



Role of Realism and Fantasy in R. K. Narayan's Novels

Realism is the doctrine that universals have an objective or absolute existence. This doctrine implies that matter as the object of perception has real existence and is neither reducible to universal mind or spirit nor dependent on a perceiving agent. It is opposite to idealism. This world has a reality, to elaborate more properly realism tends to regard things as they really are; they are characterized by practical view of life.

Fantasy implies mental apprehensions of an object or perception. By this faculty we can perceive an object of apprehension and the image is impressed on the mind by an object of sense. In other words fantasy is a faculty of imagination. Hence, fantasy may be defined as the eccentric, the improbable which is hardly possible in real life. A novelist gives free vent to his imagination. He throws the laws of logic and natural causation to the winds. Thus, the result is fantastic and absurd. According to Uma Parmeswarn, "Narayan uses both fantasy and realism in eight of his ten novels, but they are not properly balanced. The first half often has excellent, realistically drawn setting, characterization, and action. About halfway through, there is a distinct break and fantasy takes over."

The critic Uma Parmeswaram continues her definition of fantasy in context with Narayan's novels. Fantasy as an adjunct of comedy is a legitimate and effective device for a novelist to use. "In Narayan's novel it serves its purpose within the immediate context, but becomes incongruous in the larger context which includes realistic persons and realistic situations. Every novel, except *Swami and Friends* and *The Dart Room*, has the two factors of realism and fantasy very loosely threaded together. There is a realistic hero (the word 'hero' is used for lack of any other suitable short term) and a fantastic villain; the hero is portrayed realistically against a middle class background whereas most things about the villain are fantastic. The two elements could be handled deftly, but Narayan merely places them side by side. That part of hero's life which is affected by the villain is insulated. Srinivas's life, for example, is steered by Sampath into a fantastic venture, but we do not hear enough of the effect it has on Srinivas's private life. Similarly, Narayan's experience with Vasu is almost traumatic but only a part of his life is shown to come into contact with Vasu's outrageous behavior. Even in *The Vendor of Sweets*, which is one of his best novels, the plot gets out of hand. The fantasy that goes out of balance here is not Jagan's eating with the sculptor but Mali's fantastic story-writing machine. Fantasy is used as an adjunct of satire here, but somewhere along the line Narayan loses the links that would make the plot cohesive. As they are, most of his plots break into two disparate plots, the realistic vein being carried alongside the fantastic and then dropped altogether.

In Narayan's novels, there is a mechanical mixture, or blending of these two elements realism and fantasy. Usually fantasy predominates and strikes one as incongruous in the context of the realism which is also one factor. Savitri endeavours to commit suicide in *The Dark Room*, but there is her miraculous escape, and returns to her home and children. Chandran has renounced life in the Bachelor of Arts, with the soul of his dead wife. These are various examples of Narayan's novels. All this is incongruence with the reality of the novels.

These fantastic events pertaining to fantasy are sometimes improbable in the Indian context. But, reality is never ignored. Fantasy is always based on certain facts. Let us take the case of Vasu, the Man-Eater of Malgudi. He is certainly a fantastic death by his own hand reminding us of Hindu

myth of the Rakshasa who expired while he was dancing and placed his hand on his own head. It is another fantastic example of Malgudi when he is hatching the conspiracy of shooting the elephant.

In his other novel *Waiting for Mahata*, we have the fantasy of infusing or blending Gandhi and his Gandhian politics in the simple and realistic love story of Bharati and Sriram. In his novel under consideration there is one more fantastic event as coming to life on the creation ground of an old woman who is supposed to be dead. We can get more examples of fantasy and realism in *The Financial Expert* and *The Vendor of Sweet*. Some critics feel that too much stress on fantasy and realism spoil the novel. There are many eccentricities and absurdities of characters and events in the novels of Narayan.

Uma Parmeswara says, "The Guide is the only one of Narayan's novels which comes close to having a perfect unity and a compound of realism and fantasy. In *The Guide*, Narayan uses the literary device of ambiguity to get this compound."

