CHAPTER - VI

SUMMING UP: THE EMERGING PICTURE

(245-262)
CHAPTER - VI

SUMMING UP: THE EMERGING PICTURE

Narayan's characters move about in a socio-cultural environment which includes economic compulsions, family and personal ties, socio-political surroundings, religious and cultural traditions, the influence of modernity on the present, and the impact of the West on the East. Narayan is rooted in the ancient Hindu religion, a religion that attaches importance to self-discipline, renunciation, incarnation, the doctrine of rebirth, the law of karma, and non-violence. An ancient myth or legend provides him to express his vision of modern life. This tendency grew more prominent as he crossed the fiftieth year of his life.

The spirit of Hinduism

Narayan embodies the spirit of Hinduism. According to William Walsh,

In Narayan, Hinduism appears at the natural sub-stratum of a sensibility preoccupied with individuality, with the specific, with particularisation. Not that he is concerned with a mere ticked collection of particulars. Each details is seen and presented so as to imply as essential truth about its own nature, just as the aggregate of details is raised from a simple collection to an order or world or portrait. A detail in Narayan is not only close to the essential object but also contributes its part to a significant whole. 1

The use of myth and legend

Narayan does not make use of myths and legends as mere illustrations of abstract ideologies and beliefs, but to reveal the final vision of
the present-day realities as visualised by him. This method links the modern with the ancient Indian tradition. In this sense, Narayan is in the line of the old Indian sages interpreting the prevailing human conditions in terms of ancient myths, legends, and fables. His view of life is expressed through rich circumstantial details. The presence of the central mythic idea never obscures the real life depicted by the author. Narayan says:

For an Indian, training in the classics begins early in life. With the impact of modern literature, we begin to look at our gods and demands, not as some remote concoctions, but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity even when seen against the contemporary background. Passing inevitably through phases of symbolic, didactic, or overdramatic writing, one arrives at a stage of valuing realism, psychological explorations, and technical virtuosity.²

In his introduction to Gods, Demons, and Others (1965), Narayan refers to the "inexhaustible vitality" of our classical mythology which is as rich and variegated as the Greek mythology. The myth is often brought in to galvanise reality, to point a moral, or to suggest a parallel. But there seems to be no desire on Narayan's part of modernise the myths so as to fit them into the contemporary scene - a desire that is evident on the part of Mulk Raj Anand - in Gauri, for example.

**The Hindu joint family**

Most protagonists of Narayan's novels belong to the Hindu joint family - Swaminathan (better known as Swami), Chandran, Krishnan, Ramani, Raju, Sampath, Margayya, Jagan, Sriram, and Raman. They have strong family bonds. They are deeply attached to their parents, children, and grandchildren, and so are uncles, aunts, brothers, and sisters. The individual grows in a joint family. His character is shaped or warped by the members
of the family. He has to respect the decision of the family elders even in such important matters as the choice of a career or a wife.

**Varnashrama**

The two time-honoured directives of Hindu society are *Varna* and *Ashrama*, commonly called *Varnashrama*. They regulate the social and spiritual life of an average Hindu. Even modernised Hindus, who openly reject the traditional beliefs and customs, are unconsciously guided by them. The majority of Hindus accept the manners of their caste. Many of them carry on their caste occupations. They are afraid to lose their caste. The determining factors in the Hindu marriage are caste and religion.

Despite the odds of unmatching horoscopes in *The English Teacher*, Krishnan loves and marries Susila, a girl of his caste. In *The Guide*, Raju’s mother seriously objects to her son’s affair with Rosie, partly because Rosie is a married woman, but largely because she is a *devadasi*, a dancing girl, whose caste is not known. She cannot tolerate Rosie’s presence in her house and threatens to leave it. In *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan is shocked when his son Mali brings a half-American and half-Korean girl and intends to marry her. He cannot accept her as his daughter-in-law. He has no peace until he succeeds in booking the girl’s passage to America.

In *The Painter of Signs*, when Raman announces his decision to marry Daisy, the first question his aunt puts to him is:

That girl: What is her caste? Who is she? Isn’t she a Christian or something? How can you bring in a Christian?

(PS, 146-147)
As she shows her consternation, she drops the vessel she is holding in her hand, as if she has lost her hold on things. She has slaved at her life to bring Raman up as her own son. All her tenderness for Raman disappears at the infringement of the socio-cultural norms forsted by her religion. For Raman, it is the end of a lifelong association. Her decision creates a family crisis. Raman cannot give up Daisy, but the aunt can give up Raman. Her darling nephew has to be deserted because of her cherished Hindu tradition. Since Raman decides to marry Daisy, his aunt decides to leave for Kashi to live and end her life there.

