

CHAPTER VI

R. K. NARAYAN — A WORLD VIEW.

R. K. NARAYAN — A POPULAR NOVELIST BOTH IN INDIA AND ABROAD.

R. K. Narayan is far the dominating figure in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction, whose stature as a novelist will never diminish with age. He is more known in the West as a writer than any other novelists or poets of India, save Tagore. Western public, specially the Americans have read the novels and stories of R. K. Narayan.

The development and publicity of Indo-Anglian fiction owe a great deal to R. K. Narayan. English was not his mother tongue. Like M. V. Adimali he did not get his education in Cambridge and London. He had his education in South India. But his English is so superb, so intelligible and so serious. It is not an Englishman's English — it is an English used by an educated Indian who has taken his craft seriously constantly trying to improve his instrument and achieving technical perfection. Narayan is one of the few writers of India who uses the English language as a tool to express the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness — which are all purely Indian, all of the soil and environment of India.

R. K. Narayan is a popular novelist both in India and abroad. M. V. Adimali and Raja Rao wrote their novels in an atmosphere profoundly charged with the tension of the freedom struggle of India. Naturally, they drew their

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inspiration and theme from the political scene. But H.K. Karayan started writing since 1935 when perhaps the political turmoil in the country was on the wane. He did not allow himself to be carried away by the current of politics. With the exception of 'WAIIING FOr TiE HAMMA,' none of his novels reflects the spirit of the freedom movement of India. The educated classes were tired of the political upheavals of the time. They wanted something new to happen either in the political or in the field of literature. Karayan felt the pulse of the largest section of the reading public who had been suffering from anxieties and tensions and socio-religio maladjustments of the era and he purveyed to their needs opening a new world of comedy and humour. He brought into light in the subject matter of fiction the mood of comedy, the analysis of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution and above all the impartial observation and a realistic outlook which constitute the main staple of fiction. Karayan wanted to make his novel a faithful mirror of contemporary Indian society. His subject matter was largely human relationship in the projection of a familiar society - relation between man and man, between man and woman in its ethical and traditional bearings of Hindu life and culture. Karayan is a staunch realist. He brought into the novel a larger diversity of characters and situations drawn from all
ranks of social life. They are not lacking in realism, and as the realism is born of wide personal experience, it has a living quality that endows their novels with considerable freshness.

\[ \text{His Comic View of the Universe} \]

R.K. Narayan's standpoint was that of the middle class gentry, the eccentrics and knaves, the prostitutes and adulterers, buffoons and drunkards and his game-preserves, and his hunting sprees. They are treated with comic irony. As a result in their own world they add to mirth, their villainy and violence devoid of terror and their effect is restorative. Narayan depicts them with playful humour and wit. The tone is always genial and comic.

Narayan lives both in the external and internal world to afford scope for the study of the human mind in its broadest aspects and manifestations as far as possible. His earlier novels do not of course, reflect his artistic maturity and psychological depth of vision. They were concerned with social manners and behaviours viewed as delectable social comedy. Narayan noted and depicted the broad and varied spectacle of life, the manners, customs, behaviours and speech fashions of men and women around them. His view in his first series of novels was not only limited but also confined to the surface. But gradually he graduated in the
hard school of experience, and his personal experiences had
given to his imaginative creations the basis and hard
substance of reality. Between 1949 and 1973 the social
problems, as we have seen, loomed large and portentous.
Thereafter, much greater attention was paid to the social
mind, which was developing more complex and contradictory
relationships. This new interest is illustrated by the
growth of critical study of human psychology written around
fifties. In showing, far more straightforward attempt to
face the realities of life and to probe into its central
truth A.K.Narayan's novels resemble those of Brontës,
George Eliot and Hardy. Like them Narayan's attitude to
life grows out of a whole view of man's condition in the
universe. Narayan believes that society is not man-made by
choices but existing as part of a universal order from time
immemorial. Therefore, to appreciate his philosophy as
revealed in his novels we must try to understand his view
of man's life in the context of the universal order. The
Vedantic view of the universal order is this that life is
cyclical. It has a cyclical order. Human existence is
related to this order. The treatment of the universal order
can be seen at Narayan's work at different levels. He has
his own philosophical and metaphysical beliefs and doctrines
which he has developed from the reading of the Hindu mytho-
logy, upanishads and the Vedas; the beliefs he puts into

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the minds of his characters and from which he detaches himself as an author and lastly the conscious use he makes of this view as a comic and literary device.

