

Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

The novel, according to Philippe Sollers, is the way in which society talks to itself. Contemporary critical theory has placed the study of fictional works in a broader perspective attempting to answer the *whats* and *hows* of its organization, structure and development as a literary genre. The present study attempts to apply the theoretical concepts of Bakhtin on some selected works of R.K. Narayan.

The writings of Bakhtin go back to the 1920s and 1930s, but he remained unknown to the world until translations in the 1970s brought him to focus. Since then, his ideas, specially polyphony, dialogism and the carnival have proved attractive to critics of different persuasions ranging from Marxists, feminists, to traditional humanists. The reason for such a fascination may be hidden in Bakhtin's radical understanding of relativization of truth, his notion of hidden polemic in all speech, his notion of addressivity, which promotes human connection, and the overall moral implication of freedom. His habitual avoidance of any reductionism shows his concern for the dangers of knowledge both inside or outside a text. He conceives knowledge as dialogic, which

addresses rather than defines. This concern for openness or dialogism can be traced back even to his early aesthetic theories which indicate a deep conviction that an aesthetic event can take place only when there are two participants present, and that it presupposes two non-coinciding consciousnesses. This perception later on was developed to an understanding that a fictional work is primarily dialogic and multi-voiced. Bakhtin stresses not the way that texts reflect society or class interests, but rather the way language disrupts authority and liberates alternative voices.

Bakhtin's theoretical position is clearly anti-Stalinist and against all kinds of oppression. To him any kind of human relationship cannot be viewed in terms of the active and the passive. It may be asserted that in a dominant and subordinate relationship, the passive agent not only accepts anything as *fate accompli*, but also suppresses his/her inner voice, which silently cries for freedom and space. It was quite natural for Bakhtin to be apprehensive of the diminution of the human soul or deprivation of human freedom. Verbal signs are the arena of continuous class struggle: the ruling class will always try to narrow the meaning of words and make social signs 'uni-accentual'. However, Bakhtin

underlines the importance of 'heteroglossia' as the foundation of 'multi-acculturality' of linguistic signs in social discourse that governs the production of meaning in all discourses. It asserts the way contexts define the meaning of utterances, which are heteroglot in so far as they put in play a multiplicity of social voices and their individual expressions. A single voice may give the impression of unity and closure, but the utterance is constantly producing a plentitude of meanings, which stem from social interaction.

Bakhtin had lived through the oppressions of the Czars, and also the gloomy years of Stalin's dictatorship. He was even arrested and lived in exile for six years. So, the authorial vision which he almost valorizes in "*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*" cannot be taken as final, as there seem to be an inner tension in the essay itself. Pam Morris points out that this tension is evident when Bakhtin links the authority of authorial knowledge with death. Morris quotes:

Artistic vision presents us with the whole hero, measured in full and added up in every detail; there must be no secrets for us in the hero in respect to meaning ... From the very outset, we must experience all of him, deal with the whole of him: in respect to meaning, he must be dead for us, formally dead. (Quoted in Morris, 1994:7)

This authorial vision is dismissed by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, where he criticizes Tolstoy's monologic (authorial narration) style. Authorial knowledge leads to a dead end. To Bakhtin, the overwhelming question that compels to be asked is, is not life more mysterious, more ambivalent and full of unanswered questions and quest for meaning? Is not the meaning of myself always yet to be completed? Is not there more attraction towards the sense of unfinalizability of self than da Vinci's perfect knowledge of human anatomy?

His search for answers to these questions led Bakhtin to understand the complexity that exists in relationships between the author and his characters in a narrative. It is, as he finds, more complex in the dynamics of the social than in love, which is considered to be the ideal form of relationship. So he finds for himself that the active giver (author) and the passive recipient (hero) of his "*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*" become two active agents interacting with each other in a complex manner. Language becomes the focus of Bakhtin's thought as he finds it to be the sensitive register of the complex power relations in a society. He finds a strong flavour in the polemic and addressivity of

the language in a novel. This leads him to his narrative theory, which he calls 'dialogic' – meaning that each utterance is addressed to someone, never uttered without consciousness of a relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In this, the play of power and hierarchy are also taken into account. Bakhtin writes in "*Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*" that the basic stylistic tone of utterance is ... determined above all by who is talked about and what his relation is to the speaker – whether he is higher or lower than or equal to him on the scale of social hierarchy.

