishes God's Kingdom on earth, and restores the elect, till then captives under Satan, to their rightful place in the Kingdom. The Gospel story detailing the life of Jesus, the sacrifices he makes, the miracles he performs, the parables he employs to convey his
message, and the discourses that punctuate the narrative are all indicative of
the process through which the Kingdom of God is established in the hearts
of the elect.

In accordance with the basic concept of the narrative-critical
approach, the implied author and the implied reader become the focal point
of scrutiny and assessment, and the narrative itself is interpreted from the
viewpoint of the implied reader. In narrative criticism, the implied author
and the implied reader are generally considered to be abstract constructs,
narrative, however, provides legitimate reasons to identify them as concrete
realities. Whatever has been gleaned, gathered, and synthesized from the
Gospel lends credence to the inference that God is the implied author, and
the elect, with whom he interacts, is the implied reader. This study views
them as pre-supposed by the text, the elect's anticipatory response being
part of the literary intent of the text. The response is integrated into the
story itself. Further the tenor and import of the message—enlightenment of
the elect as to the mystery of the story of Jesus—leaves God the implied
author, and the elect the implied reader on the same wave length and
provides a clear understanding of the meaning of the Gospel. The meaning
of the text is interpreted in terms of what it communicates between the
implied author and the implied reader.
Through devices intrinsic to the process of story-telling, the implied author guides the implied reader to keep abreast of the story and its intent. The narrator and the narratee are studied as the structural devices created by the implied author. The narrative act is examined as the first level of mediation shared by the implied author and the implied reader, and the story is discerned only through the narrative act. It has been brought out how when the implied reader interacts with the narrative act, the story, till then an abstraction, comes to be construed meaningfully. With the narrative act as its focal point, the study offers a clearer insight into the mysteries of the Gosepl story, and helps in achieving a synthesis of all that goes to make up its content, and facilitates, ultimately, a better understanding of the Gospel story.

The primary story, as recounted in the Matrix Narrative, deals with the concomitants in the life of Jesus, of the sacrifices he makes; in other words, what happens to Jesus, the protagonist. The secondary story, recounted by the Hyponarrative embedded in it, is about Jesus’ actions, what he does to establish the Kingdom in the hearts of the elect. Each action is studied as a narrreme conjoined with one another by the narrative act resulting in two parallel story-lines – the primary story in the Matrix Narrative and the secondary story in the Hyponarrative.
In the Matrix Narrative the narrative act binds the infancy stories of Jesus in divinity, and makes them meaningful in creating the narrative setting of expectancy by way of "prolepsis". The elect's craving for the Kingdom of God to be established, and the filial thirst of the believer-elect for the lost-elect to come into the fold are brought out in them. Further, the spiritual process of the elect entering the Kingdom is described in Mary’s song, John’s discourse and the commission discourse of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is depicted as a spiritual Kingdom into which those rendered powerless by Satan gain entry and reclaim power. The wealthy-arrogant elect shed their pride and become humble in the Kingdom. Those who are starved of spiritual food are fulfilled here.

In the story of the boy Jesus in the temple, the implied author again lays stress on the fact that Jesus is divine. What happens to Jesus afterwards is made clear by narrative reasoning, a narrative act that addresses logical situations. Jesus’ prayer and the descending of the spirit of God following the baptism of Jesus are perceived to be necessitated by Jesus’ sacrifice of his divinity at baptism. It is the implied reader’s narrative reasoning that observes the syllogistic pattern of narrative presentation: Human helplessness makes Jesus pray; Jesus prays; therefore, Jesus is human, and God’s spirit descends on a human; the spirit descends
on Jesus; therefore, Jesus is human. In the genealogy list, Jesus is treated along with Adam, the first human being on earth. The narrative intent of presenting the lineage of Jesus after the baptism event, also serves as a narrative clue to confirm the humanity of Jesus, following his baptism. Thus the baptism narreme which leaves Jesus in humanity is linked to the temptation narreme, by the fundamental factor of the newly assumed humanity of Jesus. Each step in the narrative is made a logical sequence of the previous step, by the narrative act employed by the implied author.