The cyclical order and its literary treatment are characteristic of Narayan's novel. The actions and events of human life grow out of the conception of the comic as 'something mechanical that is entrusted upon the living'. Bergson, in his book 'LAUGHTER: AN ESSAY ON THE MEANING OF THE COMIC', says:

Any arrangement of acts and events is comic, which gives us in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement. 1.

Bergson says, we get comedy when man acts in a mechanical or rigid way rather than in accordance with the flexibility and adaptability which are the special qualities of human beings. It is interesting to see how Bergson's theory of the logic of the absurd applies to a good number of characters of R.K. Narayan whose lives become organised around a particular obsession - it may be love or money, or buffoonery or jugglery or ambition or any other thing. This obsession gives rise to comedy or laughter.  

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In an interview with Professor Walsh (BBC Third Programme, 22nd February, 1968) R.K. Narayan declared:

My main concern is with human character - a central character from whose point of view the world is seen, and who tries to get over a difficult situation, or succumbs to it, or fights it in his own setting. 2.

It is a Hardyan view of characters. The design of Hardy is a cosmic one and with his philosophy of pessimism Hardy sees the sign of a universal tragedy engulfing everything. This is Hardy's world view. The individual fate of Sushila in 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' or that of 'Raju' in 'THE GUIDE' reminds that of 'Tess' which is merely symbolic of the fate of a whole way of life.

Narayan illustrates his view of the comic as 'that vast gap that exists within what a man thinks of his surroundings and what it happens to be'. He illustrates this point in 'THE GUIDE', a novel of the later period -

A man may think he is frivolous or dishonest, but without realising it he achieves something serious. This always happens. A man thinks he wants to do something and it may turn out as something else. 3.

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To Narayan the world seems to appear as a place of queer and fun. There is little room in this world for sheer goodness or beauty or honesty. It is a place of unpredictable and uncontrollable forces, a theatre where good and evil spirits are playing an eternal game. Here a man dreams of something, always expecting something to turn up but what takes place actually in reality is utterly different. Narayan seems to see the world as a complicated system of checks and counterchecks arising out of man's illusions and obsessions, the net result being the enthronement of the absurdity. He sees this as an inevitable part of life. In 'MR. SAMPATH' Narayan analyses Srinivas:

His mind perceived a balance of power in human relationships. He marvelled at the invisible forces of the universe which maintained this subtle balance in all matters: it was so perfect that it seemed to be unnecessary for anybody to do anything. For a moment it seemed to him a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticise and attempt to set things right anywhere.... If only one could get a comprehensive view of all humanity, one would get a correct view of the world: things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrong doers as

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there are people who deserved wrong deeds, just as many policemen to bring them to their senses, if possible, and just as many wrong doors again to keep the police employed, and so on and on in an infinite concentric circle. 4.

As a detached artist Narayan projects the elements of follies and absurdities of life before us in all their comic grandeur to which Bergson's analysis of comedy applies. Bergson starts with the assumption that -

All that is serious in life comes from our freedom. The feelings that we have matured, the passions we have brooded over, the actions we have carried through, in short, all that comes from us and is our very own, these things that give life its often times dramatic and generally grave aspect. What then is requisite to transform all these into comedy? merely to fancy that our seeming freedom conceals the strings of a dancing jack. 5.

