

# THE ROLE OF MONEY IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF R.K.NARAYAN (A Marxist Approach)

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## Introduction

R. K. Narayan is a great novelist and also a significant author of short stories in English. Due to unavoidable circumstances, Narayan couldn't publish any lengthy work from 1939 to 1945. The personal tragic incidents and the shocks of the World War II wounded the soft hearted Narayan too intimately. The influence of those incidents was so immense that he was unable to produce any immense works. But Narayan's artistic pen was not in station. During this period R.K. Narayan contributed few short stories to 'The Hindu' and to the time being quarterly journal 'Indian Thought'. In the next stages these short stories were appeared in the volumes and earned very good consideration in Indo- Anglian short stories. Narayan has a half –a-dozen collection of stories to his credit. Thus, in all, Narayan's short stories are eighty two in numbers. He has also to his credit a collection of stories based on the ancient Hindu myths and legends, 'Gods, demons and other stories.' In this part of the study, the study continues on analyzing the role of money in Narayan's short stories.

The short stories of .R.K.Narayan deal with variety of subjects. The characters are from lower middle class to the upper class, including socially rejected .also. There are the stories which show the impact of the machine age on human lives. In Narayan's stories, Malgudi is always present as a background but this is not the whole truth of his stories. Dr. Disha Sharma in Short Stories of R.K. Narayan Themes and Techniques writes,

“Narayan's novels are set in Malgudi but Malgudi is not the locale of all his short stories. Sometimes the action takes place in Mysore, of life with which he was intimate. But the people here represent humanity at large and hence Narayan's short stories have universal appeal. Some of Narayan's short stories contain parallel characters sometimes in Bangalore, Madras, Kritcham and other places.”

In Narayan, short stories there are several characters. They belong to various professions. They are astrologer, postman, servants, beggars, rickshaw puller, knife sharpener, artists, thieves, pick-

pocketer, doctor, snake charmer, singer, office clerk, priest, gateman (watchman), shopkeeper, unemployed, housewives, children, story teller, writers, insurance agents, cook, lock repairers and many more. All his characters are lively. Whatever role they are playing they are believable and likeable. Narayan loves his characters and his characters are also loved by all his readers. He has presented every type of middle class and few higher middle class characters also but the most important thing of his stories is that he doesn't believe only on his main characters. For him each and everyone who is present in the story is important. Life is impossible without small incidents. Society completes with the presence of each and even major and minor characters. Dr. Disha Sharma in 'Short Stories of R.K. Narayan: Themes and Techniques', writes,

“Narayan's minor characters are more assertive than any of his major characters. In the brief precious moments allowed to them they act their part exceedingly well. With the deft strokes of a clever artist, Narayan creates living and breathing characters which haunt our memory long after we have finished reading his stories.”

In the present day scenario every body's life is determined by one own economic conditions. Moreover, it is true that economic systems were the deciding factors of human history. For Marx, “forces of production” method shapes a society. This force of production is a method utilizes to generate the material compositions of life. The economic situations implicit in any society are recognized as material circumstances. In Marxism the economic circumstances forms the society, in that formation the methods of production are known as the 'base'. The social, political, and ideological systems and institutions that generate the values, art, and legal processes-are called the superstructure. In the course of society the dominant class controls the superstructure. In the later stage the extension of dominant elements capable to dominate the members of the working classes. But it is irony to say that among Marxists, there is no perfect opinion related to reflection of the base by the superstructure or the effects of superstructure on the base. Even a common thinking can say that in any society the very first thing is always economic act because for human beings material needs are important than any other need. Therefore, first they mind to fulfill their everyday material need than anything else. In the later course in the analysis of social and historical development of societies the economic production and the division into social classes in them have become the main theoretical perspective. In this perspective this study can examine some of the short stories of R K. Narayan. Here, an effort has been undertaken to explore the following group of characters such as idealist, practical, sentimental and household. The reason behind this study is Marxist cultural, psychoanalytical and materialist analysis.

We can divide his characters into six parts. They are,

1. Group of idealist's characters,
2. Group of practical people,
3. Group of sentimental people,
4. Household servant characters,
5. Group of women characters,
6. Child characters.

In a short notice the study makes a brief notice at the short stories from Group of idealist's characters, Group of practical people, Group of sentimental people, as well as Household servant characters.