Bakhtin follows an overtly Marxist approach with a significant departure from its ideological orthodoxy. He embeds his thesis in a perspective that is drawn from Hegelian 'humanism' and Lukacs's concept of "social realism". In making language the central concern of his study, Bakhtin has attempted the closest approximation to scientificness of language in the study of ideology and creativity. He criticizes two current approaches to the understanding of literature – the Formalist attempt at objectivity and the alternate approach of identifying creativity with subjective psychology that fails to understand that verbal art is intrinsically sociological. The social with or without

ideological considerations is crucial for the verbal art as it originates in society and uses its resources.

An assessment of Bakhtin's theory on the carnival needs a prior evaluation of the concept of the polyphonic novel. We should start our discussion with Bakhtin's praise of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin uses a new term 'polyphony' to describe Dostoevsky's highly innovative narrative form that shows his acute awareness of the multi-voicedness of all discourse. In Dostoevsky's novels, the author's voice is only one among many and the characters are allowed free speech. This, he says, is lacking in Tolstoy where the over-riding authorial voice sounds the loudest. Bakhtin identifies such polyphony as a special property of the novel and traces it back to its carnivalistic sources in classical, medieval and Renaissance cultures.

Bakhtin traces the origin of the many-voiced 20th century novel to the carnival tradition in folk culture. The rich tradition of serio-comic, dialogic, satiric literature is found in Socratic dialogues, Menippian satire, medieval mystery plays, and in the works of Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Voltaire, Balzac and Hugo. This carnivalized anti-tradition appears most significantly in the novel. The public ritual

of carnival, especially the ritual of crowning and de-crowning of a mock king inverts values in order to question them. Often through the medium of the grotesque, the people of a community express both their sense of being victims of power and their own power to subvert authority. In a similar manner, the polyphonic novel calls closed meaning into question. Carnival and the novel make power relative by addressing it instead of defining it.

The strong feeling that pervades us while we discuss Bakhtin's perception of the novel and his theory of carnivalization is his deep longing for the freedom of the human soul. His theory is more appealing, as it is more generative than that of the structuralists who focus on the *Langue* – or the system of any language. The Russian Formalists studied folk tales as structural units that together contained a limited number of types of characters and actions. If this can be called the *langue* (the system), then, the individual tale is a *parole* (the specific application of *langue*). Bakhtin's idea of the novel breaks all literary conventions. M. Holquist explains that the 'novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system. Unlike poetry

or drama, the novel holds immense scope and possibilities for the free play of social speech, thereby inviting the whole gamut of life into its sphere. This democratization of expression is further initiated by Bakhtin's concept of the carnival. Bakhtin's concept of the carnival should be understood in the context of the age-old folk-culture, which had been so rich and active in the past, which is still there camouflaged in modern society, and which will always be there as long as the human community remains essentially social and cosmic. The keynote to this age-old folk-culture is carnival laughter or the unofficial laughter, which is actually a certain way of conceiving the world. It is an all-embracing and broadminded world-view, which is never pedagogic, humourless or biased. It has the strength to take the incongruous world in its stride, fearlessly laughing away the strictures and threatenings of the official value-system. It negotiates with a truth that lurks in the grotesque sphere of the world. As against the upward movement of the official value-system, grotesque realism moves downward, respecting earth's gravity. By way of degradation, the grotesque world brings all its subjects down to earth, while materializing them and turning them to flesh. This grotesque existence is ambivalent, as it signifies a world that dies to be

born, which devours, but at the same time gets devoured. In its spheres, binaries like death and birth, evil and good are not isolated phenomena, but are the two faces of a single truth. This acceptance of ambivalence in truth creates healthy positivism, which is free from the effects of isolation and egocentricity of the modern world.

In the perspective of Bakhtin's theory, a study of the novels of R.K. Narayan proves enlightening. The novels selected for this study exemplify Bakhtin's theories on the polyphonic novel and especially his radical view about the carnivalized anti-tradition.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born in 1906 in his grandmother's house in Madras, India, and grew up in Madras, although his father was a headmaster of a state-run school in the old Mysore State. Narayan did not distinguish himself as a student, but passion for literature was unmistakable. He read eclectically and contributed items on meetings and murders to a Madras newspaper, which brought him a little income. His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) was rejected by several publishers before it came to the attention of the English novelist Graham Greene, who found a publisher for it, as he did for his *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The Darkroom* (1938). Narayan married a