Bergson argues that a mechanical arrangement like the 'snowball' (The cyclical construction which is the characteristic form of Narayan's novel is a universal comic device and Bergson in his book calls this the 'snowball effect') is funny because life is not like that:

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things do not really happen in an inevitable way. On the other hand, in Narayan’s 'LAWLEY ROAD' or some novels of later period, the cyclical construction or inevitable sequence is really parodying a much more serious and determined order by making the solemn familiar. Again, while Bergson's analysis of absentmindedness is very applicable to Narayan's characters, Bergson finds Don Quixote funny, absurd and fool only because he acts mechanically on his illusions instead of adapting his image of the world to fit the changing circumstances of life. Don Quixote could have controlled these circumstances within realistic limits. But he did not do so and became a legend of fun. But for Narayan while thought and experience are free, there is no possibility at all of really free action. So every man with ideals, plans and illusions is Quixotic and funny, because all these plans will come into collision with the fixed and determined.

Indeed the very nature of these collisions constitute the unexpected in life. Narayan seeks adventure in life. A man wants to do something definite and it turns out as something else. This is the charm of life. It makes life, according to Narayan, a terrific adventure and something worth seeing. In the words of Srinivasa Iyengar:

We watch with relish these exquisite patterns of folly and self-deception, these Alnaschars and their castles in the Air, these diminished

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Don Quixote and their Dulcinea del Toboso,
these Malgudi Sanchos and their patient beasts
of burden. 6.

Narayan's philosophy stems from Vedantic view of
life.

Narayan's philosophy is based on and grows out
of a particular comprehensive Vedantic view of life, which he
accepts to such a degree, is so familiar with, that he can
parody it. Donald Barr remarks in 'NEW YORK TIMES' BOOK
REVIEW:

Vasu and the Printshop might be the West and
India, might be science and humanism, might be
totalitarianism and liberal civilisation. They
are all of these things and none of them. For
Narayan's comedy is not a mere sprightly allegory
any more than it is a mere anthropological
anecdote: it is classical art. 7.

Mr. Barr's remark embodies a substantial truth. R.K.

Narayan's special position as a comic interpreter of the
contemporary Indian cultural scene needs to be understood
in terms of his acceptance of a range of cultural values
particularly literary values from India's glorious past.
Narayan is not the usual kind of neo-colonial literary
phenomenon interested in westernising his own aesthetic
heritage at all costs. His art and technique and his

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philosophy express a genuine formal as well as contextual continuity with the best efforts of Indian literature generally, which, as elsewhere in the world, achieved their typical formulation in a 'classical period'(C 200 - 1200 A.D.). Narayan's is a classical art. Mr. Harvey Breit has called Narayan as the 'Chekhov of India'.

a satirist, a purveyor of amusing oddities. Such approach or such comparisons obscures our attempt to understand the world view of the artist and imposes stringent limitations on our reading of Narayan and necessarily plays down his undoubted achievement in interpreting India and Indians to us as contemporaries.

Narayan is such a superb writer of English fiction, so expressive in our own idiom, so sophisticated and sensitive to Western literary tastes, that we are rightly struck, first of all by his affinities to the larger tradition of Western literature. And yet, paradoxically, it cannot be said of Narayan, as it can be of many Western-educated and Western-oriented Indians, that he is a man whose sympathies and ideals separate him from his society and its history - a foreigner at home.

Narayan is so highly sophisticated English writer yet so intensely Indian in spirit and temperament.
Ved Mehta brings out this point clearly:

R.K. Narayan has no equal among the Indian novelists writing in English . . . . he manages by a miracle of perception and choice of detail to convey the Indian without a single false feeling of gesture.

THE SOCIETY OF MALGUDI - A PART OF UNIVERSAL ORDER

Narayan is a comic novelist. His attitude to comedy grows out of a whole view of man's condition in the universe, and therefore, the criticism of society and the observation of the social predicament implicit in his work is only incidental. For Narayan, society is a part of a universal order. Much of his artistic charm as a writer derives from his success at having made a certain universal microcosm. Malgudi is a part of the universal society. Its citizens and their attitudes are real for us. The Western readers are not used to reading Indian writers, either of the present century or of previous epochs with their hearts and sympathies. The tendency is rather to accept the Indian writing as exotica or a sources of information. But these sources are neither more particularly relevant to literary or aesthetic standards. Graham Greene in his preface to Narayan's novel "THE BACHELOR OF ARTS" makes a clear confession:

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It was Mr. Narayan with his 'SWAMI AND FRIENDS' who first brought India, in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life, alive to me and in 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS', he continues to fill in his picture of Malgudi, a small town in Mysore. Narayan has created wonderfully memorable characters in 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS'.