The first group of Narayan's stories deals with idealist characters. They are the characters who live in a utopia; they want perfect idealism from life. They are not ready to compromise with their conditions. Due to idealism, they have to suffer a lot. This is shown in story like "Father's Help"; Sadhu "The Snake Song"; Cobbler "God and Cobbler"; priest "House Opposite"; archaeologist "The Roman Image"; Narrator "Another Community" Sastri "All Avoidable Talk"; Sankar "Breath of Promise" Nambi "Under the Banyan Tree"; Selvi "Selvi"; Sekhar "Like the Sun"; Doctor Raman "The Doctor's World"; Soma, "Such Perfection"; Gopal "The Antidote"; Kutti "The Performing Child"; Krishna "The Artist's Turn" etc. All these character roles believe in their self made rules and are ready to suffer to any extent for the sake of their values. Swami's father always loves truth and is against school violence, Sadhu of "The Snake Song" is powerful and intellectual enough to curse someone, the cobbler of "God and Cobbler" sees the image of Lord Shiva on the hippie's face, and the priest of "House Opposite" is not ready to tolerate any immoral work even in his neighborhood.

The archaeologist of "The Roman Image" forgets to take breakfast, lunch and dinner when he is busy in his archaeological excavations work; the narrator of "Another community" attains the supreme place. He is dying but still he thinks to save the society from communal riots. Sastri decides to avoid all avoidable things for a day in "All Avoidable Talk" Sankar in "Breach of Promise" is ready to kill himself in order to fulfill one vow made to the Goddess; Nambi of "Under the Banyan Tree" decides not to speak a single word as he is not able to tell stories to the villagers. Selvi leaves all her status and sacrifices her position, starts singing for all after the death of her mother. Sekhar decides not to tell a lie on that day. Though, his vow takes him into a corner. Doctor Raman has developed a blunt truthfulness. He does not have faith in agreeable words to protect life. It is not his dealings to give an irrelevant hope to his patients.

Soma is not ready to break the idol of the Goddess even to save the whole society. He is anything from the greedy shopkeeper and fault finder who knows little about art. Kutti, the child dancer hates the cinema men and is not ready to perform according to their wish. Gopal tries not to do any disagreeable act on his birthday. He shakes his head and opens his right eye though he is playing

the role of a deceasedman, ready to die. Krishna the poor artist does not accept Swami the child character of “A Hero” tries to divert his father’s attention by talking useless things. His father is praising another boy and he doesn’t like this. Dodu the main character of the same story is a very practical boy. He learns many things from his mistakes. The office people of “Another Community” are very practical, as they know how to flow with the current of the stream. They are not willing to take any risk for their lives. The principal’s character of “Like the Sun” is very practical. The servant of “A Snake In the Grass” takes very practical steps to satisfy the members of family. Sankar wants to earn money for that he is even ready to give company to a drunkard. Sam also returned the payment of one day when he could not serve the narrator. Mother squirrel takes a very practical decision to leave her younger ones all alone otherwise, her life is at stake and with her all of her, and young ones' life is in danger. Within no time, she decides to save all instead of a single one. Ranga raises his demand of money as per the importance of the bowl. Rama Rao forgets his loss of purse because what is done cannot be undone. This shows his practical approach to life. The tutor in “Crime and Punishment” is doing his job in spite of the irritating behavior of the parents; Subbaiah the grain merchant is too practical to be a good human being. Due to his extreme practical nature, he dies at the end of the story. The narrator of “Engine Trouble” thinks about many practical solutions to get rid of the reward that is a road engine. VeankatRao is ready to forget the sentiments of his daughter for a cinema outing because he is getting five rupees increment in his salary. Being a practical father, he gives importance to her comforts than to her emotions Mohan in “Selvi” is extremely practical about his profits. His practical attitude passes the limit of gentleness.

The astrologer is little intelligent and he receives the challenge of Guru Nayak without being intimidated. As a trickheearns his faithand instigates his belief inhis cognition of astrology. Through his trickerymakes the challenger flee homeward.The postman Thanappa does not hand over the important letter and telegram to Ramunujam. He learns the essence of the Kamakshi’s marriage. He guesses that the marriage must not be delayed for any reasons. It is only after her marriage that Ramanujam learns about the death of his uncle. Krishna likes to marry the girl whom he loves. Unfortunately, the horoscopes are matchless. But the priest suggests a practical solution of flower.

