

A Study On Tradition Verses Modernity In R K Narayan's The Financial Expert

JUBIN NAHAR

Abstract

The conflict between tradition and modernity is most dominant in the fictional world of RK Narayan. His novels find a way of traditional values and modes of life amid the forces of new civilization and culture. But in the end it's the old tradition that gains dominance over modernity, no matter that modernity has uproot the convention but it simply touches the outer fringe of society and could not penetrate into the soul of society. Reasons Narayan novels we experience a sense of Indianness mixed with his own taste and recognition of rich cultural heritage.

The Financial Expert is one of the best creations of RK Narayan which gives us the picture of Indian culture and values and at the same time depicts how materialism affects and adds a new dimension to the Indian tradition. This paper attempts to examine the text with respect to its character's struggle for identity due changing society values and establish his own identity in new world, the world which is made up of materialistic people. Theory of colonialism and its effect in the post-independence era also kept in view to examine the text.

Keywords - Modernity, Tradition, Materialism, Indianness, identity.

Introduction

R K Narayan

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami was an Indian writer known for his work set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He was a leading author of early Indian literature in English along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

Narayan's mentor and friend Graham Greene was instrumental in getting publishers for Narayan's first four books including the semi-autobiographical trilogy of Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher. The fictional town of Malgudi was first introduced in Swami and Friends. Narayan's The Financial Expert was hailed as one of the most original works of 1951 and Sahitya Academy Award winner The Guide was adapted for film (winning a Filmfare Award for Best Film) and for Broadway.

Narayan highlights the social context and everyday life of his characters. He has been compared to William Faulkner who also created a similar fictional town and likewise explored with humour

and compassion the energy of ordinary life. Narayan's short stories have been compared with those of Guy de Maupassant because of his ability to compress a narrative.

In a career that spanned over sixty years Narayan received many awards and honours including the AC Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature, the Padma Vibhushan and the Padma Bhushan, India's second and third highest civilian awards, and in 1994 the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, the highest honour of India's national academy of letters. He was also nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's parliament.

The Financial Expert

The Financial Expert is a 1952 novel by R. K. Narayan. It takes place, as do many other novels and short stories by this author, in the town of Malgudi. The central character in this book is the financial expert Margayya, who offers advice to his fellow townspeople from under his position at the banyan tree. He is a man of many aspirations and this novel delves into some level of psychological analysis. The Financial Expert tells the story of the rise and fall of Margayya. The theme of the novel is lust for money. But Margayya is no monster of greed and wickedness. In his depiction of Margayya, Narayan humanizes him and shows that despite his lust for money, he is still a human being.

“Money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse”. (Narayan, The financial Expert)

The Financial Expert is the story about Margayya, a man who is struggling to gain social position and power by earning money, who believes that money is the only ladder to climb the social status. He is a man who helps poor people and farmers by lending them money on high interest which was taken from shareholders from bank on low interest; this is the process of earning money. He works under banyan tree in front of the Central Co-operative land Mortgage Bank. We observe the attitude of Margayya towards other lower people to whom he helps in loan matters that he shows them superiority of being Financial Expert.

The obsession of money making give him progress from being Financial Expert to a wealthy and powerful man who have control over others and no body is capable of insulting and thrashing him over his low status as before. Now he is the one who is edge over others. He has struggled to get money and position in society as he feels that only money can give power, respect and identity in society. Margayya wants to buried his past under the power of money, the past that his family members were corpse bearers, for which he often degraded by others of being in lower status.

“No wonder the secretary feels he can treat me as he likes. If I looked like him, would he have dared to snatch the papers from the box? I can't look like a wayside barber, and that is my fate. I'm only fit for the company of those blanket- wrapped rustics” (Narayan, The Financial Expert)

Enrage is clear in the words of Margayya, for indignation he received from secretary and for his own self. He himself feels that a person becomes the matter of ridicule when one does not have

sound financial position and status in society. The condition of Margayya reflects the socio-economic condition of society of post- independence era. Due to industrialization and civilization, society went through the pressure of transformation which is not that smooth as it appears which brings lots of conflict, identity crisis, matter of existence, tradition and modernity. Western civilization brought lots of chaos in mindset of people, their thought process working under the influence of Materialism, the values and conventions of society started to change which results in the formation of Margayya's obsession of status, power, money and society. The Financial Expert encapsulates the entire journey of Margayya and how he struggles to get success and fame.