Narayan projects the true image of India in his novels by his meticulous recreation of Indian landscape and by his realistic portrayal of Indian life, religion and people. Graham Greene expresses the eagerness of Western readers to read about Real India (with a Capital R) and not the India which has been a mere literary region of mystery, of strange spiritual quests, of superstitions and of jungle adventures. Narayan has detachment which makes the artist rely entirely on his creation to unfold a message or emotion without ever taking the pulpit. He leads us into an Allegorical Malgudi - a society into the world to laugh, sympathise and share the vicissitudes of its residents. Narayan perhaps alone with Tagore speaks with a literary genuineness that transcends cultural boundaries and which actually says something to postromantic Western man. Here, in Narayan, are very Indian, very local and traditional.
novels and yet here is an author who not only lives in to-day’s India but who no doubt read Shakespeare and other English classics years before he thought of writing books himself in their language. The dialogues in the novels are more striking in that Narayan gives all his characters the same ordinary English to speak, his peasants and petty shopkeepers and illiterate persons no less than the main cast of his educated middle class characters. No use is made of variations in accent or wrong usage or the many Indianisms that Narayan as much as anyone else could have heard on all sides in every part of the country. What this means is that for Narayan the English language is not in itself a subject but only a neutral instrument which, while useful, leaves all the work still to be done by the user. And, as with Shakespeare’s use of blank verse, the significant fact is that while his characters speak English, Narayan manages to express through this rather colourless medium of his not only the general Indian sensibility but a whole range of character, personality and temperament within it. This is not as simple or easy an achievement as one may imagine. In the matter of language and dialogue, Narayan would seem to have thoughtlessly disregarded a ready-made comic possibility that has proved popular with so many other Indo-Anglian writers, that has, in fact, proved a main prop of their own popularity with readers.

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both at home and abroad. We refer, of course, to 'Indian English' and the many Indian names, festivals, objects, such as other novelists scatter liberally through their pages in order to furnish touches of local colour and also at times, a glossary at the end. Narayan hardly needs a gloss of this obvious kind. Where he writes of specifically of Indian customs or objects, as he often does, no Western or for that matter non-South Indian reader need be non-plussed. The literal significance is relatively unimportant while the human meaning, which is what interests Narayan as opposed to the local colourists, is invariably manifest from the narrative and dramatic context.

HIS WORLD VIEW OF A CYCLICAL ORDER AND THE WHEELS OF EXISTENCE

Narayan's novels are to be studied in context of his view of man's life in a universal order which is cyclical and attached to the wheel of existence. He describes this explicitly in his introduction to 'Gods, Demons and Others' as the time-scheme of the Indian myths:

The sufferings of the meek and saintly are temporary even as the triumph of the demon is; everyone knows this. Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately, at least in a thousand or ten thousand years; if not in this world, at least in other worlds.

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Over an enormous expanse of time and space, events fall into 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. The strongman of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction, and however frightening a demon seems, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities.

Brahma's own life span is a hundred celestial years, at the end of which he himself is dissolved and nothing is left of creator or creation. The Sun and the moon and the stars are put out and the oceans rise in gigantic waves and close over the earth. Ultimately even the waters from this deluge evaporate and are gone. A tremendous stillness, darkness and vacuity occur. Beyond this cosmic upheaval stands a supreme God, who is untouched by time and change, and in whose reckoning creation and dissolution have occurred in the twinkling of an eye. He is the ultimate God head, called Narayan, Ishwara or Mahashakti. From this Timeless Being all activity, philosophy, scripture, stories, Gods and demons, heroes and epochs, emanate, and in Him everything terminates.