Narayan’s stories have a few sentimental characters as well. The narrator in “Another Community”; Nambi in “Under the Banyan Tree”; Velan in “The Axe”; Rajuin“Trail of the Green Blazers”; Govind Singh in “The Gateman’s Gift”; Iswaran in “Iswaran”; Sankar in “The Evening Gift” and the girl character of “The Watchman” are the some examples of sentimental characters. The narrator wants to save the whole humanity. No one understands his feelings but he is very sentimental and in spite of his death he wants to protect all. Nambi considers his memory loss due to the disgrace of the Goddess. Though this is because of aging but for Nambi this is the end of all his happiness. Velan is attached to his plants. He cares for them like his children. The last sentence where he requests the people not to cut the tree in front of him butwait till he leaves the place shows his deep sentiments

for his plants. Due to his sentiments, Raju the pickpocket should not have a soft corner for an unknown child but he can't help it. Govind Singh is not ready to obey the suggestion to unfold the registered letter that due to his sentiments, Iswaran assumes that he has not passed the intermediate examination and is not willing to see his result. Though he passes the examination, yet he dies, as he can't restrain his sentiments. Sankar is deeply attached for his family and his family is in extreme need of money. Sentimental Sankar never reveals his problem to his employer, but quits the rich drunkard at that point of time when Sankar's company was badly received and to read its contents. He suffers because of his sentimental nature. The girl in "The Watchman" considers her to be unwanted worry on her step mother. She always hates to live in anybody's mercy. She has decided to commit suicide as she can't get scholarship and is not ready for marriage. All the characters who are sentimental suffer a lot in their lives and because of them their relatives have also to face many inconvenient situations.

Another group of Narayan's characters is of domestic helpers. Except for Ramu "Career" all, the household servants are honest, hard working and sincere towards their masters. Velan of "The Axe" is a little bit whimsical by his nature but he is very faithful to his owner and considers their problems as his own. The Ayah, in "A Willing Slave" besides doing her own works observes over the work of the gardener, cook, and other servants and especially over the tutor. All the time she keeps and eyes over the above mentioned people for the betterment of the family. No one instructs her for this. Her love for Radha the youngest member of the family deserves appreciation. She is all the time on her heels to serve Radha. Sidda in "Leela's Friend" is replica of Ayah. He is also a very sincere servant who completes all his work properly and loves Leela the child of the family. But he can't get the same love and respect in return from Mr. Sivasankar's family. They hand him over to police. Ramu in "A Career" is also a devoted servant in beginning. He does many things for the family. He is not demanding any salary but later on, he falls in love with a girl and the girl makes him cheats his master.

Dasa in "A Snake In the Grass" is an ordinary servant. Though he performs many duties for the family, yet he manages sufficient time for his afternoon nap also. He is smart as well as an obedient servant. Because of his smartness, he is not ready to cut the garden grass, as grass cutter is not available to him. Dasa represents Annamalai is also a faithful servant. He is whole heartedly devoted and a superstitious man. He has his own logic and reasons for twenty first century servants. He never hesitates to give fair opinion to his master. His master also loves him. Narayan's short stories and his novels both have their own caliber. He wrote novels as means for short earning for his livelihood. But writing stories was his passion. He loves depict ordinary characters whose lives move on the same tracks. He loves to present simple incidents of their lives. Narayan himself has expressed his opinion about short stories in "Introduction" to his last collection of short stories in the following words:

“I enjoy writing a short story. Unlike the novel, which emerges from relevant, minutely worked-out detail, the short story can be brought into existence through a mere suggestion of detail, the focus being kept on a central idea or climax.”

In the short story named ‘Selvi’ chosen from ‘An Astrologer’s day and other stories’, Narayan depicts a character of Selvi, similar to Rosie from the novel, ‘The Guide.’ The title of the story itself indicates that it is the story of the main character, ‘Selvi’. The story revolves around the character of Selvi. Mohan’s monetary pursuits can be compared to Raju from the novel, ‘The Guide.’ In the novel, ‘The Guide’ Raju treats Rosie for his financial desires in the same way Mohan sees Selvi. Mohan dominates on Selvi and designs to utilize her to let loose his financial whims. Selvi’s innocence, resourceful, simplicity and her bootless cries provide Mohan a chance to increase his subjugation. Pertaining to Mohan’s treatment Narayan says,

“He was a financial expert who knew how to conjure up money and at the same time keep Income Tax at arm’s length. Pacing his lawns and corridors restlessly, his mind was always busy, planning how to organize and maneuver men and money.”

