Abstract

R.K. Narayan is perhaps the best known and most widely read Indian novelist writing in English. He received the Sahitaya Academy Award for his much talked novel The Guide, which made Narayan a famous literary figure. His ninth novel The Man Eater of Malgudi is considered by the critics to be the best of his all novels. The novel is based on the Hindu myth of Bhasmasura. Among other qualities, the novel is also known for its narrative technique. According to K.A. Panikar, Indian narratology can be analyzed under ten heads, "Interiorisation, Serialisation, Fantasisation, Cyclicalisation, Allegorisation, anonymisation, Elasticisation of time, Spatialisation, Stylisation and Improvisation. In the present paper, I have analyzed the narrative technique of the novel under these ten heads.

1. Introduction

R.K. Narayan is among the well-known and most widely read Indian novelists writing in English. His literary arena comprises fourteen novels, six collections of short stories, two autobiographies, a number of travelogues, besides a version of Ramayana and Mahabharta and contributions to newspapers and magazines, which are of distinctive literature quality. In 1958, Narayan received the Nation Prize of the Indian Literary Academy for his famous work The Guide which also won for him the Sahitya Academy Award. His well known works are Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), Malgudi Days (1942), The Guide (1958), The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962) etc. The one distinctive feature of Naryana's literary genius is his art of story-telling. He is a master narrator.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is Narayan's ninth novel which is hailed by learned critics to be his finest work. It was published in 1961 and at once claimed immense popularity. Narayan was well-versed in Hindu mythology and this novel is cast in mythical framework. Here, the writer
recreates the old Hindu myth of Bhasmasura in modern form. The novel is a mythical comedy portraying the absurdities and incongruities of life in modern South Indian society in a fictional mode that is both fabulous and ironic. The novel represents the struggle of the good and the evil of the common and the uncommon, of the passive and the active. The novel is a thoughtful presentation of two diametrically opposed attitudes of life, the adequacies of both of which ironically exposed. Narayan has harmoniously blended realism and fantasy and humour and irony in the novel. The editors of Time Literary Supplement praised the novel in the following words:

Pungent as Madras Curry, gay witty, the rueful wry gaiety of Tamils and Telgus, R.K. Narayan’s The Man-Eater of Malgudi makes a most rich and satisfying mixture. Hilarity and high seriousness are rarely yoked together in partnership as effectively as they are in this book. Narayan’s writing is limpid and beautifully unforced.

2. Ten Heads of Indian Narratology

K. Ayyapa Paniker's Indian Narratology is a seminal book tracing the tradition of Indian narratology, which is accepted in this paper as the basis of the theoretical frame work. He says in this book that, "For the sake of clarity and conciseness, the main distinctive features of Indian narratology may be listed under ten heads. There may be some overlapping here and there in this classification, some times even chronological misinterpretations or imbalances in itself is of some use at this distance of time. These are interiorisation, Serialisation, Fantasisation, Cyclicalisation, Allegorisation, anonymisation, Elasticisation of time, Spatialisation, Stylisation, Improvisation".

I. Interiorisation

Interiorisation is the process by which a distinction, a contrast or even a contradiction is effected between the surface features of a text and its internal essence. The novel The Man-Eater of Malgudi has two parts: Man-Eater and Malgudi. Man-Eater is the internal surface of novel and Malgudi is the outer surface of the novel. The second part of novel Malgudi indicates the particular place or locality where the various events and incidents narrated in the novel take place. Malgudi in South India, essentially a “country of the mind”, provides the setting to the novel. A number of its localities such as Market Road, Kabir street, Sarayu river, the Taluk office, the Lawley Extension, the Mempi Forest are mentioned. An account is also given of the professions, beliefs, customs, superstitions, tradition etc. of its people. The internal part of the novel Man-Eater means a tiger that has once tasted human blood, has relished it, and so attacks human beings whenever it gets an opportunity to do so. It death and destruction and so is an object of terror to all in the neighborhood. There is no man-eater in Malgudi in the literal sense. But there is H. Vasu, the taxidermist, who is a destructive as man-eater. Thus the inner surface deals with the real part of the novel and external surface deal with the outer appearance of the locality.