In all the novels of R. K. Narayan, normalcy (the usual order of life) is disturbed because an outsider arrives into the settled world of Malgudi. Everything is uprooted due to his evil designs. But our great author R.K. Narayan is a very distinguished person because he endeavours to bring about the restoration of normalcy. The main theme is the disturbance of the normal order which is restored by the ordered world it. It is temporary phase. In the last chapter everybody is happy, gay and frivolous. All the human barriers created by the wicked person are destroyed by the law of nature. Narayan ponders over the elaborate system of checks and balances functioning in the universe. But all supreme forces lead to the oral order. Thus, the absurd and eccentric are dethroned. The moral order is restored and enthroned. This theme is very prominent and outstanding in his novels. Let us discuss this theme in various novels.

First we take *Bachelor of Art*. The hero is desperate because he is unable to marry the girl whom he loves. He is very desperate and he renounces this world and becomes a wandering Sadhu. But in the end he comes back on his own and finds the girl selected by his parents, very attractive, charming and bewitching. They marry in due course of time and the 'Bachelor of Arts' (now a married man) takes a job as a newspaper agent. He leads a fully satisfied, happy and prosperous life with his wife.

In the other novel *Swami and Friends*, Swami and his friends are leading very harmonious life. But their friendship is temporarily disturbed because Swami does not turn up in time to play in the crucial cricket match. Swami's other friend Rajan is deeply disturbed. He is offended. There is heart burning, sorrow and suffering. However, Narayan by his art brings about resolution of the story. Swami goes to the railway station and bids farewell to Rajan. But both the friends could not meet each other because there is huge crowd at the station. Swami cannot talk to Rajan but order is restored when both of them are shaking hands from the moving train.

Sometimes in his novel there is a disruption of normalcy but some supreme powers bring normalcy with some mysterious characters. For examples in *The Financial Expert* normalcy is enthroned when Margayya goes back to his son's house. Margayya has lost all his ill-gotten wealth. He is the financier who has cheated the people and accumulated huge amount. But he has lost everything and becomes penniless. His son Balu is living separately and is leading a very happy and prosperous life. The son is deeply affected by the miseries of his life. Margayya has kissed his grand child and wife of his son. Thus, normalcy has been restored and they are living in the ancestral home.

Lastly in *The Guide* we find order-disorder-order in Narayan's novel. All the alarms and excusing, all the excitement and suspense, all the regrets and recrimination are over. Raju realizes that "neither Marco nor I had place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along."

To sum up, the theme is concerned with normal social order which is disturbed. There is conflict between the forces of order and disorder. But R. K. Narayan is a pure artist. He brings

reconciliation by some mysterious forces. Thus, there is no absurd and eccentric or evil dominating over his world. In the end, there is love, beauty, peace, harmony and the renewal of life. Although, there is temporary aberrations life should go on as usual. Thus, R. K. Narayan communicates this message to this world. Order should replace Pandemonium or Satan.

In his art of fiction writing, Narayan stresses family and domestic life. Thus, the word 'domestic' is very important to illustrate the theme. Domestic problems are constantly used as a point of reconciliation. All these individual problems are solved by mutual understanding and we approach the extra-ordinary situation. The crisis is over and the influence of normalcy takes place. Sometimes idiosyncrasies, whims and caprices of children disturb the normalcy, but Narayan feels that his heroes should not suffer in the end and should lead a prosperous life. "His affection for the family is the constant, which keeps the other constant of his as an average person, alive; it places the tragedy of his other self in a light which merges the disaster of the expert with that of the man."

"I prefer to pay tribute to Narayan's ambiguity and art by speculating that this risk, though imposed on Raju and not planned by him, pays dividends; that he recovers from his swoon and graciously accedes to the humble requests of his disciples and the government allows glucose-saline injections to reinvigorate his blood stream, while his halo shines brighter than ever in the eyes of the mytho-loving rustics and sensation-loving urbanities."

R. K. Narayan's novels are highly enchanting, entertaining and amusing because of the incongruous mixture of realism and fantasy. His novels could have been very boring, dull, monotonous without this mixture. Thus, he is a pure artist, because he has blended these two elements artistically and art for art's sake. The impressions of the mind are correlated with the external features of Narayan's environment. Thus, his art is pure and simple conveying the rich ideas of the mind.

References

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- VIII. The Dark Room
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