**The role of horoscopes**

Horoscopes play a decisive role in the settlement of a Hindu marriage. The marriages of some of Narayan’s protagonists suffer a serious setback on account of the horoscopes which do not match — of Krishnan in *The English Teacher* and Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Bhatnagar points out that

Narayan has in his novels some very inclusive digs at the orthodox Hindu customs like the tallying of horoscopes, a custom which could well have prevented his own marriage with Rajam who is, alas, no more. 3

The priest is often bribed to find a way out, and the marriage takes place only after getting his clearance. In *The Painter of Signs*, horoscopes are not consulted, but the help of astrology is taken. The temple hermit predicts that, in Raman’s relationship with Daisy, there will be trouble. At the end of the novel, Raman’s plans to marry Daisy are never realised.

**Woman’s proper place: home and hearth**

A woman’s proper place in a Hindu joint family is her home and hearth. She is obliged to perform domestic duties which include cooking,
housekeeping, and taking proper care of her husband and children. The proper discharge of these obligations accord her a respectable position in family and society. She must be a dutiful and loving wife, always faithfully and submissive. If her husband deviates from conjugal norms, she has to bear with them. In The Dark Room, Savitri is furious with herself and the helplessness of Hindu wife when her husband gets involved with "the other woman."

In the Dark Room there is marital discord, in The English Teacher there is a perfect marital compatibility but in A Tiger for Malgudi Narayan presents an ideal Hindu life when the Swami's wife pleads for the restitution of her conjugal rights.

Husband, husband, husband, I'll repeat it a thousand times and won't be stopped I now to whom I'm talking, Don't deceive me or cheat me. Others may take you for a hermit, but I know you intimately; I have borne your vagaries patiently for a lifetime: your inordinate demands of food and my perpetual anxiety to see you satisfied, and my total surrender night or day when passion seized you and you displayed the indifference of a savage, never caring for my health or inclinations, and with your crude jocularities even before the children, I shudder.

Come home with me, I'll accept you as you are, keep your beard and loincloth, only let me have my husband at home. (TM, 170-171)

**Man-woman relationship**

Relations between man and woman in India are not so free as in countries of Western civilisation. There are social and family restrictions. The lover is under the inquisitive eyes and the comments of his family, his neighbours, his relatives, his friends. Raman is indignant at his aunt who guards him sedulously as well as with the watchfulness of the Malgudians.
who pry into his love affair with Daisy. There is a comment on the conservative section of Malgudi:

This was a wretched part of the town. He wondered for a moment whether he should not sell his old house and take up residence in a more civilised locality like the New Extension or leave Malgudi itself - the conservative town unused to modern life. (PS, 146)

**Cultural ambivalence**

In Daisy, we meet a woman who is not only modern but also a family planning promoter with a missionary zeal. She is averse to marriage. Her parents had arranged her marriage, but she refused to go through it. She believes she is not made to lead a marital life and settle down to domesticity, and so she runs away from home. She says:

They had a shock at home when I told my people that I’d not allow anyone to inspect me as a bride and that I’d rather do the inspection of the groom! They felt outraged and my father’s younger brother - my father being too angry to speak to me - took me aside and said, Don’t be mad! “Don’t you know that it’s not done?” I replied, “If it’s not done, it’s better that someone starts doing it now.” I had other aims. I said I would like to work rather than be a wife (PS, 130)

Daisy and Raman’s association for a few weeks in the propagation of the family planning programme arouses her dormant sexuality, and she carries on an affair with him without meaning to marry him. When Raman persists,

she lays down two conditions for accepting his marriage proposal - (i) that they should have no children, and (ii) that, if by mischance, a child was born, she would give the child away to somebody and keep herself free for social work. Further, their marriage would be a “Gandharva-style marriage, as easily snapped as made.” (PS, 169)
For good or for bad, the marriage does not take place, but Narayan has succeeded in showing the cultural ambivalence.