That Narayan himself believes in such a universal scheme is clear from a conversation which he records in Contd....P/495.
'My Dateless Diary', a Journal which he kept during his travels in the United States in 1956. On one occasion when he was asked 'what is the meaning of existence' Narayan, pushed into making a statement of his beliefs, comments 'I can only view the problem from the point of view of Karma and rebirth'. Later in such a philosophical conversation he adds -

It (i.e. self-knowledge) may not be in a single birth, but in a series of them, that is why we believe in a sequence of births. Such a world view of a cyclical order is germinated from the Upanishads and Narayan has established his philosophy based on the 'eternal Upanishadic truth.

The same world view of a cyclical order can be seen working in the thought of Narayan's characters. Both his novels 'MR. SAMPATH' and 'THE FINANCIAL EXPERT' end not only with a completed cycle of events but also with the clear indication that the cycle may repeat itself. Srinivas comments when he meets Sampath for the last time:

He might probably have his family with him. He might have abandoned them; he might after all, still have Shanti with him and be planning further adventures, or he might disappear or
still dangle a carrot for Somu and Co. (The other Directors) to pursue. But whatever it was, he felt he was once again in danger of getting involved with him if he asked too many questions.14.

This may be compared with the end of 'THE FINANCIAL EXPERT':

You asked for my property. There it is, take it; have an early meal tomorrow and go to the banyan tree in front of the Co-operative Bank. I hope the tree is still there. Go there, that is all I can say; and anything can happen thereafter. Well, what do you say? I am showing you a way. Will you follow it? The boy stood ruminating.

He was looking crushed: 'How can I go there? What will people think?' 'Very well then, if you are not going, I am going on with it as soon as I am able to leave the bed,' said Margayya.15.

Srinivasa in 'MR. SAMPATH' is a man who is conscious of the cyclical order of the universe. He thinks in antitheses: the importance of social obligation in a world where the perfect and the imperfect run together and form the part of the whole. He believes that the good and the evil balance each other and the paradox of the universe

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is symbolised in the figure of the Nataraja before whom he prays every day. Srinivasa sees that this paradox is reflected also in the way people interact. His theory is that every good or evil deed or purpose is balanced by another, that they form a part of a total picture which may not clearly be perceived by man. By interfering with each other's lives people disarrange the picture temporarily; the total picture remains the same. This is the view of the world as anticipated by Narayan himself:

Srinivasa was filled with great wonder at the ....... vastness of the whole picture of life that this presented; tracing each noise to its source and to its conclusion back and forth, one got a picture which was too huge even to contemplate ....... 'That's clearly too big, even for contemplation', he remarked to himself, 'because it is in that total picture we perceive God.' 16.

Srinivasa derives his theory from his observation of Ravi:

Throughout the centuries, Srinivasa felt, this group was always there ........ though not in one birth but in a series of births. 17.

Ravi's madness in the novel is the result of his attachment; it is not seen as its conclusion. This cycle of events is put into its perspective within larger cycles of time.

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The literary device that Narayan develops in his novels is really part of his material or theme: the study of an individual against the scheme of an inevitable determined cyclical order which includes the moral order. Man's attachment to things like material objects, love, money and ambition which get out of control reflects the relation between the unique individual experience and the mechanical repetition of the universe. This relation is explored in different degrees in different novels.

Narayan's first four novels - 'SWAMI AND FRIENDS', 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS', 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' and 'THE DARK ROOM' revolve around the home and family. The main character of each of these novels chooses freely within the very close limits set by the family or community which see themselves as parts of an eternally fixed order. As William Walsh has pointed out:

The family is the immediate context in which his (Narayan's sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated. 19.

In 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' Narayan shows that Chandran through infatuation, disappointment, disillusionment and
realisation ultimately develops 'the ordeal of consciousness' on a gradual awakening to the need for acceptance of life in spite of all its trials and tribulations which is suggestive of a fatalism that marks the common Indian attitude to life. In 'THE DARK ROOM' the same theme - that of utter dependence of woman on man in our family or society is reflected. In Savitri Narayan has portrayed the picture of a long suffering of a Hindu wife. After tasting the bitter experiences of life, the meek and docile Savitri is transformed into a strong character. Savitri asserts her individuality -

Do you think that I am going to stay here?
We are responsible for our position: we accept the food, shelter and comforts that you give, and are what we are. Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here, and eat food you buy with your money? No, I will starve and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man.