young woman of his own choice, against family traditions and astrological warnings, and his wife died of typhoid in 1939. After a long period of literary stasis Narayan wrote the intensely autobiographical novel *The English Teacher* (1945; republished in the USA as *Grateful to Life and Death*, 1953). Narayan's succeeding works do not delve into his persona, though his writing gets richer, more broad-based and complex. Along with fourteen Malgudi-novels, Narayan wrote numerous short stories, critical essays, travelogues, etc. Narayan's novels have been translated into many foreign languages. In India, he won the Sahitya Akademi Award (in 1960, for *The Guide*) and the Padma Bhusan (1964) and was nominated to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament. The British Royal Society of Literature awarded Narayan the A.C. Benson Medal and he received the English Speaking Union Book Award from USA and was made a Fellow of the prestigious American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1982), the only Indian writer to be so honoured.

R.K. Narayan, India's prolific storyteller, died at the age of 94 on May 13, 2001.

Narayan's tolerance and all-embracing consciousness engenders the comic mode, which, according to C.D. Narasimhaiah, is equivalent to the tragic in his evocation of mediocrity. According to Graham Greene, sadness and humour go hand-in-hand in Narayan's novels. This ambivalence is possible as the writer uses a polyphonic style, which renders meaning as unfinalizable. The openness of meaning is what the protagonist's consciousness manifests, for his consciousness is dialogically placed with other equally valid consciousnesses, thus questioning the hero's ideological position and preventing any rounding-up of his character. This very reason thwarts any attempt at compartmentalization of Narayan's novels, leaving the readers puzzled if they are looking for well-constructed plots and rounded characters. One very interesting example in this context is Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The novel is often marked out by readers and critics as a Gandhi-novel. But throughout the novel, what we find is Narayan's placing of the image of Gandhi among diverse and contradictory positions. The image of Gandhi in the narrative enters into various relationships with other positions, which leaves the meaning/image of Gandhi open. The relativization of Gandhian principles destroys the

myth, bringing to surface questions that lurk between lines, and often threaten to unsettle our complacent idea about the people of India in relation to Gandhi. Did the people of India understand Gandhi and his non-violence? We find in *Waiting* the people of Malgudi joining with equal enthusiasm the Gandhi-rallies as well as the Loyalists' meetings. They hardly realize how opposed are the two meetings in principle. The image of Gandhi is polemicized in other novels too. In *Swami and Friends* the occasional demonstrations against the British government is spasmodic, with children boycotting their classes, burning their foreign clothes and breaking the glass-windows of their schools. Such chaos gives Swami, a little boy, the opportunity to bunk his classes. He burns his *khadi* cap in the spree of destroying foreign goods. Swami is a little boy, but his confusion seems to reflect all other agitators, including adults. All of them are caught up in the excitement, which the very name of Gandhi evoked, but their true perception of Gandhi remains questionable. Gandhi in Narayan's novels is not a monologic figure, but is a dispersed signifier who brings into focus the polyphonic reality of India's freedom struggle that manifests a structureless paradigm of a carnival. According to Bakhtin, the polyphonic world is like the church,

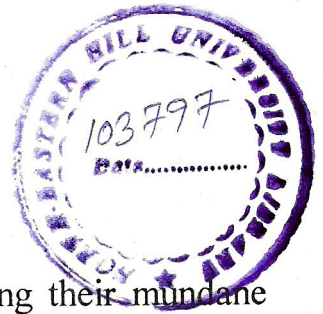
which is a communion of unmerged spirits – the meeting place of the sinner and the righteous, the repentant and the unrepentant, the saved and the damned. The dialogism in a polyphonic novel provides a scope for an unbiased and democratic exploration of the mystery of life.

Narayan's dialogic world-view has the elasticity to accept and expose the ambivalence of life, and thus initiates the depiction of life not as a harmonious unity but as a battleground of diverse and contradictory tendencies and pursuits. Hence Narayan's stories never achieve the expected denouement that would satisfy our expectations. However, they remain open ended and ambivalent. As Graham Greene points out, in the very first novel of Narayan, *Swami*, the little boy Swami at the end watches his dear friend Rajam with whom he had needlessly quarrelled, vanish into the vast unknown spaces of India. It is a reality as stark as death, especially to a sensitive little boy, as it leaves no promise or hope for the future reunion. It is a deceptively powerful ending, as it emits the flavour of the stark reality exposed in the irrational and accidental quality of human life. Thus, while Rajam's train shows its tail light to the gaping little Swami, the reader too has to gape in wonder at the suddenness and irrationality of the ending.

