

R.K Narayan's use of mythical images and symbols

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R.K.Narayan, like some of the great modern writers has been gifted with a poet-eye. He has used images and symbols everywhere in his writing. His images and symbols are not personal but conventional and generally taken from common Indian life, from mythology, everyday professions and ancient art.

In his short stories Narayan has created an imaginative character of a talkative man. Though he is a fictional character; Narayan has used him as symbol of a typical Indian. His exaggerations his zest for life, his subdued interest in simple and common things are some of the traits which we may find in most of the people of India. "The Talkative Man is a reflection of Narayan's personality and to a certain extent represents his creator Like Narayan; he has an aptitude for humor and comedy. Like him, he is a man of silvery tongue. Like his creator, he is recounter, a brilliant narrator and a storyteller. There is an element of ease and lightness in his way of telling the story. He is full of zest for life. He shares Narayan prejudices He is likely to share his creator's artistic fate also his fame and immortality".¹

In most of his works Narayan has created a character of storyteller. He is a symbolical representation of traditional life. He too uses exaggeration and other means like hyperbole, images and symbols to make his stories sound impressive and keep the listeners awe struck. He symbolises the ancient method of oral tale telling in which the personality of the narrator counts much more than that of modern short-story writer who remains effaced behind his word on the printed page. In the real tradition of tale – telling the personality of the narrator not only his physical appearances but also his tone, style gesticulations etc become an inseparable part of the story and leads considerably to the total effect of the story. One example may be cited from his mythical work Gods, Demons and other: "On such occasions the storyteller will dress himself for the part by smearing sacred ash art on his forehead and wrapping himself in a green shawl, while his helpers set up a framed picture of some god on a pedestal in the veranda, decorate it with jasmine garlands, and light incense to it. After these preparations, when the storyteller enters to seat himself in front of the lamps, he looks imperious and in complete control of the situation. He begins the session with prayer, prolonging it until the others join and the valleys echo with the cants drowning the cry of jackals. Time was when he narrated his stories to the accompaniment of musical instruments, but now he depends only on himself"²

We know that the mythical allusions of R.K. Narayan help the reader with a better understanding of characters and a deeper insight into human nature. The characters of The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and God, Demonds and others are elustrated well with the help of

these mythical allusions. The most prominent symbol in these books is exile which, represent truth, sacrifice, patience, sufferings purity, valour, wisdom of these mythical characters.

R.K.Narayan has very beautiful used exile as a symbol for restoring order and peace and establishes truth among human being in The Ramanyana. Rama's exile throws light on various aspects of characters. Because of exile Rama's and Sita's character were bloomed and became symbols of ideal man and women. After exile Rama was revealed as an ideal son, faithful husband, a good brother a just ruler and above all a good person, who became a symbol of humanity. The exile revealed him as an ideal son who went for exile in order to keep his father's promise. He left the kingdom without any hesitation and had no ill feeling for his step-mother who was the cause of his banishment from Ayodhya. As a faithful husband, he became grief stricken when he found his wife, Sita missing at Panchvati and went in the quest of her even across seas to Lanka. He made her free from the capture of Ravana and proved her purity by making Sita pass through the test of fire. He allowed no other woman in his life even when Sita was away from him. As a good brother, he had no ill will for Bharatha and he accepted him as a king. But Bharatha acted as a regent and did not sit on the throne and acted as a regent and took care of his subjects from the outskirts of Ayodhya. As a just ruler, Rama maintained law and order in his kingdom and did not hesitated in sending his wife for exile when he came to know about his subjects opinion .He ordered Lakshmana to leave Sita in the forest even during her pregnancy: *"Tomorrow before daybreaks you will take Sita in a chariots to the banks of the Ganges and leave her there."*³

Like Rama, Sita's character also fully revealed in the atmosphere of exile. Sita became a symbol of purity and truth who chose to live by the side of her husband and bear hardships' in the forest rather to live in the palace and enjoy royal life. Lakshmana and Bhartha were also revealed as good brothers and become a symbol of good brothers. They are still remembered for their loyalty towards Rama and their brother hood. Exile also symbolises that whoever goes against truth is sure to be ruined. As we see in the characters' of kaikeyi, Ravana and soorpanaka. They violated the laws of dharma and went against truth the main purpose of lord Vishnu as Rama was to destroy the evil demons and remove them from earth. This purpose was also fulfilled by the death of demon king Ravana in exile.