**Daughter-in-law: the traditional reception**

In *The English Teacher*, Krishnan goes to the railway station to receive his wife Susila and her baby, who are escorted by his father-in-law. When they arrive home in a Victoria carriage, a traditional reception is extended by Krishnan's mother before Susila and the child are allowed to step into the house. A proper ceremony awaits them at the gate. Krishnan tells us:

> My mother came down and welcomed her at the gate. She had decorated the threshold with a festoon of green mango leaves, and the floor and doorway with white floral designs. She stood in the doorway and, as soon as we got down, cried, "Let Susila and the child stay where they are." She had a pan of vermilion solution ready at hand and she circled them before the young mother and child, before allowing them to get down from the carriage. After that, she held out her arms, and the baby vanished in her embrace (*ET*, 35)

**The status and treatment of the elderly**

Aged persons, particularly grandfathers and grandmothers, are esteemed and cared for in Hindu society. That Narayan has feeling and consideration for old age is evident from the Master's observation before he attains samadhi, In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the Master admires Raja for his old age:

> Raja, old age has come on you. Beautiful old age, when faculties are dimmed one by one, so that we may be restful, very much like extinguishing lights in a home, one by one, before one goes to sleep.
No one relationship, human or other, or association of any kind, could last for ever. Separation is the law of life right from the mother's womb. One has to accept it if one has to live in God's plans. (TM, 174)

Old age is characterised by nostalgia and dependence. It is perhaps more so for aged widows. Narayan's novels consider old age as the period when one harvests one's experience to replenish the lives of others. Some of his novels emphasise the fact that old age in the Hindu joint family provides love, protection, and care to children and grandchildren, and they provide these spontaneously, like Swami's granny, Krishnan's mother, Sriram's grandmother, and Raman's aunt.

**Tyaga and tapasya**

In Hindu society, renunciation and asceticism are regarded with reverence. The yogis and sanyasis are respected because they practise the ideals of *tyaga* and *tapasya*. Austerity, meditation, and self-discipline are supposed to be aids to miraculous powers. As Meenakshi Mukherjee puts it:

> Renunciation has always been an Indian ideal of life, be it renunciation of worldly goods and possessions, or the renunciation of selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage. Like all ideals, it is a distinctively difficult condition, attainable only by a few.

She goes on to add:

> The ideal of asceticism runs through Indo-Anglian fiction as a recurrent and compulsive motif. Even writers, who are seemingly indifferent to the spiritual aspects of life, have not been able to ignore it altogether, because this is a pervasive cultural ideal in India.
In his Introduction to *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Narayan says that:

the terms *sanyasi, yogi* or *swamiji* indicate more or less the same state. A *sanyasi* is one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality. Why one would become a *sanyasi* is not easily answered. A personal tragedy or frustration, a deeply compelling philosophy of life, or a flash of illumination may drive one to seek a change. (TM, 9)

**Distinction between detachment and renunciation**

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran’s frustration in love drives him out of Malgudi. He is unable to marry the girl with whom he falls in love at first sight. Narayan says it might have been a silly infatuation.” Chandran deserts his loving parents who have given him all their love, care, and savings. Chandran’s detachment is “forced”, and not voluntary; He moves about with a shaven head in and around Madras for eight months. He inflicts on himself and kinds of physical tortures. He calls himself a *sanyasi*. His new philosophy is says Narayan,

> Love and Friendship were the veriest illusions. People married because their sexual appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house. There was nothing deeper than that in any man and woman relationship. (TM, 123)

There is much truth in Chandran’s newly-found philosophy. On his return to Malgudi, after eight months of wanderings, he settles down “to a life of quiet and sobriety.” He feels that, “his greatest striving ought to be for a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics;” His detachment is merely a transitory phase of his life, and not renunciation. It is an escape from life and then back again into life.
The pretence of sainthood

A real sadhu is difficult to find. In The Guide, even Raju is not a genuine sadhu. He pretends to be a sadhu to hide his identity. His past has been shady and he has been just released from prison. He does not want to be a holy man, but circumstances are such that sainthood is imposed on him in such a way as to leave no outlet for escape. The villagers mistake him for a saint. Their faith in him shocks Raju. He himself is responsible for letting his impersonation go on. Narayan says:

He now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone. He left his seat abruptly, as if he had been stung by a wasp. (The Guide, 109)

Raju curses himself for having once told the villagers the story of a saint whose tapasya brought about rains in a drought-stricken land. When he reveals the truth about himself, it is too late, and nobody believes him. Ultimately, he has to undertake a fast to bring rain. He tells Velan:

I am prepared to fast for the sake of your people and do anything if I can help this country, but it is to be done by a saint. I am no saint, Velan, I'm just an ordinary human being like anyone else. (The Guide, 112)

Although Raju pretends to be a saint, he is forced by the villagers to play the role of a real saint contrary to his wishes. Narayan writes:

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. (The Guide, 238)
Raju begins as an imposter, and Narayan leaves us in doubt whether he dies as a real saint.