In the temptation story (4:1-13) Jesus’ victory over Satan is very clearly set forth. The implied author presents the event as a cosmic war, after which Jesus gains control of the elect by acquiring the power to condone their former disregard of God’s tenets, and, in this way, accounts for the spiritual Kingdom of God coming into existence for the elect. Then, when the need arises for Jesus to manifest the power the elect also have in the Kingdom, he willingly comes under the power of Satan for a short spell. The two major premises, quite paradoxical as they appear – Jesus gaining control over Satan, and Jesus losing control over Satan – are perceived to be supplied by the implied reader’s narrative reasoning. Here the implied author employs “enthymeme”, a rhetorical device of the narrative act providing links between the two premises for the sequential narration of the
story. It is through “enthymeme” that the implied reader detects a pattern of reading between the narremes, perceives the meaning, and establishes correlation between the two premises. Thereafter, the stories of Jesus sacrificing his self and his life are related in the narreme of prayer on Mount Olives, and the narreme of the cross respectively. In the resurrection narreme, once again, the story takes on a new turn towards the divinity of Jesus. Jesus is identified as God, worshipped, and praised. The circular path of Jesus from heaven to earth and back to heaven is established. The circular frame of the Matrix Narrative begins and ends in a temple.

It is highlighted that the primary story is discernible not only through action-oriented sequences, but also through other forms of narration – the silent tales of sacrifices of Jesus – which the reader observes nondiegetically. Each episode is perceived as acquiring the intensity of import and intent from the other. Episodes of Jesus’ prayers, and of the spirit of God descending on him are viewed as acquiring their significance from the baptism event, in which Jesus surrenders his deity. The story of temptation is realistic since Jesus meets Satan as a human being and not as God. Since Jesus is understood to have withstood the attacks of the tempter as a human being, the story is justified in presenting Jesus as a perfect model of resistance to the spiritual enemy, and a permanent source of succour and
hope for the elect. The implied author’s depiction of the temptation event as a cosmic war between Jesus and Satan, and the victory of Jesus over Satan as the establishment of God’s rule on earth, serves to recognize the power and authority of Jesus over demonic powers, as both legitimate and meaningful. The story of vision, whose implied theme is Jesus surrendering his armour of defence, leads logically to the crucifixion story. The sufferings of Jesus do not appear to be unreal divine exercises, because the baptism episode implies the sacrifice of the divinity of Jesus. Further, the sufferings of Jesus do not seem redundant, as they are delineated by the implied author as the manifestation of the power the elect have for a life of obedience to God. It is the narrative act that provides the sequential flow to these stories in the narrative through various narratological devices.

The Hyponarrative deals with the story of the elect perceiving the working of the kingdom in their lives, and growing in it. Through various miracles, episodes, discourse, and parables connected by different narrative links, the implied author proceeds to achieve his objective of enlightening the implied reader as to how the Kingdom of God gets established and sustained in the hearts of the elect, and how it withstands the attacks launched by the enemy from the bastions in the kingdom of the world. The elect’s emulation of Jesus in their lives is viewed as made possible in the
Kingdom of God solely on account of their election. Thematic parallels are discerned in the Hyponarrative and in the Matrix Narrative. The themes – Jesus' trust in God's power, his rejection of the earthly privileges, and his faith in God's care, evident in the temptation narreme in the Matrix Narrative – are found reflected in the same order in the introductory narreme of the Hyponarrative. A narrative pattern of miracle-discourse-parable is also observed as a recurring feature in most of the narrremes of the Gospel narrative.

In order to bring out the elect's most intimate relationship with Jesus, the narrator introduces the family episode (8:19-21), in which the elect are represented as constituting a spiritual family, with the bond among its members stronger than with biological family relationships. As providing a narrative lead to the preparation narreme, the family episode is viewed as a transitional device facilitating the flow of the narrative. When Jesus' disciples learn to represent Jesus using his name, the narrative goal of establishing the Kingdom in the hearts of the elect is observed as notionally achieved. A narrative need for the parable of the good Sa-mar'i-tan is created in the preparation narrame. The narreme closes with an awareness in the disciples of their commitment for the elect family which is spread across nations. The importance of the horizontal relationship among the
elect is brought out by the parable of the good Sa-mar'i-tan (10:30-35). Closely following it, the Martha-Mary episode (10:38-42) indicates the vertical relationship which an elect needs to have with Jesus. The disciples’ request for prayer provides a lead to the prayer narremee in chapter 11. In the parable of the importunate friend (11:5-8) the especial right of the elect to get God’s blessings is indicated.