R.K.Narayan has also shown exile as a source for purification of soul as we see in The Mahabharata when Draupadi was distributed among the Pandavas after swayamwara, it was decided that Yudhistira begin the eldest would marry her. The princes were to live with each brother for are full year as his wife, and then pass on to the next. When she would live with one, the others swore to eradicate her image completely from their minds. A very special kind of detachment and discipline was needed to practice this code. Anyone who violated it, even in thought would exile himself from the family and seek expiation in a strenuous pilgrimage to holy rivers. But once for seeking Yudhistira's guidance on an urgent matter of state Arjuna was perforced to intrude Yudhistira when he was in the company of Drapuadi. So he exiled himself for twelve years and spent his time bathing in holy rivers to purify his soul. Thus exile became a symbol of purification.

Secondly, the Pandavas exile symbolises the victory of truth. Yudhishtira was trapped in the game of dice in which he lost everything. He, his other four brothers and his wife, Drapudi were sent for exile for the period of twelve years and one year of incognito in any city. This sort of conspiracy was planned to keep the Pandavas away from the kingdom for their whole life. But the Pandavas took it as a challenge faced difficulties and sufferings of exile boldly and finally succeeded in achieving their legal right. Exile revealed the unity, love, honour, brotherhood, valour, wisdom, patience of the Pandavas. Kauravas were also revealed as wicked and dishonest who conspired against their cousins to snatch away their kingdom.

Thus we see that R.K. Narayan has used exile as symbols of truth in his mythical works. All the great characters discussed above became ideal human characters only through suffering of exile. So, for the achievement of truth and well being of humanity in general a character has to face boldly all the ordeals of life. Without it the world of truth cannot be achieved.

If we really want to establish Ramrajya where everyone may live with peace and prosperity, brotherhood and love we should have to follow the examples set by all the above legendary characters and many more like Bhishma and king Harishchandra. They all suffered a lot for the sake of truth. Bhishma to keep his promise of celibacy remained a bachelor for his entire life and Harishchandra, who is also known as Satyavadi. Harishchandra paid a very heavy price to prove himself as a truthful man.

Like exile, sainthood or concept of holy man, is a mythical symbol that has been used by R.K. Narayan. In the Bhagavad Gita Krishna teaches Arjuna that a yogi or saint is one who is joined with God. The path that leads to ideals is that of a yogi, who consciously and deliberately progresses towards divinity. He undergoes voluntary sacrifices to obtain celestial powers like going without food and sleep for several days.

The symbol of rishi or Mahatma stands for culture and stress on the need for the development of the inner facilities of a human being. They discovered various methods of feeding, resting and revitalizing the body. After countless years of experiences and experiments, they develop special system of exercises for increasing the strength, purity and power of all the faculties of man.

In order to attain spiritual progress one must try to associate from worldly pleasures and attachments. Hence they advocate that meditation is supposed to be performed at a predetermined place, time and location for accelerated concentration. To make this easier they constructed temples, which are highly energized holy places.

In India, saints and sages have been meditating from time immemorial and they can be still found in many holy cities and river banks. Most of them give up their food and clothes to attain moksha or everlasting life. Saint Vivekananda is said to have meditated in the Rock Temple in Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India for peace. Nowadays even common Indians have started to make a beeline of Ashrams which propose to teach them meditation and concentration to attain peace in life.

One cannot fail to appreciate "the rainbow magnificence of life" in R.K. Narayan's novels. It is the 'miracle of faith forged by the use of myths' image and symbols that is enacted

in his writings. Despite the use of these sources, it is the 'credible universe' changed with moral imagination that comes to us in the works of the 'grand old man of Malgudi.'

The Guide, Narayan's magnum opus represents Indian images and symbols in abundance. Raju's enforced sainthood and martyrdom is a fine example of it. After imprisonment he inadvertently becomes a saint for the people of village, Mangala after he took refuge in an ancient temple on the outskirts. Velan becomes his protégé and Raju out of his own necessity motives and desires becomes a saint for the villages. He spoke to them on various issues of topical importance. He not only gave them discourses on The Ramayana and characters there in but also advised them on matters of cleanliness and godliness. He also prescribed them medicines and settled disputes and quarrels involving property. He also encouraged the village school master to reopen the school in the premises of the temple. He plays the role of a swami to the best possible extent, but once he is overtaken by the inexplicable eventualities, things take dramatic turn. Velan's brother mistakenly reports that swami will not eat till its rains events that followed were beyond Raju's thinking or control. He never imagined that a time would arrive when the fake swami in him would become transform into a genuine one. People expected him as holy man with spiritual power, to bring rain to the draught stricken area by his penance as it used to happen in ancient times.