**Pseudo-sanyasi**

In *The Vendor of Sweets*, the sole mission of Jagan’s life is to make money, and in this mission he succeeds remarkably well. As a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, he by his professional honesty makes a lot of money as a sweets-vendor. He is disenchanted by the conduct of Mali, his only son. Mali “imports” an outlandish girl and introduces her as his wife without marriage. He spoils the sanctity of his ancestral home when he lives in sin with her.

Jagan now realises the futility of his pursuit of money. He has been hoarding it for a son who, in his opinion, is worthless. Mali is contemptuous of the Hindu ethos and the Hindu way of life. Jagan collapses under the weight of Mali’s unfilial attitude. He is disgusted with the ways of his wayward son. He therefore decides to renounce the world. He cuts himself off from paternal bonds is. He says:

> Yes, yes, God knows I need a retreat. At some stage in one’s life, one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and desappear so that others may continue in peace. (VS 181)

Having thus justified himself, Jagan begins to rationalise further:

> I have probably outlived my purpose in this house. If I live for ten or fifteen years, it will have to be on a different plane. At sixty, one is reborn and enters a new janma. That was the reason why people celebrated their sixtieth birthdays. He remembered his father and mother, his uncle and aunt, and a score of other couples, who celebrated a man’s sixtieth
birthday like a wedding, with pipe, drum, and feasting. People loved to celebrate one thing or another all the time. He had his fill of them, and had nothing to complain of. Mali had proved that there was no need for ceremonials, not even the business of knotting the thali around the bride’s neck... When his sixtieth birthday came, it would pass unnoticed. A widower had no right to celebrate anything. He was fit only for retirement. (VS, 182)

Mali, his son, is imprisoned for smuggling liquor, but this does not bother Jagan as he has snapped all ties with Mali and his mistress Grace. We may call it renunciation, but it is neither total nor in accordance with the Hindu view of life. He carries away the charkha with him because he is Gandhian, but his retaining of the cheque-book is evidence that his interest in materialism still persists.

**Authentic sanyas**

On the other hand, Raman’s aunt, in The Painter of Signs, has firm faith that “

> a visit to Kasi is the most auspicious end of one’s life. (PS, 152)

M.K.Naik is of the opinion that

> “she certainly appears to be a more authentic candidate for renunciation than the weak and hypocritical Jagan.”

In Waiting for the Mahatma, Raman’s aunt also leaves for Benares, and her conduct is more genuine that of Jagan.

The essence of the Hindu ethos and way of life includes non-violence, the law of karma, the cycle of rebirth, the transmigration of
the soul, and the oneness of all living things. The last word in wisdom is Vanaprastha. The theme of renunciation is shown with clarity in A Tiger for Malgudi. The supreme realisation comes to the Swami (or Master) after he has gone through the ordeal of hardship and tapasya. The transformation does not come all of a sudden but is slow and gradual. It may take, not one birth but several births, to become a sanyasi. The Swami tells the tiger:

In Bhagavad Gita, He reveals himself in a mighty terrifying form which pervades the whole universe in every form and action. Remember also He is within every one of us and we drive our strength from Him. (TM, 158)

**Gandhi and Gandhism**

In Waiting for the Mahatma, sainthood transforms the lives of two lovers - Sriram and Bharati - in fact, of a whole people. In this novel, we see Mahatma Gandhi in person staying at Nallapa’s Grove in Malgudi and years later in Delhi and on the fatal day (30 January 1948) of his martyrdom. The next day (31 January 1948), he was to preside at the marriage of Sriram and Bharati.

Narayan’s novel has been compared with other “Gandhi novels”, like Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, M.R.Anand’s Untouchable, K.A.Abbass’s Inquilab, and V.Nagrajan’s Chronicles of Kedaram. Gandhiji plays a different role in each of these five novels.

In Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, Moorthy has become a local avatar; a kind of village Mahatma fighting battles on behalf of Gandhiji - against foreign rule, casteism, usury, and false orthodoxy. The entire village of Kanthapuram - with its customs, traditions, and festivals - comes out alive under the impact of the Gandhi movement.
In Anand’s *Untouchable*, we witness the charisma of Mahatma Gandhi as a preacher of social and moral justice. One of the listeners is Bakha and he is thrilled, The Mahatma says:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable.\(^7\)

In Abbas’s *Inquilab*, we have the political events of more than a decade (1919-1931) through the consciousness of the hero, Anwar, as he grows from youth to maturity, from the Jallianwala Bagh carnage to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. In this novel also, Gandhiji appears in person. The very fact that Anwar meets the Mahatma face to face enables him to develop a “total vision” of the Indian political scene.

