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## QUEST FOR SELF REALISATION IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE ENGLISH TEACHER*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theme of self-realization in the literary works of R.K. Narayan, emphasizing its profound connection to Indian philosophy and the relentless pursuit of truth and enlightenment. Throughout Narayan's narratives, his central characters embark on a lifelong odyssey in search of self-realization, frequently entangled in the allure of wealth and glamour. The journey towards self-realization is depicted as a process of dispelling illusions and conquering temptations, culminating in a profound awakening. The paper also underscores the dissonance between the common individual and their place in the cosmic order, driving them to seek understanding and leading to a series of peaks and valleys in their life trajectories. Narayan's protagonists frequently grapple with universal truths, and it is through the attainment of self-realization that they discover the inner strength to confront life's tribulations with unwavering resolve, ultimately achieving a state of equilibrium and wisdom.

Keywords: Self-realization, Enlightenment, Indian philosophy, Identity, Spiritual harmony

Quest for self-realization is one of the prominent themes which have been discussed at length in the fiction of R.K. Narayan. The word realization is as old as the origin of human race. It is one of the cardinal principles of Indian philosophy. In *Mundkapanishad*, it has been pointed out: "He whose mind is pure and serene can, by meditation, attain a vision of the indivisible. The Subtle Spirit dwelling within, into which the fivefold life was entered, can be realized by the understanding." (62) It has also been pointed out clearly in Indian scriptures that "the feeble minded who do not make earnest effort through well directed meditation and control of mind and senses, cannot hope to realize the Self within." (63) The famous philosopher J. Krishnamurthi also observes that the search for truth demands a total comprehension of life.

Thus, self-realization is the supreme stage for which a man aspires. It is the stage of enlightenment which means realizing that one has reached the point at which struggle is irrelevant. It goes without saying that realization means how to understand oneself in order to understand the meaning of life and peep into the mysteries of this world of human relationships. It is to understand one's capability, to know one's place in the world and adopt the right standards of living. That is why the quest for self-realization is crucial and necessary to the development of the fully functional individual in a society.

In R.K. Narayan's novels, the struggle for self-realization leading to perfection goes on throughout the life of the characters. Jayant k. Biswal has a point when he says:

The men characters move along erroneous path to realize their ambitions and instincts. On the other hand, the women characters move along uncharted ways, as far as the orthodox Indian tradition is concerned... as they move, they clash with the established codes of a traditional society and thus appear funny, pathetic and absurd. They are ultimately led to a point where their whims and fancies can no more sustain them. When the stage ripeness is reached, their illusions crumble and normal reality is restored. (57)

Narayan's protagonists strive for spiritual maturity because they are deeply rooted in their culture. With the passage of time they engage themselves in different fields. They seem to be haunted by wealth and glamour. They lose their original identity and as a result they suffer and lose the balance of their life. Ultimately it dawns upon them that cunning and over straining ways can yield to material benefits but it will never contribute to their spiritual growth.

Self-realization which is the outcome of a long struggle is seen in different forms in R. K. Narayan's novels. Lakshmi Holmstorm has rightly pointed point:

The institution of Sanyas or the renunciation of worldly goods and attachments for the sake of spiritual pursuits is an ideal that remains constant in Narayan's novels. It is the obverse side of attachment or involvement which very often forms the cycle of events in his stories but different characters in these novels choose to interpret and occupy the idealized role differently. (72)

But the fact remains that in the case of each protagonist, it is the crumbling of illusions and coming back to the realities which enables him to realize that he had been surrounded by illusions. However, the successful overcoming of temptation – Maya - makes them aware of the self and this ultimately leads to self-realization.

R.K. Narayan is primarily concerned with the incompatibility of the common man to understand his place in the universe. This inability engages them in a quest of realizing their true place in the society. They have to pass through the intense fire of suffering. They have to strive hard to reach that level of understanding where all doubts will be resolved. However, when they are unable to reach that stage, they accept their downfall without any regrets. His protagonists face rise and fall frequently until their experiences make them wise. Narayan has himself asserted: "My main concern is with human character - a central character from whose point of view the world is seen, and who tries to get over a difficult situation or succumbs to it or fights it in his own setting." (124) In Narayan's novels, the unique crisis arises one of a setback in the relationships of the protagonists with various people of different shades when they meet during the course of their life.

The primary aim in the fictional world of R. K. Narayan is to achieve, in the words of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*, "a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics." (123) In *The English Teacher* the inspiration and impulse is too obscure to be recognized by Krishna, the main protagonist. He is simply haunted by vague feelings of dissatisfaction. Irritable moods often over-power him: "what was wrong with me? I couldn't say, some sort of dissatisfaction, a self-rebellion I might call it." (1) In fact, Krishna is always haunted by a strange sense of loneliness which is quite oppressive. When he lives in the hostel as an English teacher at Albert Mission College, he frequently feels the busy day leaving a feeling of hollowness in him. The fact of matter is that he is gifted with the fine sensibility and imaginative power of a poet but he finds his work of teaching quite unexciting.

As a result, he is highly depressed and consequently indulges in self-analysis. He records deep reflection on life and death, man's inescapable sense of profound loneliness and separation. The novelist explains the mortal nature of things but his protagonist seems to move out of the bonds of temporal existence in order to build a bridge with the life after death. D. S. Sundaram has a point when he observes that Krishna in *The English Teacher* tries "to look steadily at death and see if there is anything beyond." (59) A heart-rending quest for a blissful state of life/existence occupies the protagonist's mind from the beginning to end.

The novelist makes a very serious effort in order to analyze the protagonist's struggle to extricate himself from his past bindings. He also puts forth a serious moral print of view. Krishna's rejection of the job

which was not suited to his temperament indicates the independent nature of mind. In way, it is also a rejection of a whole system of which he was a product.

Krishna's wife Susila is a woman with a charming personality. She tries to run the household with a narrow budget, makes plans about future, dreams of a house to be built and her daughter's marriage. She, in a way, epitomizes the best in Indian womanhood. Krishna, her husband, grows with her in love and understanding. Like most of the Indian wives, she aims at becoming the true Sahdharmine (सहधर्मिणी) to Krishna. Even after her death, she undertakes the task of guiding Krishna through his confusion of grief to the higher harmony of the souls beyond life and death.

Thus, it goes without saying that the protagonists of Narayan encounter or enunciate one or the other universal truth like man is merely helpless against the odd circumstances or that an individual remains entrapped in the complex web of sorrows and pleasures which he experiences in his daily life. A lively atmosphere in the family brings happiness to the human soul but in case of a turmoil or an emotional setback one is lost in the complex terrain of this social setup. The harsh realities weigh heavily on his mind and his sense of self-realization enables him to face the struggle of life with courage and determination. It is this courage and determination which enable him to attain equilibrium and wisdom.

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