Narayan has used saints and sages as symbols of peace and humanity in his mythical works. He has highlighted the characters of Valmiki, Vyasa, Vasishtha, Viswamithra and others in his mythical works like The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and Gods Demons and others. All these sages represent truth, honesty peace sacrifice, suffering etc. They spent most of their lives in meditation and fast to please God and serve humanity. They were not exiled by anyone but they themselves left their home and all comforts of life willingly for the sake of human kind. Valmiki is a great sage, who is also known as Brahmarishi. He gave us the Ramayana which the world can never forget. It is one of the great epics of the world. People of other countries also take interest in it as it is full of guidelines. The study of The Ramayana reforms our lives. Sage Valmiki's the Ramayana in Sanskrit is first such poem in Sanskrit. So, it is called the Adikavya or the first poem. Sage Valmiki is also known as Adikavi which means the first Poet Sage Valmiki's The Ramayana can be sung which is very delightful to ear like cuckoo. Sage Vyasa is considered by all Hindu as a chrenjivi, one who is still living and roaming throughout the world for the well being of his devotees. He is the author of the Mahabharata and also compiled many Vedas for the well-being of humanity. Sage Vasishtha is described as Brahmarishi. For helping Gods against demons he was gifted a divine cow named sabla. The sage helped the needy and poor people by the eatables provided by her. As a former king Vishwamithra was known for his temper. He often cursed people in his anger, thereby depleting his yogic powers obtained by much penance. People feared his temper and Prayered that their actions may not disturb the sage. However, as former king Vishwamithra also possessed great compassion for all human beings. Taking pity on Trisant he willingly exhausted all the powers he had gained from his tapas, to enable him to ascend to the heavens in his physical form. Following his attainment of the status of Brahmarishi, he was known to use the power of his tapas to help anyone who was in need, whatever its may cost to himself. Vishwamithra is said to have found the 'Gayatri Mantra'

which is found in Rig, yajar and same Vedas. He is also featured in many legendary stories and in different works of Sanatana Dharma.

R.K. Narayan has also used the symbol of fast associated with the life of saints. All great saints and holy man took the help of fast to be near to god and for their purification of soul. They found it as the best way of controlling their mind and sense. Fasts have been used by millions to withdraw ones senses from the outside world and focus on god. During period of sadhana, fast help in being away of the vulgarities of life. So, saints and sages and all great men use it as a medium to keep themselves close to God.

In the Guide, Raju is assumed as a saint by the villagers and emotionally forced to keep fast to please God and bring rain to the draught effected area. The first four days of his enforced fast were sheer agony for him. The sight of food tormented him. He polished off the vessel containing the previous days left food. He cursed his first meeting with Velan who was responsible for whole thing. He felt sick. He knew that the fact of his being a swami is myth just as the old crocodile in the pond. But then people of this land survive on myths. It gave them something to fall back upon in times of crisis. It enhanced their belief and religious faith. The transformation in Raju is gradual, natural and also wonderful. The resolution to chase away the thoughts of food gave him a peculiar strength from inside. It further forged his thoughts towards genuine fast. "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not it do thoroughly".⁴

Similarly in the story of Vishwamithra in Gods, Demons and others we see him meditating and keeping rigous fast to please God and achieve his life-long ambition of getting the title of Brahma-Rishi for thousand years he remained foodless, and the time came for him to end his fast. He was on the point of breaking his fast after prayers and ablutions when a mendicant appeared at the door....."⁵

R.K. Narayan has used symbol of rivers as a source of salvation in many of his works. In the epic The Mahabharata we find the mention of river Ganga, which is considered by all Hindus to be sacred. It is worshipped and is personified as goddess. They believe that bathing in the river on certain occasions causes the remission of sins and facilitates the attainments of salvation. Vasus cursed by Vasishtha requested Ganga to be their mother. SO, Ganga incarnated and became the wife of king Santanu on condition that at no stage shall he question her action, or she would leave him. As seven sons were born as their children, one after the other Ganga drowned them in her own waters, freeing them from their punishment and the king made not opposition. But when the eight was born the king finally opposed his wife. So, the eight son Dyaus incarnated remained alive, imprisoned in mortal form and later became known in his mortal incarnation as Bhishma. He is one of the most respected characters in the Mahabharata.

