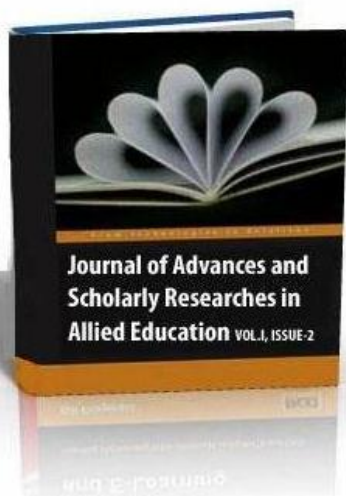


## Stylistic Dimensions in the Works of R.K. Narayan with Special Reference to 'The Guide' and "The Man-Eater of Malgudi"

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Style is the embodiment of a writer's vision. As David Lodge aptly asserts, "...not a decorative embellishment upon subject-matter, but the very medium in which the subject is turned into art..." (Biswal P.116). Narayan's style embodies the Malgudi life not only in terms of a distinct regional flavour but also in terms of revolts and reconciliations. Narayan adopts the simple style of a storyteller. Events flow naturally, one out of another, in the same way as they would actually happen in life. Events happen and characters live in innumerable equations of human relationships. To borrow phrases from Wayne C. Booth's "The Rhetoric of Fiction" it can be said that Narayan 'shows' but does not 'tell' (Biswal P.116). Narayan could have well said what the young novelist, whom Mr. Booth quotes, says,

I shall not tell you anything. I shall allow you to  
eavesdrop on my people, and sometimes they will  
tell the truth and sometimes they will lie, and you  
must determine for yourself when they are doing  
which.” (Biswal P.116)

In the present research paper, I shall explain Narayan’s style of writing through characterization, narrative technique, humour, wit, satire, symbols, Indianness and the language he used. He is an Indian writer dealing with humanity and emotions of middle-class characters. He has a comic vision of life and his style and language are suited to his purpose. The Sahitya Akademi put a seal on his genius by awarding him for ‘The Guide’ in 1961.

Though his range of characters is limited by the middle-class which he portrays and by his comic vision. Narayan’s intimate knowledge of human psychology has resulted in ‘individualistic’ characters, who are vividly true to life. As the story unfolds, their personality is revealed and a complex, living character is painted. Raju in ‘The Guide’ is presented through his own narration and Narayan’s and there is no one to question their vision. In “The Man-Eater of Malgudi”, Vasu, the ‘man-eater’, is unique among Narayan’s characters in more than one sense. The most striking allegorical feature of this character is the element of the fantastic, fabulous and allegorical in him. Through reiterated analogy by Sastri, Vasu is unmistakably identified with the mythical demon, Bhasmasura. The analogy is maintained all through – from the moment of his first appearance with ‘a tanned face, large powerful eyes.....and a black halo’, to the last moment of self-destruction.

Considered from the artistic point of view his plots are thin, loose and episodic. Henry Miller recognised Narayan as “a born story-teller” and to Anthony West “Mr. Narayan is ..... a

first-rate storyteller” (Gilra P.127). A straight chronological narrative technique with occasional use of the flash-back or retrospection is the usual technical pattern of his story-telling. His story has a beginning, a middle and an end. His novel “The Man-Eater of Malgudi” is an autobiographical novel and the story is narrated throughout by Nataraj, the central figure and not by the novelist. The entire action is seen through the eyes of Nataraj and it is his point of view that is given. In Narayan’s novels, the end is a solution to the problem which sets the events moving and it achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving and beyond which the action cannot progress. In “The Man-Eater of Malgudi”, the end comes with the death of Vasu and the restoration of normalcy after temporary disturbance. On the other hand, ‘The Guide’ is a mature work of art. It is divided into two parts. First part deals with Raju’s childhood, love affair and imprisonment while the growth into a swami is included in the second part. Thus through the use of flash-back, introspection and stream of consciousness technique make the novel fresh, stimulating, provocative and interesting. Without probing into the sub-conscious like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, the novelist studies human emotions and passions in the universe by means of introspection and flashback.