In Nagarajan’s *Chronicles of Kedaram*, we witness the cultural heritage of India, which is seen through the consciousness of Gokarna, a sophisticated youth rooted in the soil. Gokarna serves as a foil to his ultra-modern friends Vasu. He moves backward and forward to give a viable shape to his chronicles. In this novel, we see Gandhiji as a mediator, one who has come to heal the breach between two sects of Iyengars. Gandhiji’s visit more than his words - has the effect in accomplishing the job. His humanity and ideology work more than any political pressure he can bring to resolve the complicated situation. Under his impact, there is the transformation of an entire community as in *Kanthapura*.

But such is not the case in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Sriram cannot afford to neglect his personal loyalties to his grandmother and Bharati even when he is in the vortex of the terrorist movement. The progress of events is viewed through Sriram’s consciousness. The apathy of the people to non-violence and *satyagraha*, casteless and *classless* society, continues as
before Somehow, Gandhi does not click with the Malgudi people, though his greatness is fully recognised. The timber merchant is shrewd enough to divide his loyalties equally between the Mahatma and the collector for. Gandhi loss not seem to inspire Sriram except as a means to secure Bharati for his bride. Sriram remains almost untouched by the events in Calcutta and Noakhali except in so far as they affect Bharati.

**Philosophy of life**

Naraya’s philosophy of life is not an organised system, and to base it exclusively on the cultural awareness of his women characters would be to truncate it in terms of gender discrimination. To divide Narayan’s philosophy of life into that of his men characters and that of his women characters would not only be artificial and arbitrary but also uncritical: it cannot be bifurcated into two separate compartments, one insulated against the other. As K.C.Bhatnagar puts it:

> Though his plots follow a formula - order, disorder, and order again - we have in his novels plenty of evidence to show (i) that life never takes a straight course, (ii) that, whatever we may wish or strive for, the final result of our efforts is unpredictable, and (iii) that, being human, we must always put up a good face against all his predicament and never feel aggrieved about it.

In Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*, we have an exposition of Sankara’s monistic philosophy of Advaita. In Narayan’s *The English Teacher* krishnan can commune with the spirit of Susila, his wife. Susila is a soul freed from the body but not completely merged with the Supersoul in consonance with Ramanuja’s monotheistic creed of Advaita Visishta as explained by Hiriyanna:

259
The imperfect Prakritic body of the Jiva is then replaced by a perfect one, so that release does not mean a disembodied state. It is this ideal world - "the Highland of the blest" - that is constituted out of Suddha-Sattava.

Narayan brings out the genius of the Tamil people, their customs and traditions, as much as Raja Rao does of the Kannada people in his Kanthapura, as much as Bhabani Bhattacharya does of the Bengali folklore in his To Many Hungers, and as much as Anand does of the robust Punjabis in his Lalu trilogy. The Lalu trilogy consists of The Village (1939) dealing with the idyllic life of the rebel Lalu Singh, a farmer's son in Mandpur; Across the Black Waters (1940), a war novel dealing with the life of Lalu and other Indian soldiers in France who were fighting for a cause which they did not fully understand, and The Sword and the Sickle (1942) which shows Lalu's return from war to lead an agrarian agitation.

Comments

Narayan's main characters are externally simple people, but they are inwardly highly versed in the Hindu way of life. They can quote endlessly from the Ramayan and the Upanishads. They pray daily to their gods. They are orthodox and vegetarian. But as R.M.Varma points out, in a conflict between convention and revolt, Narayan upholds convention; between tradition and modernity, Narayan chooses tradition; between faith and reason, Narayan prefers faith to reason. The apparent conflict between faith and reason tends to sort itself out in favour of faith. To Narayan, as to most Indians, the Ganga is a symbol of India's culture.

Narayan writes for his readers, and not for critics and research scholars. His novels represent the middle class. It satisfies him to be called
social realist. He explores the darkest recesses in the minds of his characters. He investigates their psyche when it is divided against itself. He rejects sexual aberrations. He is all for leading a normal life and cherishing the traditional values. As Varma puts it:

His fiction is India's cultural and spiritual home to which we may turn for sustenance, warmth, and peace.\textsuperscript{11}
CHAPTER - VI : REFERENCES


5. Ibid, p. 130.


11. Ibid, p. 185.