

R.K. NARAYAN AS A REGIONAL NOVELIST: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan was a renowned fiction writer born in South India. Along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, he was an honoured novelist during the early Indian literature in English. He was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. Padma Bhushan in 1964 and Padma Vibhushan in 2000. He is regarded as a regional novelist who wrote about Malgudi an imaginative region. He is compared to William Faulkner in his creation of an imaginary region. Regionalism in literature is the writing that focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, culture, topography and other features particular to a specific region. Magudi forms the fictional setting in his novels. It is a typically South Indian town symbolizing Indian culture and society. It occurs and reoccurs in his novels and short stories. In this paper selected novels of R.K. Narayan have been analyzed in the perspective of regionalism in literature to reassess his greatness as a regional novelist.

Keywords: Novel, Regionalism, Society, Culture, Realism, Symbol, Locale.

Introduction

R.K. Narayan (Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami) was born in 1906 in a village named Rasipuram in South India. His mother-tongue was Tamil, but he wrote in English. He had settled down in Mysore. He did not write for cheap popularity but his chief concern was to deal with Indian life artistically. He mainly wrote novels and short stories. His chief novels are following:

- Swami and Friends (1935)
- The Bachelor of Arts (1937)
- The English Teacher (1945)
- The Dark Room (1939)
- The Financial Express (1952)
- Mr. Sampath (1949)
- The Guide (1956)
- The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962)
- Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)
- The Vendor of Sweets (1967)

R.K. Narayan was pure artist. He was free from didacticism or propaganda. He believed in domestic harmony and peaceful relations. The place of man in this universe and his predicament was the basic theme of his novels. He is a renowned writer in Indo-Anglican Fiction who received Sahitya Akademy Award in 1960, Padma Bhushan in 1964 and Padma Vibhushan in 2000. Narayan wrote mainly about middle classes, addressed his views of the world and those who live in it. Narayan created an imaginary town Malgudi and its region as a setting for most of his novels. The creative locale, Malgudi occurs and reoccurs in his novels and short stories. Narayan depicts the life of the inhabitants of this region. The customs, language, culture, characters and topography of this region find a place in his works. Narayan is a great regional novelist who writes about this creative region Malgudi in the manner as Wordsworth writes about Lake district, Thomas Hardy about Wessex, Arnold Bennet about pottery Towns and William Faulkner about Yoknapatawpha county.

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Objectives of the Study

- To understand the meaning of regionalism in literature.
- To analyze selected novels of R.K. Narayan from the regional perspective.
- To evaluate R.K. Narayan as a regional novelist.

Regionalism: Its meaning and Characteristics

Regional refers to anything connected to a particular region. Regionalism in literature is the writing that focuses on the characters, dialect, custom, culture, topography and other features particular to a specific region. Regionalism indicates that a writer has selected one of the areas outside the centres of power to be focussed upon. For regionalist writers, the setting is central and the 'local colour' is significant. Further more the characters chosen are sometimes individuals as well as types. Regionalism in literature is writing about the characteristics of a specific region. The setting in a regional literature is integral to the study and may sometime become a character in itself. Characters sometimes become types and are characterized by their adherence to the customs, traditions and old ways by dialect or particular personality central to that region. The regional novel deals with the life of the people of a particular regions outside a metropolitan city, depicting the customs, tradition, dialect, culture and natural scenery of that area.

R.K. Narayan's region – "Malgudi"

R.K. Narayan is an acclaimed regional novelist. Malgudi is his only locale. He writes about Malgudi, an imaginary town and about the region surrounding it. Malgudi shapes the setting for most of his novels. It is the anecdotal town located in South India. The readers are taken to this imaginary land to laugh, sympathize and share the vicissitudes of its inhabitants. The fictitious region 'Malgudi' is woven in such a smooth thread that it creates a fine fabric of inseparable part of Narayan's realistic art. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'Lake District' of Wordsworth 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy, 'The Five Towns', or 'Pottery Towns' of Arnold Bennett, 'North of Boston' in New England of Robert Frost and 'Yoknapatawpha county' of William Faulkner.

R.K. Narayan and William Faulkner: A Comparison

R.K. Narayan is often compared to William Faulkner as a regional novelist. Faulkner is famous for his novels – *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1938) *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). William Faulkner is one of the celebrated writers of American literature. He received Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949. His novels are set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha county which he created and resembled his own native Lafayette county in Mississippi. Faulkner's this imaginary town reflects the American South and an impression of that region penetrating deep into the psychology of its people, both individually and collectively with a feeling of living in and belonging to the South at many different moments of its rich culture and social structure. He was greatly influenced by his home state of Mississippi as well as by the history and culture of the American South altogether, Mississippi, showing his sense of humour, his sense of the tragic portion of black and white Americans. The old South, Mississippi is his native town where the racism is deeply rooted. Racism is embedded in every white man of the South and naturally Faulkner is no exception.