Savitri knows that she does not have the necessary strength of non-attachment to live by herself. She must either live within society by accepting its norms or live outside it, entirely on her own inner resources. Ultimately, she returns

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to the disciplines and support of her family. In each case, the main character finds that he or she cannot live without the support of the family and his or her place within the society after all.

But when we come to the middle and later novels, the material is not that of home and family, but rather the world of small industries, businesses, and the rise and fall of entrepreneurs within it. It is a much more complicated world of passion and deception. The role of the family or the theme of domestic disharmony become a subsidiary one; where it is of importance, it is of no help in sustaining the main character in his relation to the universe. The influence of the family has nothing to do with the mysterious involvement of Margayya, of Sampath or of Raju in their external affairs of life. Their follies and ruthlessness bring them ultimately unending sorrows and troubles in life. They are always involved in crisis. Narayan pursues his favourite trick of exposing his heroes in difficult situation and then making them express their thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness reverie. Most of his characters believe that everything on earth is pre-ordained and that no amount of human effort can ease the situation. The heroes of his novels do not control the events, but events control them. They are helpless creatures torn by desires and passions and tossed this way and that by the

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caprice of fortune. In 'MR. SAMPATH' Narayan sees the world as being controlled by blind and unpredictable forces, a stage where force and tragicomedies are eternally played. The Guide dies a ruined man not because he wanted to die, but circumstances so conspired that the only alternative before him was to become an unwilling martyr. Narayan's characters, as for instance, in 'THE GUIDE', 'SWAMI AND FRIENDS' and 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' are suggestive of his outlook on life - an approach which discovers the generally over-looked, subtle realities of the common and the unimportant, insignificant men we come across at every step in our life. However, there is one common factor in most of his novels - the main character growing from an average to an influential human being and then coming back to his normal status. The end is always seclusion which is due to his dissatisfaction either with one's own self or with the world around him. Whether it is Raju of 'THE GUIDE', Sampath of 'MR. SAMPATH', Swami of 'SWAMI AND FRIENDS', Nataraj of 'THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI', or Ramani of 'THE DANK ROOM', all of them share the same qualities, have the same approach towards life and the world and at the end fall short of nothing but reality.

Srinivasa, in 'MR. SAMPATH' feels the need of self-knowledge as the guiding factor of life. Against all the allurements and varieties he remains loyal to his

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principle. He is very much aware both of his social concerns, and also of a repetitive universe, in which, he, personally can do little and he puts his problem in this way: 'Life and all this is passing - why bother about anything. The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?' Srinivas finds an intellectual answer in the goal of self-knowledge and this is why the 'The Banner' is so important to him:

This was going to help him in his search for an unknown stabilizing factor in life, for an unchanging value, a knowledge of the self, a piece of knowledge which would support as on a rock the faith of Man and his search; a knowledge of his true identity, which would bring no depression at the coming of age, nor puzzle the mind with conundrums and antithesis.

Narayan deals with the problem in a different way in 'THE GUIDE'. Raju's awareness of his own motives and folly in the past is of little help in his present situation. He is caught in the coils of his own deception. He makes desperate attempts to get out of the whole show. It is here that he makes a clean breast of himself, to Velan, his chief disciple. He gives a flash back of his past - his love for Rosie, forgery and consequent incarceration - but his confession

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only confirms Velan's trust in his spiritual power. Professor K. Venkatachari observes:

The fast forced on him by the faith of the villagers in him proves climatic in that it generates a crisis of consciousness which makes him prefer death to going back on his fateful decision taken in a spirit of self-abnegation. Although Saju has had to pay with his life for the credulity of the villagers amidst whom he has come to live, his supreme sacrifice is suggestive of his surrender to life, since even his 'disciple', Velan, refuses to believe that he has been any other than 'Swami' inspite of his telling him the truth about Rosie and himself. 22.

Saju's view of himself as a confidence trickster is irrelevant besides the people's view of him as a Swami:

This Mangala is a blessed country to have a Swami in our midst. He is like a Mahatma. 23.