II. Serialization

The second feature of Indian narratology is serialization which implies the structure of the typical Indian narrative, which seems to prefer an apparently never-ending series of episodes to a unified, single strand, streamlined course of events, centering around a single hero or heroine and whatever happens to the central character. There are two main characters in this novel. They are Vasu and Nataraj. Nataraj is the central figure in the novel and the entire action and the other
characters are looked at through his eyes, and his point of view is always stressed, but he is an “unheroic hero”, a passive character. One who suffers and endures, rather than a man who causes suffering to other. He does not act, but is acted upon. There are twelve episodes and various incidents in the novel, have no unity except the unity provided by the fact that same person, Vasu appears in all of them. There is much superfluity. Too much space has been devoted to Vasu’s varied activities. A number of characters appear for a short duration, play their respective roles and then disappear. The forest officer, the bus conductor and driver, the D.S.P., the Inspector Police, Muthu, the adjournment lawyers etc., are such characters. Thus there is episodic looseness in the novel.

III. Fantasisation and Cyclisation

The third feature of Indian narratology is Fantasisation. Narayan is a pure Indian writer both in letter and spirit; that is why there is both the realistic and the fantastic in his novels, and both these elements are successfully fused to form and organic whole as in The Man-Eater of Malgudi. To quote Brunton:

Mr. Narayan is a brilliantly subtle comedian. His

Typical art is an original compounded of fantasy and realism.

But when, as sometimes happens in the vein of fantasy predominates, his writing slips into escapism and Triviality. An acute example of such a failure is offered By… The Man-Eater of Malgudi.

The narrative, the dialogues, the setting and the characters are real, but these are stuffed with fantasy which is seen in his use of Indian myths, legends and folklore. Fantasy may be defined as the eccentric, the absurd the improbable, as something which is hardly possible in real life. In The Man-Eater of Malgudi, the even tenor of Malgudi life is disturbed by the sudden arrival of Vasu, an out of the way fantastic characters with his hammer-fist, with his over confidence, with his boast of his scientific outlook, but with mysterious ways. His end is as sudden and fantastic as his arrival. He is evil incarnate and he suddenly destroys himself in the manner of Bhasmasura. Vasu in striking at a mosquito destroys himself in the manner of Bhasmasura. Credibility is conferred in the incident by the mythological story of demon Bhasmasura, who is led to his doom by the strategy of dancer Mohoni- an incarnation of Vishu. Also on the real life level a sort of poetic justice has been done to Vashu for taking the life of so many animals. “In Narayan’s cosmology such things are the very stuff to life which has to be accepted positively in all entirety”, says Dorothy Spencer. The choice of an Indian Classical myth by the author to explore a universal problem does not pose any difficulty for the reader because analysis reveals that seemingly different myths are all the same because they derive from a reflect “identical primal relationships” among humans. Narayan believes in this universal sameness of myth and its appropriateness in providing story patterns. The plot of The Man-Eater of Malgudi is built on the conscious use of the myth and novelist’s intention to use the myth in an obvious manner is found in the text itself not once but times. Shastri, the surrogate author while defining Vasu says:
He shows all the definitions of rakshasa; persisted Shastri, and went on to define the make up of a rakshasa, or a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, strange powers and genius, but recognized no sort of restraints of man or God. He said, “Every rakshasa gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him”. (95-96)

The obviousness of the craft is again announced in the end of the work when Sastri repeats his early belief, “Every demon appear in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were even to him, a tiny seed of self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment”. (242)

