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Representation of Indian Tradition and Culture in the Select Novels of RK Narayan

Abstract

Ripuram krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanaswami was born in Chennai on 10th October 1906 in a middle class South Indian family. All the works of Narayan are located in the imaginary place called 'Malgudi' which is located in south India. South Indian tradition and culture are greatly highlighted in the works of Narayan. As India is a vast country, we find cultural differences from place to place. South Indian tradition and culture may have slight contrast with the other parts of the nation. Though many festivals are celebrated together, variations in celebrations are clearly noticed. The beauty of India lies in similarity in the differences. On the other hand as the novels are written during 1935 to 1952 we can also see age old Indian customs and strong rooted religious believes. Since education was not spread and limited to some sect of people before British and during British, superstitious believes were very much believed. Social evils like untouchability, gender discrimination and caste systems are also portrayed in his works.

Key Words: Malgudi, Religion, Education, gender discrimination, untouchability.

Introduction

RK Narayan, who was labeled "a small town ironist" always concentrated on gentle humor, weaknesses, and life style of south Indian people. Narayan also addressed the fundamental questions regarding human existence, social evils, sensitive believes and human relations. Narayan also portrayed philosophical touch of Hindu Dharma, Karma and its relevance in

everyday life. Gandhian philosophy is one of the chief concepts in the works of Narayan. Gandhian philosophy shows more impact on finding solutions to Hindu religious issues. He strongly believes in Gandhian philosophy which did not satisfy the contemporary writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

In the early novel of Narayan "The man Eater of Malgudi", we can see the orthodox Hindu religious beliefs and caste mark on the forehead of Nataraj. He symbolizes the strong rooted mystery of Hindu religion. *"I hung up a framed picture of goddess Lakshmi poised on her lotus, holding the bounties of earth in her forehands, and through her grace I did not do badly"*. (The man Eater of Malgudi page 7) Nataraj does prayers to the sun in the early morning and also hangs up the frame of goddess Lakshmi in his parlor. The traditional approach of Narayan is depicted here. He believes in Hindu darma, Indian epics, Puranas, myths and mythologies. He takes the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for references and solutions for contemporary issues.

Narayan's third novel "The Dark Room" published in 1938 portrays the southern family culture in the contemporary society. Husband is the head of the family and wife is expected to walk in the footsteps of the husband. Woman is always expected to have a lot of patience and always Sita character from the Ramayan is depicted. At the end of the novel Savitri shows modern ideology by thinking of leaving the family and deciding to spend the rest of her life in the service of God.

She at one stage is determined that 'She would dedicate her life to the service of God, numb her senses and memory, forget the world, and spend the rest of the years thus and die, no husband, home or children'. (The Dark Room, page 146) Thus religion is chosen as the last and ultimate source for solace and peace.

The Guide is the ultimate depiction of Hindu religion, swami and saints in Indian colorful society with the distinctive humor. Superstitions, duplicities, beliefs and stupidities are greatly captured in this novel. Malgudi is portrayed as the combined place of traditionalism and modernism with the character like Rossie, a classical dancer. *"What must happen must happen, no power on earth or heaven can change its course list as no one can change the course of that river"*. (page 15)

The Guide also is a satirical humor on Hindu blind beliefs. Raju, the main character in the novel is worshipped as a saint as he is found sitting under a tree alone after release from jail. The local communities believe that he has a lot of powers and provide him food and other needs. His meaningless words are positively taken by them with a lot of philosophy.

In his recent novel published in 1990 *The World of Nagaraj*, the character is differently portrayed. Nagaraj prefers to spend much of his time writing letters, drinking coffee and doing some leisurely accounting for a friend. Nagaraj is a mild mannered man with a fragile character from a wealthy aristocrat family. He strongly observes the self-imposed calmness and prepares his soul for the silence of death. "You are like Lakshmana, who stood behind Rama, his elder brother, all the time without a murmur or doubt. (*The World of Nagaraj* page 27) This shows the influence of Hindu epics on Narayan and Indian society. Meenakshi Mukharjee says "RK Narayan successfully achieves the vision through *Malgudi*". The Indian joint family system also gets changed in the novel as Nagaraj, his mother and wife Sita are left to themselves as his elder brother settles down in village saying that he needs to take care of fields.

Conclusion

Narayan's characters in *Malgudi* represent age old Indian tradition and set the modern ideology with the influence of western culture in the later novels. Early novels show the fragrance of Indian soil, vedas, puranas and epics. The later characters are very much westernized with modern ideology. The spirit of questioning the existing social evils like social inequalities, superstitious beliefs, untouchability and caste system are questioned. The thought of questioning is the big change in his early novels to later novels.

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