



# AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTIVE NOVELS OF R. K. NARAYAN

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## ABSTRACT

Involving the autobiographical elements in creative writing is not new. But its conscious and critical analysis is becoming meaningfully deeper for its effects are more relating to a society in terms of authenticity at personal and socio- historic spectrum. Autobiographical creative writing is a hybrid genre that covers personal experiences, reader response and textual analysis to trace the methods by which narratives can create, ponder and transform the curve of psycho-socio-historical dynamics

**KEY WORDS :** Malgudi , Lalgudi, Mythical, Hybrid, Tricinipoly, Mempo

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present study focuses on this spirit and examines the various novels of R.K.Narayan produced in different stages of his life to extract additional insights and experience the relative factors of the novels' dimensions. And this is the Indian approach to literary aesthetics as well. Hence it is more befitting an approach to understand Narayan fiction. A hybrid approach, one that works to blend personal writing in the form of reader response, autobiographical creative writing and literary criticism in the form of textual analysis is more effective for literary appreciation and understanding . While personal writing should not function as a mere replacement for traditional modes of literary analysis grounded in New Criticism or for other approaches to literary criticism such as cultural context analysis, a blended approach can enact the transformative processes required for meaningful change to occur within individuals and ultimately communities through literary expressions and experience. Rhetorical study is another important parameter in understanding the narrative nuances of a work of art usually based on the factors Context, Selections of details, Organization and Point of View. To appreciate these factors also, the autobiographical elements that are outside the frames of the text contribute a lot. Though these elements could be very meagre in terms of volume, it gives catalytic effect to the artistic experience.

Writing about Bengaluru or another city of its kind is easy while creating an imaginary town like Malgudi is difficult though allowing the possibility of using another town for a model. Maintaining the details of characters and living through them all along the novel is not easy while working on the live models is far easier. Writing on the models of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha is easy, something like making of a remake film. And usually writing an autobiographical novel takes lesser time than that of a fully imaginative one. But autobiographical novel writing may not come in handy always if a writer is committed to some particular theory or dogma and wants his work reach out to a specific end. Actually, even imaginative novels have to depend upon the persons living or dead for models to avoid fictional characters ending up just black and white and losing the shades of all realistic colours. And the passage of time, the results of the actions of different characters in a given situation allow the writer to place and enact his fictional drama in a better way. Autobiographical writing poses a number of hard choices between the life and the novel. Autobiographical fiction allows to depict the issues that excite and affect the writer into the fiction. By this, the writer can find the problems opening up for a solution of just endurance of it with life like naturalness.

Discussing about the fictional town Malgudi of R.K. Narayan can contribute to the making and understanding of autobiographical novel. Talking about the cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, Coimbatore or a village is easy. Creating a place using the geographical data of these places and creating another place is different thing. Similarly creating a totally new fictional place is another thing. Malgudi is almost a character in the Narayan's fiction. It is the *sthayee observer*, a metaphor of the fictional reality, giving a serial feeling out of different novels allowing the reader to replace the characters, their conditions in the backdrop of geographical intimacy. This facility would have been difficult had the locales were different in the novels.

Malgudi is a typically a south Indian town, and it has been presented in the fiction of Narayan vividly and realistically. Even its past history is given, and in successive novels we see it changing, growing, and becoming different. All the ten novels and most of the short stories are set in Malgudi. Various critics have attempted to identify the original model of this mythical town. It is speculated that it might be Lalgudi on the Cauvery set in Mysore. Some guess it to be Coimbatore which has many of the landmarks. We see a river on one side, forests on the other. The mission school and college and all the town-extensions cited in the novels, including such specific allusions as that Malgudi is almost a day's journey from Madras as in *the Guide*.