Mohan’s concern towards financial matters is very serious. Selvi’s freedom has been curtailed and limited to a room. Mohan feels Selvi as his own fortune to get economical benefits. Behavioral changes are very evident in Mohan’s designs to earn prosperity. Mohan never permits Selvi to visit her mother. The denial of permission is due to difference in her social status. After the death of Selvi’s mother, we can see drastic change in her character. It is strange, but is true that Selvi in her life for the first time voices. She says,

“Please leave me out of all this, leave me alone, I want to be alone hereafter. I can’t bear the sight of anyone...”

In this way Selvi voices against her merciless husband. Her impassiveness shows her self-determination and mental strength.

“Evening Gift” from the same collection is a very different story. Here one drunkard employs a companion to check his drinks after nine. It seems a very odd job but Sankar belongs to a very poor family and needs the job that is why he accepts it. One night he is dismissed from his service by his master while in his drunken state-with an advance salary of four months. Sankar is very happy to get three months salary. His nature is not also for that job. Keeping company to a drunkard is not at all a healthy work. He accepts money, decides to get back to his village, and next morning is seen doing some hopping buying things for his mother, his sister and the small child at home. But when he is

about to leave the place, the police takes him into custody for his act of robbing his master taking advantage of his weakness.

“Out of Business” is the story from the collection ‘An Astrologer’s day and other stories’ tells about the story of a frustrated man who loses his job due to the economic break down. Later on he decides to solve this financial problem by solving a cross-word puzzle. But in this process, he does not get anything and wastes a good amount of money. In spite of all these things, he is indifferent towards the necessities of his family. The story ends with a positive note where he realizes his mistakes and starts completing his responsibilities.

Narayan's next collection of short stories is Lawley Road and Other Stories. It was a collection of twenty eight stories, published in 1956. Among twenty eight stories fourteen have been reprinted from the previous collections. In Narayan’s stories character plays a very important role.

“Wife’s Holiday” is the story of Kanna, a gambler. He wants to celebrate the temporary absence of his wife. Though he misses his son, yet he doesn’t hesitate to smash his son's money box for gambling. There he loses all money. As he returns from the gambling area, his wife also returns to her home. The story ends a point where he is all alone to suffer the consequence of smashing the money box.

Narayan's collection of short stories “A Horse and Two Goats” was published in 1970. It contains five long stories. All these stories present elaborated description. The Shelter is story of a husband and wife. Their names are not given. This pair is very quarrelsome. At the end of the story, the wife leaves her husband. This story gives a message that proper understanding between husband and wife is required otherwise this relationship has no meaning. “The Mute Companion” is a delightful animal story. This is the story of a monkey and a deaf and dumb beggar. This story shows how this whole world is fragmented into two parts i.e. the rich and the poor. The beggar used to show his programmes with the help of his monkey by this he earns sufficient money to live. Though he avoids the big building for begging yet one day he goes to perform before some big house and there his monkey disappears and he can’t have his monkey again. Perhaps the mean rich people caught the monkey. Sami has to depend again upon alms.

"Half a Rupee Worth" describes the story of a rice merchant Subbaiah, who knows nothing except profit. He knows to handle every hurdle coming across his way. He has master to cash every situation in his favor. By hook or by crook, he earns only benefits. Corrupt and corrupting Subbaiah does not ignore even the smallest opportunity of adding to his wealth. The greedy merchant dies only for half a rupee worth.

Thus, it is very clear from the above discussion that the history of mankind is in accordance with its economic systems. The lives of the people are determined by their economic circumstances.

According to Karl Marxian concept a society is structured by its "forces of production." This force of production is the methods uses to produce the material elements of life. Material circumstances are the base of economic circumstances implicit in the society. The ideological conditions the economic situations originate are called as the historical situation. We can sum up this chapter with the conclusion that through the study of historical circumstances of any social or political context, any event or product, one can understand the material and historical circumstances. The exploration of the selected works of Narayan has done through the study of history and materialist situations of the time.

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