

## The Tragic Vision in the Novels of R.K. Narayan

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### Abstract

R.K. Narayan is instinctively both, a humorist and a tragic artist. And though his humour is instinctive, he cultivated it to save himself from weeping. He could not help laughing and yet he could not help weeping. The vision of Narayan is tragic. Narayan's fancy chuckles while his heart doth-ache. His smile beam over his face while his tears trickle down his cheeks. He sees a rainbow through his wet eyes. The present study discusses the tragic vision in his novels. As the readers can not ascertain whether the novels of Narayan are tragedies or comedies, A serious study of Narayan's novels is inevitably essential to dispel, and remove the cobwebs of, this confusion. The present study throws a light in this direction.

**Keywords:** Tragic, vision, humour, comedy, expressions.

### Introduction

R.K. Narayan is instinctively both, a humorist and a tragic artist. And though his humour is instinctive, he cultivated it to save himself from weeping. He could not help laughing and yet he could not help weeping. But his humour, after all, is merely a way of expression, not vision. The vision of Narayan is tragic. Sometimes we see the sun peeping through the encircling dark, thick clouds. Such is, like that of Lamb and Dickens, the inextricable mingling of humour and pathos in the novels of R.K. Narayan. Narayan's fancy chuckles while his heart doth-ache. His smile beam over his face while his tears trickle down his cheeks. He sees a rainbow through his wet eyes.

He is melancholy like Antonio in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'. His melancholy deepened as the clouds of misfortune, like a bolt from the blue, struck

him. He is acutely sensitive to the sadness of life, especially to separation. He was unlucky to lose all that he found. As a child, he was very fond of the pets like the monkey, the mynah, the parrot, the kitten and the puppy. But gradually he got separated from all of them. When he lost his monkey, he reacted in the following manner:

“Now-a-days, I had no peace of mind. Presently I lost the tranquil companionship of my monkey too”.<sup>1</sup>

When he got separated from his school-fellows, he asked nostalgically:

“Where are they and how are they now? As if lost in a vast ocean “. <sup>2</sup>

As a child he lost his pets, as a boy, he lost his class fellows and as a young man he lost, what he had cherished and valued most in life, his beloved wife Rajam. But even before the darkest clouds burst upon him, he instinctively relished and wrote tragic literature. He himself wrote:

“I loved tragic endings in novels. I looked for books that would leave me crushed at the end. Thus Mrs. Henry wood’s East Lynne left me shedding bitter tear, and I read it again and again.”<sup>3</sup>

The first work he wrote was a tragic play:

“At this period I remember writing a play : It kept me busy all the afternoon .The play was called The Home of Thunder,a frightful tragedy in which all the principal characters are struck dead by lightning on a tower open to the skies”.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the vision of Narayan is darkly woven. Narayan does not believe in any philosophy like that of Hardy. His tragic vision is woven, like that of Shakespheare,of a mingled yarn. This tragic vision is illusrated more or less in most of his novels.

In his first novel Swamy and Friends the Virgilian cry,with half a sob and half a sigh, comes from within the heart of a child, swami ,at being deserted by his friend , Rajam. Graham Greene sees the shadow of tragic

Vision falling in the first novel of Narayan. He writes that “the shadow had been there from the beginning ...

The schoolboy Swami...experienced a little of what Krishna came to feel as he watched his beloved wife die of typhoid”<sup>5</sup>.in his second novel, The Bachelor of Arts Chandran suffers from the delirium of love because he is deprived of marrying his beloved, malathi.He suffers as intensely as pip does in Dickans Great Expectations when he can not marry Estella. His third novel, The Dark Room, is darkly woven. We find in this novel one of the greatest tragic ironies of world literature.the tragic irony lies in the fact that Savitri is deserted by her dissolute husband for no fault of her, especially in the fact that she can not call even her children her own. Like yank in Eugen O’Neil’s The Hairy Ape, she feels utterly lonely and has lost the wholesome feelings of belongingness. Graham Greene regards The Dark Room more tragic even than the English Teacher.he writes:

“In The Dark Room the screw of unhappiness is twisted further, the killing of love more tragic than the death of love.”<sup>6</sup>