The role he is given becomes ironically his true identity. His death viewed symbolically means that the individual by losing his life brings rain and life to his fellowmen, and his death is just 'death by water' - which is not really death but a means of self-purification and self-realisation.

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It is the ultimate triumph of the traditional way of living over natural and man-made catastrophes. Panduranga Rao makes a similar study of Raju's conversion:

For once, Raju's decision does not waver because it is a true decision made in an effort towards self-abnegation. He now faces death rather than abandon this unique experience of selflessness. 

Death for Raju is thus the culmination of life. Where Chandran and Srinivas attempt to maintain some sort of balance between their experience and the deterministic universe, for Raju this is not possible. Narayan has no single answer to this problem of the relation between the unique experience and the cyclical deterministic universe.

At one level he sees it as a tension that is a constant source of comedy as in the case of Chandran and Savitri; at another level he sees it as a profound dilemma as in the case of Raju till the event of self-immolation.

Narayan's novels introduce us into a living world.

A novel is a work of art in so far as it introduces us into a living world; in some respects resembling the world we live in, but with an individuality of its own. Now this world owes its character to the fact that it is begotten by the artist's creative faculty on his experience.

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His imagination apprehends reality in such a way as to present us with a new vision of it. But in any one artist only some aspects of his experience fertilise his imagination, strike sufficiently deep down into the fundamentals of his personality to kindle his creative spark. His achievement therefore is limited to that part of his work which deals with these aspects of his experience. In his interview with Professor William Walsh Narayan said that he is obsessed with the detail, the particular of the experiences. He gave as examples from his novels, the fat green penholder that Krishna remembers his father using, and the Queen-Anne style chair that is the place of honour in Nataraja's main room. Narayan places great stress on the value of individual experience precisely because of his awareness of continuity and mortality at the same time. Thus material objects in his novels are given the value of things seen, felt and experienced. They are selected for this reason rather than as the external setting of a social type. Sushila's death, Vasu's murder and Savitri's tragedy loom before us all the more compelling for the hint of the unearthly with which Narayan has shadowed them.

Secondly, a philosophical perception of the total scheme of which every human action is part, serves in his novels only to emphasize the loneliness of each man, his inability to avert destiny either for himself or for others. Krishna says:
The law of life cannot be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb... a profound and unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. 25.

In 'THE DARK ROOM' we see Savitri who is reunited with her husband, observing Mari, her saviour passing on the road. She wants to call him and reward him:

Savitri almost called... through the window, but suddenly checked herself and let him pass.... she felt happy at letting him go....
'Very unjust to let him go, but what can I do?'
she reflected.
She called Mangal and told him 'call that lock repairer....
'Yes Madam'.
As Rahga was about to step out, she changed her mind: 'Let him go. Don't call him.'
She thought: 'Why should I call him? What have I?'
.....She sat by the window, haunted by his shining, hungry face long after he was gone, and by his 'Locks repaired....' long after his cry had faded out in the distance. 26.
In the same novel Shanta Bai reflects

... no one tries to understand me; that is the tragedy of my life. Khayyam says: Into this universe and why not knowing, etcetera.

I am as wind along the waste. 27.

Jagan says:

What is life worth unless we serve and help each other?. 23.

Many of Narayan's novels end on this note. Thus Margayya is rejected by his son. Srinivas leaves his friend Sampath at a railway station, commenting: 'He may meet someone or go somewhere or have half a dozen reasons, but I have nothing to do with them'. Jagan tells his cousin:

Everything can go with or without me. The world does not collapse even when a great figure is assassinated or dies of heart failure. Think that my heart has failed, that's all. 29.

Narayan states his view of the cyclically ordered universe simply, explicitly and objectively which is different from other contemporary Indo-Anglian novelists such as Ajjo Rao and M.R. Anand who are greatly concerned to justify their views. What is particularly noteworthy in Narayan's work.
is the exploration of the single experience in such an ordered universe, and his awareness all the time of the tension or balance between continuity and mortality.

REFERENCES:


2. BBC Third Programme, 22 February, 1968.


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