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Address

- Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
- Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)
- (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

- aiirjpramod@gmail.com

Website

- www.aiirjournal.com

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**R.K. Narayan: The Conflict Between Tradition And Modernity In Novels,
A Comparative Approach**

Shaikh Afsar Nawaboddin

Assistant Professor,
Azad College, Ausa, (MS), India

Abstract

This paper explores how the fiction of R.K. Narayan helps in understanding the conflict between tradition and modernity in novels and its conflicts with some examples from his works. Narayan's literary creations are colourful fabrics woven with the intricate threads of Indian culture such as traditions, customs, religious beliefs, faiths, social hierarchies, family system, bitter & sweet melodies of love and marriage, conflict between Indian and foreign cultures, gap between generations, with the touch of humour.

Introduction

R.K. Narayan portrayed India of his times and its customs and traditions, myths and magics, epics and fairytales, to the outside world, in a non-serious manner. To portray old yet vibrant culture of India, he has chosen a bigger canvas in the form of a fictitious town called 'Malgudi'. Narayan created a Mini-India in Malgudi, so as to bring out all the essential characteristics of Indian culture.

Narayan's novels and short stories reflect almost all the elements of Indian culture in the 20th century in their conflicting form on different issues, which is elaborated below

Religious Traditions:

In his stories, Narayan portrays the conflicting environment of religions and religious faiths. In the novel 'Swami and Friends', when Swami complains against his fanatic teacher Ebenezer for his venomous criticism of Hindu Gods and traditions in the classroom, it appears more as the inner feeling of Narayan against the propagandists of Christianity. In 'The Man Eater of Malgudi', the festival procession is organized to celebrate the poet's completion of his epic on Radha and Krishna. Hinduism and Hindu traditions and customs play a dominant role in the fiction of R.K. Narayan.

The four Ashrama Dharmas of Hindu way of life are intervened in Narayan's stories. In 'Vendor of Sweets', the protagonist Jagan finally hands over his business to his son and leads a retired life in an ashram. In the novel 'A tiger for Malgudi', even a tiger also goes through the four ashramas. The novel "The Painter of Signs" presents the dilemma of the modern generation over religion.

Indian Philosophy:

Indian culture does not attach much value to money and physical attainments. But, the western influence on material acquisition is on increase in 20th century. This conflict is very well presented in Narayan's works. The novel 'Mr. Sampath' reveals the general Indian belief in the futility of running after money. 'The Financial Expert' also echoes the same philosophy. But, the materialistic philosophy of life has humorously been presented by Kailas in 'The Bachelor of Arts', who says: "A man must spend forty years in making money and forty years in spending it."

Myths and Magic:

An Indian myth forms the background to 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi'. Narayan writes about the myths and magics in his novels, which may appear unconvincing to the modern and western readers. In his autobiographical novel 'The English Teacher', the protagonist Krishna, after the death of his wife Sushila, communicates with her spirit, with the help of a Sanyasi. Frequent use is made of Indian myth and legends in his novels.

Rituals Beliefs and Superstitions:

Narayan frequently narrates the rituals, superstitions, traditions and beliefs as if they are quite common and credible in Indian context. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited in his novels and short stories.

Narayan presents the conflicts pertaining to family systems. In Swami and friends, Swami's grandmother tells him stories during bedtime. In the novel "The Painter of Signs", the aged aunt of Raman tends to her nephew's needs. But, in other stories like, 'The Vendor of Sweets' and 'The Financial Expert', the strained relations between parents and spoilt sons are seen.

Linguistic approach:

Narayan touches upon the issue of conflict between languages by referring to the education system of his times. The negligence of regional languages can be seen in the novels like 'Swami and Friends'- where the students don't pay attention to the Tamil Pundit's class but are very much attentive in English class. The Education system introduced by the Britishers in India allowed the dominance of English language over the other regional languages.

Gandhian philosophy and freedom struggle for independence:

The adoration to Gandhian principles and the hypocrisy attached to it are very well presented in Narayan's works. The plot of the novel 'Waiting for The Mahatma' has the freedom movement and Gandhian principles as background. In the novel 'Vendor of Sweets', the protagonist Jagan is a staunch follower of Gandhi. He wears Khadi and spins Charkha. But he is very careful about money and keeps two account books to avoid paying income tax – which shows the hypocrisy of his principles

Conclusion

The imaginative narrative style of R.K. Narayan presents the cultural scenario of India in their realistic state than in the idealistic or imaginative condition. As seen from the above, Narayan's novels reflect the elements of Indian culture and the conflicting features in the 20th century. They help foreign authors to understand the vibrant culture of India in its widespread form. One who reads the novels or short stories of Narayan cannot help but appreciate Indian culture along with its shortfalls. The conflicts between the two cultures have been presented by the 'East-West encounter. Thus, it can be undoubtedly said that the fiction of Narayan is a window to Indian culture and its conflicts, to the outside world and foreign readers

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