Tradition verses Modernity in The financial Expert.

The novel is published in 1952, just after India's independence and second world war which left the India on devastating upheaval, racial discrimination, poverty, hunger , people become victim of lots of issues, even minor needs become so impossible to fulfill as its not that independence that erased slavery from its root rather India remain slave even after independence as the western ideology has sets its influence firm in the mind set of people of India who are no where to belong ,they neither pure Indian nor British they are amalgamation of both, to which Homi Bhabha termed as " hybridity".

Through Margayya, Narayan portrayed the race of power, position, money in the wake of industrialization, by which class conflict and capitalism arises where rich tries to control poor and lower class as Margayya to erase the stigma of being a member of lower class, corpse bearers. Narayan has given "Balu" as an evil effect of westernization, modern youth of that era. Margayya gets Balu after lot of offerings to God which is the reason he pampers him a lot. Margayya dreams of his son as a good educated person ,he spend all his wealth in his son's education but all shattered as Balu hardly shows any interest in education. Balu was swayed by modern culture which makes him devoid of ethics, moral values. He failed in his examination which infuriates Margayya which resulted in heated argument between father and son, after which Balu left the house. It is not considered good or respectful traditional Indian middle class family, that son argues in front of father in harsh and slang words. Here the subject of modernity and tradition change where son tries to be modern in front of traditional father. May be Narayan wants to picture the difference between older Indian culture and the culture that emerge under the western influence and industrialization. The conflict between the British culture and Indian social values are the central concern about the matter of individualism and equality which we find in Margayya's struggle under the influence of Materialism which is a product of western civilization and his inner self that belongs to India. The bank from which shareholders get Margayya money on internet can be seen as western ideology whose product is secretary who insulted Margayya which becomes turning point in his life. It is believed that the history of Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank has colonial origins which are a proof of their nature of colonizing, here bank and secretary tries to control Margayya according to their values and notions.

Their nature has changed even the ideology of Margayya who before being subjected to secretary was helper for so many poor farmers and people but secretary has changed him to mercenary. He

indulge in his egoistic self that he doesn't care how he made money, as the only purpose was to have money no matter by what means, he was so obsessed with making money that he consciously gets involved in a business of selling pornographic book. But there is an element of Hindu culture in Margayya's ambition. He aspires to provide comfort, happiness and success to his family and he struggles for the peace of mind from beginning to the end. His desire to be a protective and caring husband and father is typical of Indian family. The character of Margayya both embodies and challenges traditional values according to critics.

No doubt Margayya embodiment of both traditional and western values but his urge for affluence has uproot familial ties from him, he exercises all his stamina and energy in making money, attain financial and social status. He worked like a robot, he becomes so machine like, due to that feeling, emotions, and love leaves his life. He becomes indifferent towards every family bliss and comfort; even he remains unmindful on his wife's agony after Balu's separation.

“The house for Margayya's wife seemed to have become dull and lonely without her son. It reminded her of those days when he had gone away without telling anybody, but Margayya noticed no difference because his mind was busy formulating a new plan which was going to rocket him to undreamt of heights of financial success”.(Narayan,The Financial Expert)

The reference of Goddess Lakshmi as a medium of gaining wealth is example of Margayya's materialistic ideals that are portrayed in Indianised way. But Margayya lacked rationality and technical knowledge that is why he propitiated Goddess Lakshmi to become rich. But still Margayya does not even have proper faith and insight in religion as he asks from priest whether he will become rich or not after offerings, “will they produce results?” Margayya superficially attach to his ideals which torn him between two worlds. The world to which he belongs and the world which he wants to belong. His confused faith in religion but adamant acceptance of Lakshmi proves shallowness of his faith. Margayya wants to be rich by any means no matter whether it costs his moral values or ethical one. And we came to know from novel how he achieved status and gain money by degrading himself to the extent that he became the supplier of obscenity. The contrast between religious and cultural values with the materialistic ideals is perfectly blended in the novel. Through the character of Margayya and his son Balu, Narayan has portrayed the differences and conflicts that westernization brings.

Conclusion

The Financial Expert is the novel that gives the journey of Margayya under the influence of western ideologies and culture, which result in conflict between tradition and modern values. In the novel, Margayya at one point wants to be rich, and the other point complains rich of their indifferent attitudes towards lower class and poor people. This paper shows how after colonization, people of India has emerged as an independent identity after struggling with the impact that British left on them.

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