



Traditionalism In R K Narayan's Novels

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ABSTRACT: R K Narayan was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He is the one who made India accessible to the people in foreign countries -he gave unfamiliar people a window to people into Indian culture and sensibilities. His simple and modest writing style is often compared to that of the great -American author William Faulkner. His first Novel Swami and friends was published in 1935. Besides novels, he wrote short stories, travelogues, condensed versions of Indian epics in English and his memoir.

KEYWORDS : Modernism; Orthodoxy; Traditionalism; Values

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INTRODUCTION

R K Narayan upholds the old traditional values of life prescribed by the ancient Indian culture and embodied in Indian epics, Shashtras, Puranas, myths and mythologies. Naturally he gives the philosophy of traditionalism which permeates all of his novels. It is the fountain head from which his other philosophical concepts, such as Orthodoxy, superstition and the role of fate in life flow as its inseparable channels.

He presents his concept of traditionalism through the middle class of Malgudi an imaginary small town in South India, which forms the background to all his novels.

Narayan's novels show that success and happiness in life lie in resignation to and acceptance of the shastra-approved traditional values. Human life is suggested as a quest of self-identity or emancipation from the miseries of life. But influenced by man's modernism, ego and karma are governed by fate and chance, human life moves in a zig zag way and at last comes to the same state from which it starts but which man's self-realization of his puny stature and the truths of life in the tradition bound social set-up. Any deviation from traditional norms results in disruption of regular, normal life. Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts, Savitri in The Dark Room and Mali in The Vendor of Sweets run away in protest against their family traditions suffer a lot of troubles and later on come back or are brought back willingly or unwillingly for a life better or worse.

The traditional world of Malgudi does not sanction romantic love, as it has its own custom of arranged marriage which is settled by parents after negotiation and horoscope matchings. The marriages of Chandran and Susila in The Bachelor of Arts and Sriram and Bharati in the novel Waiting for the mahatma are supposed to give happiness in life. Unlike Chandran's parent's, Margayya in The Financial Expert regards horoscope matching only as a formality in the settlement of the marriage of his Balu with Brinda. But their consequent life is not so happy as it was expected. Brinda had to suffer much on account of Balu's indecent way of life.

Malgudi has its own set sexual ethics act to which sex-aberration or perversion with any motive is bound to end in frustration and misery. Man and woman living together as husband and wife without getting married are regarded as sinners. Hence it is sacrilegious to violate the sanctity of sex. Ramani, in the novel The Dark Room, Ravi and Sampath in Mr Sampath and Mali in The Vendor of Sweets are eg.

It is thus obvious that the people of Malgudi have their roots in the traditional family systems and moral codes of conduct against which they cannot revolt for freedom. In Narayan's novels traditionalism dominated and overpowers modernity whenever there is a clash between them.

Most of Narayan's woman characters excepting only a few are typically Indian housewives. They are meek, docile, submissive and orthodox having traditional views of virtue and family life. They seem to think that their virtues lie in their perfection in the roles allotted to them in their male dominated families. As they are fully aware of the fact that the happiness in family life depends on the mutual understanding of husband and wife, they merge their individualities in their husbands. They avoid quarrelling with them just to preserve the peace of the family life. They appear to be resigned to their fate, but they are the depositories of social and family

traditions. Janamma, though a minor character in *The Dark Room* gives a clue to the happy married life in a traditional family.

R K Narayan who believe in Indian religion ,scriptures and culture and old values of life show in his novels that religion and its constituent parts can't be separated from life. Eventhough they cause conservation of thought and some kind of inertness, they give a sort of systematic normal life in Indian social set-up. Chandran's mother in *The Bachelor of Arts* is conservative and orthodox in all matters. She prefers Puja every morning with full faith in the protective power of God.

When Savitri in *The Dark Room* steps down the river ,her conscience pricks because she has talked back to her husband and disobeyed him for which she may be punished by Yama in the otherworld.

Velar and other villagers in *The Guide* are of the view that a saint is capable of curing a man of any disease as he has supernatural power for this. They also believe that Raju- the Saint can do miraculous deed for saving the village from draught and famine.

Ravi's mother in *Mr Sampath* is highly superstitious. when Ravi goes mad because of his failure and frustration in love for Shanti, she thinks that he is possessed by some ghost. She believes that exorcising can surely restore him to his normal state.

The old priest of the village temple of the Goddess in *The Painter of Signs* is a hypocrite. He says that barren women conceive within 30 days after offering prayers to the goddess for 3 days. The simple, credulous villagers think that he is a yogi who knows the past, present and future.

The adherence of the people of Malgudi to the commonly accepted theological or religious doctrines shows their orthodoxy on the one hand and their traditionalism on the other. Raju's mother in *The Guide* and Raman's aunt in *The Painter of Signs* are highly orthodox in their ways of life. Like them Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* is against his son's immoral life with grace. He is haunted by the thought that his pious ancestral house has become polluted. This is why he makes desperate attempts to save himself from moral pollution by locking the connecting door to the room of Mali and Grace. Moreover he is very dogmatic .He uses shoes made out of the hides of animals who have died natural death.

According to Indian religion and Philosophy ,Karma and Fate play important roles in human life. Though these concepts appear to be inter-dependent ,it is an established belief that in this karmabhumi fate is determined by karma. As you Sow so shall you reap is a universally accepted proverb. The exponents of the theory of karma hold to the view that the present existence of all individual is the effect of the past and its future would be the effect of its present existence.

Savitri in *The Dark Room* and Rosie in *The Guide* believe in Karmic laws according to which everyone has to bear the consequence of his deeds. She thinks that she has lead a religious life and she has not deliberately committed any sin. so she will not be punished in the other -world. This shows her staunch faith in the theory of Karma.

Joys and sorrows ,rewards and punishment are the results of one's deeds done in the past. The karmas of human beings influence, control and condition their lives. Every action good or bad has its reaction.

Narayan's faith in life after death is quite obvious in his novel, *The English Teacher* in which Krishna succeeds in establishing spiritual contact with the spirit of the dead wife through occultism. Though she does not present herself physically ,he feels her presence and talks to her. He comes to know from her the nature and meaning of life and death.

The institution of Sanyasa or the renunciation of worldly goods and attachment is an ideal that remains constant in Narayan's novels. According to the Hindu religion there are four stages or Ashramas of life Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha, and Sanyasa (asceticism). It is only after passing through the first three stages that one can enter into sanyasa successfully. The spiritual motive behind sanyasa is the attainment of the salvation of soul through meditation on God as well as self purification by renouncing material, goods, worldly relationship and attachment .But it is found that the characters in Narayan's novels choose this state with difficult motives.

Raju's mother in *The Guide* ,Jegan in *The Vendor of Sweets* ,Raman's aunt in *The painter of Signs* leave their houses in opposition to the anti-traditional unethical way of life of Raju, Mali and Raman respectively. But they don't appear to renounce the world willingly in order to attain the salvation of soul which is the only spiritual aim of renunciation or sanyasa.

But in *A Tiger of Malgudi*, a tiger and his master after passing through different ashramas or stages of life accepts sanyasa at last in the usual conventional manner of ancient Indian sanyasis (ascetics)

Thus traditionalism in its varied forms pervades almost all of Narayan's novels. It promotes blind acceptance of the traditional values of life. Religion no doubt makes people orthodox ,superstitious, fatalistic etc, but it gives moral strength of human being in miseries and enables them to talk a calm view of life.

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