The role of rivers as the sustainers of life and fertility is reflected in the myths and beliefs in many cultures. In many parts of the world river is referred as mother. R.K.Narayan has often linked rivers with divinities. For Narayan the village life is a symbol of simplicity and peace. Against the humdrum city life, the village life is full of serenity, it is a native strength cut off from civilized areas. The village depends on the vagaries of monsoon and its inhabitants are completely ignorant about the changes that modern world has wrought. The villagers seek help

from the wisdoms of the ancients that has proclaimed through centuries. In Gods, Demons and Others, Narayan has presented, Village life in the description of 'The world of storyteller.'⁶ In this Narayan Deals with the characters, themes, setting and several other professions which are character is tics of village life. He has presented a vivid picture of village and their occupations and presented a visual picture of village life before us: *"The nearest railway stations is sixty miles away, to be reached by an occasional bus passing down the highway, which again may be an hour's marching distance from the village by a short cut across the canal. Tucked away thus, the village consists of less than a hundred houses, scattered in six crisscross streets. The rice fields stretch away westward and merge into the wooden slopes of the mountains. Electricity is coming or has come to another village, only three miles away, and water is obtainable from a well open to the skies in centre of the village all day the men and women are active in fields, digging, ploughing, transplanting, or harvesting. At seven o' clock (or in the afternoon if a man-eater is reported to be about) everyone is home."*⁷

R.K. Narayan is a realist, so his images are not airy and ethereal but fully firmed in ground. He gives us the picture of the daily activity of an average man so vividly and accurately that the description at once becomes life like and realistic. As we see in the domestic picture of storyteller in Gods, Demons, and others : *" He bathes twice daily at the well and prays trice, facing east or west according to the hour of the day, chooses his food according to the rules in the almanac, fasts totally one day every fortnight , breaking his fast with greens boiled in salt water. The hours that he does not spend in contemplation or worship are all devoted to study "*⁸III

It is hard to find sensuous images in Narayan's mythical work. However images related to colour, taste, smell and light can be easily seen. In the following lines we feel a sensuous picture which appeals to sight: *"..... Rama felt a great tenderness for his wife, who looked particularly lovely adorned with the ornaments given by Anusuya. Rama glanced at her whether a beautiful object caught his eye. Every tint of the sky, every shape of a flower or bud, every elegant form of a creeper reminded him of some aspect or other of Sita's person "*⁹

Narayan also uses colour imagery the colours of red, white, green, brown etc. Different colour symbolises different things. For instance green symbolises prosperity, wealth and happiness. In The Ramayana when Rama was exiled he decided to reside on the on the banks Godavri with sita and Lakshmana. The place was full of greenery, peace and natural beauty. So, it was liked by them to pursue their spiritual aims. In The Mahabharata Pandavas were also attracted by the greenery and beauty of a spot while chasing a deer and sat under a tree to rest. As they were thirsty the youngest Nakula climbed a tree to see some source of water nearby and saw a crystal clear pond at a distance.

Animal imagery has been well used by R.K. Narayan. He gives Human attributes to animals such as serpent, cow, birds m deer, dog, horse, etc. In the guide, Rosie is addressed by Raju as a serpent girl because she could dance vigourlsy like a snake. Hearing this the heart of Raju's mother began to sank because in Indian mind serpent woman symbolises cunningness and fraudness. In The Mahabharta Durhodhana is compared with snake by the writer, R.K.Narayan himself. The writer has presented visual image of snake in the following lines: *"When Duryodhana came back, she lectured him, although he breathed heavily ("like a snake") and with eyes red ('as a copper from weath")*¹⁰ Similarly in the Ramayana, Kaikayi is also

addressed as a serpent by her own son Bharata because she conspired against Rama: You are a serpent . You are heartless. You have had the cunning, the deviousness, to trap the king into promise, and not cared that it meant death to him. How am I to prove to the world that I have no hand in this ? How can anyone help thinking that I have manoeuvred it all through You have earned me the blackest reputation for anyone since the beginning of our solar race.”¹¹

The image of cow has also been well presented by Narayan in The Mahabharata. When Yudhishtra lost everything in the game of dice, his other four brothers also accepted their defeat willingly and did not speak a word against their Watching all this Dussasna danced around his victims, jarring “Oh cows, cows”¹² As in Indian mind cows symbolises gentleness.

Narayan has also used beautiful image of birds in his mythical works. Dove symbolises innocence and purity whereas hawk is a bird of prey. It refers to cruelty and cunningness. So, in the story of ‘Sibi’ in Gods, Demons and others, Narayan has very artistically presented a visual picture of these two birds for the sensuous pleasure of his readers.

Thus we see that images and symbols are essential part of the energy of Narayan’s prose, and its liveliness depends largely on its success in reinforcing thought by concrete figures of speech. In Narayan images and symbols are presented not merely as description, report or documentation but they have some aura of significance lending to a complexity of meanings.

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