Malgudi gradually grows from a small town or village in *Swami and Friends* to a big city in *Vendor of sweets*. In *Swami and Friends*, Malgudi is neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. With each new novel, Malgudi grows in importance and gains in definition. The major landmarks, however, remain. The river Sarayu flows by its side. Fringing Malgudi or just beyond it are Nallappa's Mango grove and the Mempi forest, reached by the Grove Street and the Forest Road respectively. There is Trunk Road to Tricinipoly. One can board the train for Madras at the Malgudi station. Within the town there is the Market Road, which is described as the life line of Malgudi in *Mr. Sampath*. This road intersects the Race course Road. There are various streets and lanes: Kabir Street, Kabir Lane, Anderson Lane, Sarayu Street, Kulam Street, Vinayaka Mudali Street, Abu Lane, Ellaman Street, Keelacheri.

These details and handling by the writer gives us a glimpse of the process of making an autobiographical stuff into a fictional one. The difference is that individual idiosyncrasy is less pronounced in dealing with the geographical details.

The first three novels of R K Narayan, *Swami and Friends* (1935), *Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945) are considered a trilogy. The middle period novels are reckoned as his best works; these include *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961) and *The Sweet Vendor* (1967). The traditional Hindu values (weakening at that) facing western incursions into the society is the major subject of these works. Narayan's later novels are *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) and *Talkative Man* (1986). He has also published several short stories.

It may not be fully right to just compare and analyze the similarities and contrasts between the author's life per se with his autobiographical works. The major aspect of autobiographicality lies in the fact that his life and thinking have shaped his art and this has set the dynamics of the novels. His Hindu view of life has a bearing on his fiction writing. It need not be so in all the writers. This feature is more pronounced in certain novels. This kind of personality of a writer operating in his writings achieves an intimate, respectful honesty which also percolates into the readership. The popular English writer Jeffery Archer has showered all praise for Narayan for his simple, artistic and friendly narratives.

The publication of *Swami and friends* earned the huge fame all over the world and launched Narayan as a great story teller. The use of language with local colour without the burden of verbosity or critical/political ideas. Narayan captures the experience of childhood in India under the British rule. The novel tells the story about a ten year old boy growing in the 1930s. His next novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* depicts the life of a young man's career when he is about to leave college and enter life. The novel mingles the humour and pathos skilfully and becomes a mature novel. Much of Narayan's personal suffering has gone into the making of *The English Teacher*. It revolves around an unconventional love story.

R. K. Narayan's trilogy mentioned earlier, *The Guide*, *My Days* contain the autobiographical elements of the author. If the foundation of the few works are autobiography, *The Guide*, has a veil of it. *My Days* which is autobiography, per se, betrays a wonderful measure of creativity and imagination. Hence, to explore and study the autobiographical elements in novels of Narayan makes a sensible and profitable study. So far, very meagre output has been found on the topic. Though there are few stray articles on the subject, thorough and in- depth study covering the mentioned books is a serious lapse in the critical arena of Indian Writing in the English language.

R. K. Narayan shares his life story, in *My days*. His childhood was relaxed and calm in his grandmother's garden in Madras with his ferocious pet peacock. May be he got it from Coimbatore which is their habitat. He was playful and not interested in attending school. He was busy with grasshoppers, scouts, and generally took part in life's simple excitements. He was not encouraged to write. His father who was a headmaster opposed to the idea of creative writing. However the Punch magazine accepted a piece of writing of Narayan and infused confidence in him as a budding writer and the going ahead was never stopped. Soon he became a sort of public figure people of all sorts showing interest in him –English readers, journalists,

officials, film makers, and fans expressing blind love for him. It was all amusing for R. K. Narayan for he was naturally unassuming and just a soul in a crowd, observing the maya of life.

The present study tries to make a study of autobiographical novels in general, R K Narayan as an artist and chronicler of personal history-experience, autobiographical element as intimate history, local and global aspects of autobiographicality of a narrative, autobiographicality and idiosyncrasy of a writer etc. All this makes for the first chapter of the thesis. In the second, third and fourth chapters, the different novels of the author will be studied having the theme of the study in the background. The last chapter will contain the conclusion derived out of the study taken up so far. The study will not restrict itself to any particular theory or school of thought. Analytical view of descriptive reality the texts provide will be basis of the study. The novels are the primary sources of the study while a wide range of secondary materials include both main stream criticism and the other voices.

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