Narayan is the greatest humorist among the Indo-Anglian writers of fiction. We get in him humour of character, humour of situation or farcical humour, irony, wit and satire. In “The Man-Eater of Malgudi”, humour of character is resulted from the constant discomfiture of Nataraj. He remains a passive spectator as Vasu takes possession of his attic and treats his parlour as the extension of the attic. Nataraj fumes and frets internally, but is unable to set matters right. He is virtually dragged out by Vasu and carried away in Jeep without even a single pie in his pocket and without buttons to his shirt.

Irony and wit are woven into the very texture of Narayan’s prose. The best example of such wit in the novel “The Man-Eater of Malgudi” is provided by Vasu whose use of similitudes that is similes and metaphors is both startling and amusing. “Only fools marry and they deserve

all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all means. You don't have to own a coffee estate because you like to have a cup of coffee now and then" (P.38) and he smiled more and more pleased with his own wit.

Laughter is generated in 'The Guide' through farcical situations. The Pyol school with its abusive school master and the boys encroachment in the master's kitchen creates humour. Later, when Raju tries to eat, he finds the pot empty and throws it. His explanation that "Empty vessels makes much noise" creates laughter.

The novelist's ironic style is the source of humour in the description of Sastri in "The Man-Eater of Malgudi" as an all rounder. As he manages single handed all the different functions of the processes of printing, but he is a 'very tyrant' during an emergency that is when any particular work is to be done on time. Then the relation of employer and employee is reversed and the employee, Sastri becomes the top dog.

Narayan's indirect and mild satire of life is achieved by means of irony. He satirises fake sadhus, the red-tapism of government officials, the blind faith of disciples and lawyers.

Narayan makes use of symbols which besides being a structural necessity helps him to depict India and Indian sensibility ironically. Malgudi, his locale expands culturally, historically and is on the way to modernization. Malgudi symbolises a transitional India deviating from traditions and accepting western civilization. In the novel 'The Guide', city life is placed against serene village life. Malgudi by being modernized is spiritually corrupt, materialistic and hypocritical as symbolized by Raju. However when Raju goes to Mangla, the atmosphere is different. The village is a symbol of simplicity is ignorant of the modern world. The villagers seek the help of the swami who is a symbol of ancient knowledge for them. In "The Man-Eater of Malgudi" Narayan has consciously used myth as a technique of narration. Vasu is evil incarnate. He frightens children, kills dogs and defies social conventions by bringing in prostitutes. All these

negative acts set him apart from common human beings. Sastri identifies him with the rakshasa, embodying forces of destruction. The novelist has used the Bhasmasura myth as a conscious technique, the purpose being to stress the self destructive nature of Vasu and to link it up with the Indian classical tradition.

Narayan's Indianness is reflected in various ways in his novels. He has a great regard for family ties and pieties of the home and the family. Human relationships particularly domestic relationships occupy a central place in his novels. In 'The Guide' relationship between Raju's parents, Raju's fear of his father, his closeness to his mother, the widening of affection between them due to clash over Rosie- are all depicted vividly. His Indianness is further seen in the introduction of much that is fantastic but which is credible in Indian context. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited. In his novel, 'The Guide' there is fasting to bring down the rain and Raju is easily taken to be a Mahatma by the credulous villagers. There is exploitation of such Indian motifs as cobras and dancing girls and devadasis.

Narayan's language is highly appropriate for the communication of an Indian sensibility, Indian scenes and characters. In his style, Narayan 'displays his own unique signature' (Biswal P.119) and is remarkably different from other Indo-Anglian writers, a fact brilliantly observed by Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book "The Twice Born Fiction". Through the skillful use of language, Narayan successfully captures the rhythm of life that is peculiar to Malgudi and its people. Narayan's contemporary novelists convey the specific feel of the life they depict through various experiments and innovations. Mulk Raj Anand largely depends upon literal translation of native phrases, proverbs and slangs, direct presentation of Hindi words like 'Angrez Log', 'Thappar' etc. to achieve an effect of realism. On the other hand, Raja Rao's description is usually rich with images and metaphors, allusions and quotations not only from Sanskrit classics but also from French literature. In contrast to Anand and Raja Rao, Narayan uses a style which is remarkably simple, conspicuous by its 'unobtrusive' quality.

Whatever the style and language, he uses it confidently and convincingly with ease and naturalness. We seem to catch the rhythm and accents of the life which he portrays. His achievement cannot be underestimated as in his communication of the reality of life, though there is no intrusive message, philosophy or morality. His novels are entirely free from all didacticism.

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