The parable of the fig tree (13:6-9), and the episode of Jesus healing of a crippled woman (13:11-17) are viewed as bringing out the inevitability of the growth of every elect in the Kingdom of God. That filial obligations which might come in the way could be overcome is indicated as the theme of the parables of the tower builder (14:28-30), and the king going to war (14:31-33). The cost of discipleship in God’s Kingdom has been viewed as calculated and reckoned, well in advance, by Jesus’ victory over Satan in the battle-field of temptation. Jesus’ deep concern for the lost-elect is observed as focused in the parables of the lost son, the lost coin, and the lost sheep (15:4-32), and in the episodes of the blind man and Zac-chae’us. The blind man is not allowed to meet Jesus; Jesus stops to meet him as he is an elect (18:35-43). Zac-chae’us being an elect, climbs up a tree to see Jesus; Jesus goes to spend the day with him (19:1-10). Thus the Hyponarrative is viewed as centring round the concept of election. The
focus on election is seen to serve as the connecting link in the narremes, and to provide a narrative unity to the Hyponarrative.

The extra-textual communication device employed by the implied author to achieve the narrative goal of enlightening the implied reader on the character of the Kingdom is highlighted as the unique feature in the Gospel narrative. In 20:20-40 the characters who communicate are Jesus and his opponents. Though the textual communication takes place between Jesus and his opponents, the extra-textual communication is observed to take place between Jesus and his disciples at the level of the implied author and the implied reader. This device is identified as helping the elect/the implied reader know the truth and equip themselves to face encounters, and get doubts cleared. Other instances of extra-textual communication through non-diegetic narration are Simon carrying the cross of Jesus (23:26) and Joseph burying Jesus’ body (23:50-53). These incidents are treated as extra-textually emphasizing the elect’s responsibility for the other elect. Since the Hyponarrative comes to a close with Jesus’ commission to his disciples, in the way it began with Jesus’ own commission, conceived and executed by God, and as the story begins and ends in a place of worship, the circular feature observed in the Matrix Narrative is found reflected in the Hyponarrative also.
Another structural device of the narrative act employed by the implied author is the leitmotif. Leitmotif is the intentional repetition of an idea, used to unify the subject matter of a narrative. The leitmotifs of reversal, division and prioritizing serve the purpose of unifying the subject matter of the Gospel – the Kingdom of God. They are the dominant leitmotifs, and the examination of these leitmotifs has provided an encapsulated description of the Kingdom of God as a spiritual entity and as a present reality. As the powerless elect enter the Kingdom of God, they experience a reversal to power. They experience a reversal of motivation, orientation, and approach; their values change, and spirituality takes the place of religiosity in them. Such a reversal experienced by the elect is brought out by the episodes, discourses, and parables, which also function as leitmotifs. Mary’s song of reversals (1:51-52) indicating the reversal of fortune in the elect is echoed by John’s metaphoric prophecy of reversal (3:5, 6). The episode of Jesus in the temple (2:48, 49) is a reversal leitmotif of Jesus giving importance only to his heavenly Father pushing aside his earthly filial affinity. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus functions as a leitmotif of reversal of roles in the Kingdom of God. The leitmotif of division indicates that in the Kingdom of God, the practical realities of a living relationship with Jesus divides the elect from those whose lives are ordered by religious rules and regulations, and that the religiosity of the
world, and the spirituality of the Kingdom are do not coexist. Among other instances, the leitmotif of division occurs in the analogy between the old and the new garment, and the new wine and the old bottles (5:36-38), the elect and the others (8:10), and in the discourse of the great divider (12:51-53). It is clearly maintained that division is not to be considered as delinking an elect from his civic duties. The leitmotif of prioritizing Jesus’ word of authority over unfavourable circumstances (5:5) and (9:23), obedience to Jesus over serving him (10:41, 42), and God over the world (16:13), describe the elect in the Kingdom, who put God first and find everything else falling in its proper place. The treatment of leitmotifs as structural devices has suitably formed a part of the narrative-critical analysis of Luke’s Gospel narrative, in view of the unifying characteristic of the leitmotifs.