References of Various Places of Malgudi

In R.K. Narayan's novels set in imaginary Malgudi, we have many references to some places as Municipality, clubs, school, colleges, tea- estates, ruined temples, Memphi Hills and caves. We are introduced to a Municipality, a Town Hall, a club and two school – the Albert Mission school and the Board High School. The school boys are cricket – conscious, talk of Bradman, Hobbs and Tate. In 'The Guide', Marco takes rooms in Memphi Peak house on the top most cliff and he explores caves with their carved doorways and wall- paintings. Modern life of Malgudi is represented by references to cars. In 'The Dark Room' the hero, Ramani, has his own Chevrolet car. Malgudi has its well- equipped theatre the palace talkies. The other modern places are – Malgudi photo Bureau, The Suburban stores, the Regal hair cutting Saloon. The truth printing works etc. The modern companies and corporations are hinted at by Englandia Insurance company, English Banking corporation, Central Co- operative Land Mortgage Bank, and hotels – Anand Bhawan, Modern Lodge and the Taj.

Presence of Malgudi in Novels

Malgudi is present in all the novels of R.K. Narayan. In 'Swami and Friends' Malgudi is a semi-agricultural town. Malgudi has peaceful and conservative life, but in 'The Bachelor of Arts' the new civilization has begun to influence it.

In 'The Dark Room' Malgudi is a commercial centre. In 'Waiting for the Mahatma', Mahatma Gandhi delivers his speech on the bank of the Sarayu in Malgudi. In the novel 'The man Eater of Malgudi' the setting is that of Malgudi. In 'The Guide' the town Malgudi is portrayed with the inception of the Railway and the life influenced by Railway. Not only the town, but its vicinity, its forests and caves, temples and other places of tourist interest are portrayed.

Malgudi as a Symbol

Malgudi is a symbol of the transitional India shedding the age- old traditions and accepting the modern western civilization. So Malgudi connects the East and the west, the ancient and the modern. Malgudi is neither village nor city, but a town of modest size in the novel 'Swami and Friends'. With each new novel we advance in time, Malgudi grows in importance. The major landmarks, however remain. The river Sarayu flows by its side. There are Nallappa's Mango Grove and the Memphi forest reached by the Grove street and the forest Road respectively. One can board the train from Madras to the Malgudi station. There is a trunk Road to Trichinopoly. Within the town of Malgudi, there is market Road which is described as the life- line of Malgudi. So Malgudi symbolizes the transitional phase of India moving towards modernization.

In the novels, Malgudi evolve with new dimensions and it represents the progress in social and cultural scenes in India. Malgudi is not only an individual place but a type. It is the microcosm of India. That is why in each novel, a different section of Malgudi is depicted. In the trilogy. 'Swami and Friends', 'The Bachelor of Arts' and 'The English Teacher' the area was education and the characters were either teachers or students. In 'The Dark Room', 'The Financial Expert' and 'The Vendor of Sweets' the protagonists are businessman. There are major characters like Raju, Rosie, Margayya, Marco, Balu and others who defy the traditional norms of life and accept modern manners. So, its strictest case, regional novel can not be applied to Narayani's Malgudi novels. For the town and region of Malgudi with its men an manners is not distinctive and unique and so not different from other regions and people in India. So Malgudi symbolizes and represents Indian culture and society at large.

Malgudi as the Real Hero

According to prof. Iyenger, Malgudi is the real hero of ten novels and many short stories of R.K. Narayan, everything changes but the old landmarks- the Sarayu, the Hills, the Jungles, the Grove remain the same. The characters in these novels love Malgudi. They live in a around Malgudi, never leave it. If they are compelled to leave it, they return to it or to its surroundings.

Malgudi and Myths

Malgudi is associated with many myths. In the novel, 'Mr. Sampath' Srinivas, the scenario- writer passes in review the possible history of Malgudi that perhaps Lord Rama passed the village on his way to Lanka. Lord Rama made the Sarayu river flow. Perhaps Sankara preached Vendanta at Malgudi.

Narayan's Love of Malgudi

Malgudi is land of Narayan's heart's desire. He loves its people and portrays in his novels the men and manners. The habits, fashions, superstitions and all activities- educational, religious, economical, domestic are all depicted with minute detail and in a realistic manner by the novelist.

Conclusion

R.K. Narayan is considered to be a regional novelist in the true sense. All his stories take place in Malgudi, an imaginary world, a small South Indian town. This imaginary Malgudi provides the setting for all of his novels and short stories. Narayan lived in a spacious house built in the orchard garden in the charming and scenic town of Mysore, in which he spent most of his successful years. This city located at the foot of the Chamundi Hill might have inspired Narayan to create his famous Malgudi. Malgudi was for him what Yoknapatawpha was for Faulkner and Wessex for Thomas Hardy. Narayan is known for his objectivity and detachment. He is free from desire to preach, to advise and to convert the contemporary society. The backgrounds in his novels are absolutely realistic and philosophical in their realism. Narayan provides complete aesthetic satisfaction. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' point of view maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality. Like any other regional novelist, he presented all the topographical details of Malgudi, dealing with its physical features. Its people's way of life, customs, beliefs and manners, The portrayed the social cultural setting of this region and showed how this place and the people were interlinked and interdependent. But Malgudi not only remains as an individual region but it emerges as a type also. It is the microcosm of India. It represents Indian society with Indianness and Indian sensibility. A number of people created by Narayan, their life

style, situations, incidents, and themes appeared everywhere in India, Malgudi symbolized the transitional phase of Indian life moving towards modernization. His novels are significant and relevant even today in the perspective of regionalism in literature, and are widely read with keen interest. Thus R.K. Narayan remains a great regional novelist.

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