Cylicalisation is the fourth feature of Indian narratology which follows the cycle of day following night and night following day, and the perpetual cyclical rotation of the seasons as well as the circular revolutions of the heavenly bodies. In everyone of Narayan's novels, the usual order of life, i.e. the normality, is disturbed by the arrival of an outside into the sheltered world of Malgudi or by some flight or uprooting, but in the end there is always a return, a renewal and restoration of normality. The normal order is disturbed only temporarily and by the end the usual order established once again and life going on as usual for all practical purposes. Vasu, the taxidermist does not stop at anything in the novel. He shoots wild animals even in the Mempi Forest without the permission of the authorities and soon turns Nataraj's attic into a charnel house. He does not care for any social norms. There is disorder for sometime, but order is restored once again by his equally sudden death. Like the Rakshasa Bhasmasura he kills himself with a blow of his hammer-fist on his head. Evil is thus, expelled and normal peaceful life once again becomes possible for Nataraj. Thus the novel follows the cyclical pattern of order-disorder. The western critics view this technique narration under the heed of plot. The plot of the novel has a classical design; the pattern is order-disorder-order. The western critics view this technique narration under the heed of plot. The plot of the novel has a classical design; the pattern is order-disorder-order, only with in the convention of storytelling which unsparingly emphasizes that a story must have beginning, middle and and end. The Katastasis plot on which is superimposed the mythic paradigm serves to anticipate the development the denouement of the story. The story runs under the shadow of the end what Brooks sees as the "structuring force of the ending" because the idea of author behind the story has its end before the beginning. In the disorder the climax is touched ; with Vasu's death denouncement is reached, the mythic paradigm serves to anticipate the development denouement reached, the order is established, the recognition that evil contains its destruction, in itself is established the first ending of the plot is sudden, abrupt the fantastic.

IV. Allegorical Method

An allegory is technique of vision. It reserves to convey abstract and mystic truths in an easy-popular way. The allegory is a literary composition with a hidden moral lesion. The Man-Eater of Malgudi is also an allegory for not only does it narrate an interesting story, but it also represents the conflict of the Good and the Evil, of the normal and the uncommon, of the passive and active. These allegorical implications of the story become clear, with the comparison and contrast of the
character of Nataraj the unheroic hero, and Vasu, the anti hero. The New York Times reviewer read the novel as an allegory and Edwin Gerow, in a perceptive analysis of the novel, has pointed out how closely, the novel follows the allegorical pattern of Sanskrit Literature. The polarity between Nataraj, the meek and tolerant printer, and Vasu, the dynamic man of action, is too clear to be overlooked. Nataraj is mainly passive; things happen to him and he has very little power to influence events, while Vasu is the great advocate of individual achievements. Vasu is alone, he comes from outside, and sets up his business of taxidermy unaided by anyone, fighting with the Forest Department, on one hand, and the Malgudi people, on the other. He secures a room, a jeep and a game license on his own initiative, and kills, processes, stuffs animals, packs them in boxes and sends them out to different places single handed, while “I (Nataraj) noted it all from my seat in the press and said to myself from his humble town of Malgudi stuffed carcasses radicate to the four corners of the earth” (125) clearly this type of Indian theme of the conflict between good and evil is being worked out attributing allegorical character of the novel.

V. Stylization and Improvisation

The last two features of the Indian narrative are stylization and Improvisation. Narayan's language is very much like the language of the newspaper and the Sunday Weekly and the common use and the Indian makes of it. From the limited vocabulary, Narayan has fashioned for himself a kind of diction of common life for Indian scene—a medium which is at once casual and convincing and used with complete confidence. In The Man-Eater of Malgudi, R.K. Narayan makes a clever use of language which starlets the readers. One examples illustrates this:

"Only fools marry, and they deserve all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all. If you like a woman, have her by all means. You do not have to own a coffee estate because you like to have cup of coffee now and then" and he smiled, more and more pleased with his own wit.(215)

VI. The use of Cinematic Technique

Cinematic devices used in the novel make the narration marvelous, create a make believe world for the reader. As in film, the device of parallel editing is employed here to show the parallel action taking place in the story. The movement of the temple procession and the action in the attic of Vasu occur simultaneously. The author gives audience the benefit of witnessing both the actions by juxtaposing the shots that build up suspense to the maximum level.

3. Conclusion

Narayan's narratives always encourage the readers to have a careful reading of the text so that they don't miss of the charm of the stories. Narayan's stories find in irksome when they are vigorously scrutinized through literary canons of western criticism. They are devised to delight and while doing so they transmit the vision of the writer in a subtle way. For a reader, the stories may seem over simple but the simplicity in Naryan's stories is only deceptive, behind it are woven intricacies of storytelling methods, both accidental and oriental, that allure that reader to read more and more. And it is what S. Krishna says about Narayan's stories: "his (Narayan's) alchemical art that transforms them into a living experience in which the reader fully participates". As there is fluidity of the
narrative in India, in the same way there is fluidity of the narrative of the *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

References