So far the shadow was instinctive and imaginary .But now it is the real shadow that has fallen on Narayan. He loses his dearest wife Rajam, the phantom of his delight. He is stunned by the heaviest blow struck on him by the cruel fate : He stops writing and when , after a gap of a pretty long period , at the pursuesion of his friend , Graham Greene, he restarts writing , the result is The English Teacher ,his autobiographical novel. As the pen that wrote David Copperfield was often dipped in Dicken’s own blood, the pen that wrote The English Teacher is dipped in the blood of Narayan:

Like Rajam, Susila in the English Teacher dies of typhoid .Narayan is the novelist of the tragic themes of change and separation. Though we find the theme of change in almost all his novels, it is prominently expressed in The Bachelor of Arts:”

“Every where there seems to be change: change, change, every where”.<sup>7</sup>

Here is one more expression in the same novel:

“Where were all these now... Where were they.....? “<sup>8</sup>

As the tragic theme of change is expressed prominently in The Bachelor of Arts, the tragic theme of loneliness is expressed in The English Teacher. Here we have an extract of it:

“There is no escape from loneliness and separation ....The law comes in operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother’s womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or to get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. The fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false ....my earliest friends ...where are they?

They scatter a part like the droplets of a water spray .The law of life .No sence in battling against it.”<sup>9</sup>

Narayan is almost run away by this tragic theme of loneliness and therefore he repeats it in A Tiger for Malgudi <sup>10</sup> the summum bonum of almost all his novels is loneliness consequent upon change and separation. Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma loves Bharati to the point of distraction, but he remains deprived of the fulfillment of his love through marriage. The Guide is the excruciating tragedy of love. Raju loves Rosie and Rosie alone from the innermost chambers of his heart. But ,deserted by Rosie ,he strays into the Mangla village where he, at first unwilling to observe twelve days fast to appeared the raingod, ultimately willingly seeks martyrdom.we have in The Vendor of Sweets, as we have in The Dark Room , one of the Greatest tragic ironies .Jagan loves his son ,Mali madly , to the point of obsession .But the selfish and dissolute son disillusiones and disappoints him . Jagan, who craved for a word from Mali and longed for his glimpse, now evades and avoids him. What a tragic irony! When Jagan learns that his son has brought him disgrace by polluting his

home by living in sin with Grace, the Korean – American Girl, he renounces the world and seeks sanyas. The painter of Signs is a dark tragedy. Raman loves Daisy intensely, madly and truly. But Daisy, his Gandharva wife, who has even enjoyed the consummation of sexual bliss with him, deserts him without rhyme and reason.

Thus though there is in the novels of Narayan the bubbling humour, the vision of Narayan is tragic. But humour is not Narayan's vision. His vision is essentially tragic. However, the critics, even the eminent ones, regard the novels of Narayan's as comedies. Even the supremely great critic .William Walsh calls Narayan's novels the "comedies of sadness" <sup>11</sup> as if sadness is something to be laughed at. The Indian critics awed by his stature, have run away with his view. J.K.Biswal regards his novels as governed by the "comic pattern" <sup>12</sup> and Raju of the Guide as the "Comic hero" <sup>13</sup>. Dr. G.P.Baghmar observes that Narayan's fidelity to the comic muse is so great that..... He does not mind sacrificing the plot to exploit the comic Opportunity" <sup>14</sup>. He regards the Guide as belonging to the comedy of manners. <sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Thus, as we have seen the novels of Narayan are tragic. But, on the other, hand, some of the critics, even the eminent ones, regard his novels as comedies. These opposite views have created a lot of confusion. The readers can not ascertain whether the novels of Narayan are tragedies or comedies. A serious study of Narayan's novels is inevitably essential to dispel, and remove the cobwebs of, this confusion. This justifies the work on the present title, which will reveal the true nature of Narayan's genius. In order to explore the tragic vision of the novels of R.K.Narayan. I propose to study the present title under the following heads:

1. Life and Career of R.K. Narayan
2. The Works of R.K. Narayan
3. The Works on R.K. Narayan.
4. The Genres of Comedy and Tragedy.
5. The comic in R.K. Narayan.
6. The Tragic Vision in the Novels of R.K. Narayan.
  - a. The Early Novels.
  - b. The Middle Novels
  - c. The Later Novels.

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- [15] Ibid, p, 69