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NOVELTY IN SIMPLICITY: R.K. NARAYAN'S *MALGUDI DAYS*

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ABSTRACT

R. K Narayan stands as one of an unmatched pillar of Indians writing in English along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. His contribution is immense and cannot be neglected. While Mulk Raj Anand's novels fell in the domain of societal issues Narayan's novels surprised through their mundane portrayal. There was an essence of freshness even in his mundane exemplification. He is best known for his fictional town Malgudi where he sat the whole universe of his imagination. His characters never moved out of Malgudi. Their daily chores were set in Malgudi itself. His town is set in south India. Graham Greene held a major role in success of Narayan's writings. He not only recommended Narayan's *swami and friends* to a publisher but also asked the latter to shorten his name in order to be more familiar with English speaking audience. This paper seeks to analyze novelty in simplicity of Narayan's narration of *Malgudi Days*. There is a mark of serene beautification in his narration of human nature. Unlike Shakespeare he never dwelled on malignity, gloom, anger, revenge, jealousy of human nature. Certain warmth always swam through his characters which took residence into reader's heart. *Malgudi days* popularity among Indian readers even laid to its adaptation into Indian television serial on Doordarshan in 2006.

Key words- novelty, simplicity, Malgudi, myths, humanity, humor

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Discussion

A fragrance of south Indian culture breathed through *Malgudi Days* through his narration of the town Malgudi or his famous Talkative Man or *pyol, jutka* etc. There is a message of moderation in his short stories which could be sustained only through selfless and dispassionate life. He succeeds in adapting to the traditional myths of India and representing them through his subtle narration that totally wins in holding the reader's attention. P.S. Sundaram calls Narayan's work as "religious fables". (Dewari 108) Hindu myths had gripped the mind of Narayan which is why it is seen flourishing in themes of most of his fiction. Also the western audience is not unknown to the traditional myths and superstition of Indian society therefore it is never rendered into shock through mild representation such as in Narayan's work and therefore has been always accommodating. William Walsh once said "the religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Narayan's reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience." (Walsh 166-167) We notice in *Such Perfection* how beautifully Narayan projects the superstition

held by villagers on Soma's *Nataraja*. The sculptor was such perfection that villagers started worrying it would bring chaos and misery to their village. The villagers warned Soma by exclaiming, "God has shown us only a slight sign of his power. Don't tempt Him again. Do something. Our lives are in your hands. Save us, the image is too perfect." (Narayan 81) They wanted him to destroy the image as its perfection has angered God. Similarly in *The Snake-song*, the superstition of master and the disciple persuades us to believe that *punnaga varali* song should never be sung at night as it might enchant the snake and render the musician in danger. The master himself tells says when the latter narrated his experience the next day,-

"Don't you know you ought not to play *punnaga varali* at night? That apart, now you can never be sure you will not get the snake in again if you play. And when he comes he won't spare you unless you sing his song over again. Are you prepared to do it?"(98)

Malgudi days has a tone of humanity in its characters. Narayan's characters are universal and with whom one can identify spontaneously. He had an eagle eye for the insight of the human nature which he chalks out with delicacy. The reader is overwhelmed by the humanism of the postman in *The Missing Mail* where he deliberately gives the mail carrying the message of Ramanujam's uncle's demise after the marriage as the sympathetic postman felt it might obstruct Ramanujam's daughter's wedding. His impassioned feelings for other's grief and taking a little time out of his work to hear everyone's problem fills the reader with affinity. his confession to Ramanujam fills us with awe . He says "you can complain if you like sir. They will dismiss me. It is a serious offence." (18)

Though Narayan's *Malgudi* is a fictional town it has a lasting mark on the reader's mind. Its characters are universal and realistic. They behave as normally as a human does. Even though they are located in a small fictional town a reader sitting in any part of the globe can relate his feelings to them. Narayan has often been compared to William Faulkner who also created a similar fictional town named Yoknapatawpha. M. K. Maik has rightly penned down the contribution of Narayan to English Literature across the world:

Narayan's chief contribution to Indian English fiction is two-fold: first, he has created a tiny but perfectly credible universe in *Malgudi*, which is in the same class as Hardy's *Wessex* and Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha*; and he has filled it with men and women who are as real to us as the people actually around us. Secondly, an eagle-eyed observer of life and human nature, he has illuminated the basic ironies, deep seated ambiguities and essential dilemmas of the human condition.(Maik22)

Malgudi Days delights the reader with its light humor as well. It makes the reader laugh at pathos of its characters. In *Engine Trouble*, the misery laid on Talkative Man by the engine that he wins at the *Gaiety Land* makes the reader chuckle at his sadness. The engine does nothing good to him other than being a source of pain. He thinks that the engine would fetch him a good price. But his happiness turns into gloom as he drowns into debt just to move the engine out of the ground. His wife leaves him and he becomes a symbol of ridicule for the town folk. He pleads Swamiji's assistant and says "You have steamed it up. Why not take it over to that field and then go."(109) Similarly in *An Astrolger's Day*, the readers chuckle at Astrolger's smartness in duping the stranger and later revealing the stranger's true identity to the reader. He says to his wife "do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years."(9) When he finds that the stranger is the same man who he attacked through a knife and dumped in a well, he shrewdly makes the stranger believe that his life is in stranger in order to get him out of his town.

Conclusion

Narayan's contribution to literature is immense. He stands apart among Indians writing in English. The readers always have a delicate heart to his novelty, simplicity, jest, humanity in expression of mundane life in *Malgudi Days*. The *New York Times* said in the praise of the book "everyone in the book seems to have a capacity for responding to the quality of his particular hour. It's an art we need to study and revive."(Broyard, Anatole)

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