Critics generally opine that narrative criticism can determine the meaning of stories, but not ultimately the significance of their meaning. What they mean is that scholars who use narrative criticism to bring out the meaning of the text are conscious of a gulf, between the story world of the narrative and the real world of the reader. The contention of the thesis is that this gulf exists because narrative critics as a rule identify the implied author and the implied reader as idealized abstractions. However, the
significance of the meaning of the Gospel for the elect is well brought out in the thesis by identifying the implied author as God, and the implied reader as the elect, both as existing realities. Further, this study also provides the interpretive possibilities of the strategy of concretizing the implied author and the implied reader. Furthermore, the thesis has made use of the text as a finished product with self sustaining viability, rejecting the notion that background information and author’s intention are essential to the understanding of the text. Removal of cultural and historical embeddedness makes the Gospel a literary piece of eternal contemporaneity. Narrative-critical approach to the Gospel can initiate such a methodology to the criticism of other pieces of literature also.

It has been proved in the thesis that insights derived from the study of other narratives of secular literature can be applied directly and profitably to Gospel research. Focus on the narrative act enables a rediscovery of the sense of wholeness of the Gospel. A study of the narrative act, as a critical tool, brings a wonderfully refreshing perspective to Gospel interpretation. It transforms dry historical analysis of the texts into something vibrant and intense. This aspect of the methodology of studying the narrative act allows scope for insights into the mysteries of the Gospel stories, and meets the need of synthesizing the meaning of the Gospel, otherwise unaddressed by earlier biblical scholars. The story
sequence recognized by the study of the narrative act is a beneficial contribution to the Gospel study in general. This study of Luke's Gospel as a narrative has offered new avenues of research on some of the larger issues, that students of the Bible have traditionally examined. Contrary to conventional understanding, baptism, temptation, vision on the Mount and prayer at Mount Olives are treated as sacrifices. The divine–human–divine aspect of Jesus, discerned in the study, helps to answer many questions raised by the readers of the Gospel. Questions on sabbath observance, fasting, and other religious observances have been answered in the study. The study also provides answers to questions that people often ask about – the meaning of baptism, temptation, and vision on the Mount. Thus, though the focus is on purely literary and aesthetic evaluation – not theological interpretation – it has also served the purpose of understanding the meaning of Gospel material. This study illustrates the power of the new methodology of narrative criticism with its focus on the narrative act, to provide solutions to the old and seemingly intractable problems of interpretation.

This study can contribute to, and be integrated with other ways of reading the text. No one critical tool can be all dominant. A clear understanding of the Gospel narratives warranted by the narrative approach can undoubtedly be considered a major contribution towards explanation of
the doctrines. It encourages the reader to surmount the obstacles of piecemeal reading of the Gospel, by attaining a holistic understanding of the Gospel story. This study also underlines the enormous potential of the narrative-critical approach for understanding individual Gospel stories. The thesis insists on rigorous careful attention to textual detail. The very heart of the approach is close reading. It stresses the literary context of each unit. It also offers renewed hope for interpretive egalitarianism. The various strands of historical criticism require some rather highly specialized skills such as use of historical, sociological, and anthropological methods to reconstruct history from scant data; and education, and application of some criteria for dissecting the biblical text. But virtually any implied reader can follow the story-line in the narrative-critical approach. Gospel interpretation is viewed as well within narrative-critical theory. Further, instead of universalizing Luke’s Gospel, a conventional practice, the Gospel is particularized as a story meant only for the elect, thus making it endemic in its meaning, approach and success. Since the Gospel addresses only the elect, apart from its literary value, nothing need be of interest to others.

There are plenty of avenues for literary critics to explore the critical arena of narrative-critical approach. Narrative act as a new device can be employed to study the narratives in secular literature. The present study,
obviously, is an initial effort which needs to be pursued further. In the normal course of things, the Bible scholars do not like the Bible to be scrutinized under the microscope of literary criticism. They fear that the sanctity and serenity of the holy book may get diminished in the process. But, this study has made an earnest attempt to dispel that apprehension. Further, the study, it is hoped, will throw more light on the understanding of the holy text in the right perspective. The researcher is optimistic that this work can prompt the future researchers to make in-depth study on different aspects of the multidimensional Bible in general and the Gospels in particular.