Is the
much being
read?

Interestingly, in *The Darkroom* Savitri's homecoming creates a similar situation of deferred finality like the departure of Rajam from Malgudi. In both cases, the expectation of poetic justice is left unrequited. Savitri is a victim of the social situation in which a married lady is dependent on her husband and has no choice other than accepting his economic dominance. For Savitri it is an existential crisis – either she does not surrender and commits suicide, or is forced to return. Her disappearance would have in a sense pampered the sentiment of the reader, but Savitri does the opposite – she succumbs to her fate in life. Narayan, we find, is not looking at any extraordinary possibility of making her a tragic figure. The lack of sentimentality in dealing with her character makes her situation more unbearable. The novel remains an open question – yet to be solved.

Narayan's polyphonic style creates characters, who are unpredictable, unfinished, and lack the integrated givenness of their personality, while moving beyond the dialectical closures. In Narayan's world there is no hero and there is no villain; often the concept of hero and villain fuse and overlap. The characters thus do not make laudable



claims of morality, ethics or ideology except following their mundane materialistic needs and bodily drives.

As against the pulls of ideology that rejects the earthly and the material and centralizes human existence towards its value-system, the downward thrust of grotesque realism affirms the material life of the body and its needs. This grotesque bodily life is ambivalent in nature, as it defies the moral, ethical binaries created by the official world. This ambivalence permeates Narayan's characters and renders them unpredictable and unfinished. Raju of *The Guide* is neither a hero nor a villain, but his character is constituted in the dialectics of virtue and falsehood integrating both the hero and a villain in him. His love for Rosie drives him to leave his dear mother, but at the same time he uses Rosie's talent to mint money. In fact, it is quite difficult for the reader to thrust a final comment on the characters created by Narayan. How would one define, for example, the *Financial Expert*? Margaya is a financial wizard, who piles up money with feverish zeal. His lust for money surprisingly, is not for the promotion of personal comfort, but to appease his avarice. His money-minting tendencies are self-denying and self-destructive, for he ruins his health in the process.

In most of Narayan's novels, the hero is actually the anti-hero, a person very common, wayward, selfish and middle class, pursuing some material gain. The very image of this hero inverts the conventional image of the hero, as he moves between the two poles of buffoonery and the tragic. The closed meaning of the hero is thus brought to question. Narayan's heroes may be contrasted with the heroes of Tagore's novels, who are intellectual elites on a quest for self-identity and self-discovery. One may look for Tagore's own quest through his characters. Tagore is trying to establish the identity of balanced, modern and exemplary Indians standing between the radicals of the Derozio school and the reactionaries. On the other hand, Narayan's grotesque characters are left free in a domain where questions of identity and self-consciousness are not ideologically underpinned; they are simply floaters, floating according to the movement of the current, accepting everything either Western or Indian in their own stride.

The setting in most novels of Narayan is also carnivalesque in its market place-like atmosphere. The narrative space in Narayan's works is never a confined place; it has an openness that includes courtyards, stations or taxi stands, where numerous funny faces appear and

disappear, a veritable bazaar, giving the overall impression of life as a generative process. Births, marriages and deaths are casually thrown in without any attempt to sentimentalize them. Narayan never explores the dark layers of human psyche. Here, whatever happens to the individual is not created by that individual's psychological complexities, but by society and the individual's relation to it. Thus the crowd crowns the clown as the king and again decrowns him without remorse or a sense of victory. In Narayan's world nobody is a victor or a victim. Here, for good or bad, power is constantly relativized. Savitri's retreat to the darkroom is pathetically ineffective in moving her husband. Her sentiments turn funny and clownish, but to show that she is supreme in the house she dominates at her servants in an attempt to reinvent her power that she actually does not enjoy. In *The Guide* Raju's relation to the crowd is double-voiced; they inspire him and turn him into a loquacious character, for he holds his power over them as a tourist-guide, a teacher in the jail and as the Swami on the banks of Sarayu. The crowd too has its inbuilt force of subversion and Raju is decrowned by them; he succumbs to the will-power of the mass and literally fasts to death.

Is this
done?

Perhaps, Narayan's grotesque presentation of Malgudi renders the hitherto fragmentary picture of India true and complete. Narayan projects the 'other India' – the villages, small towns, where most of the people live – which may have been hidden behind the façade of 'great India' never considered important to writers and historians. Thus cultural signs like 'spirituality', 'harmony', 'self-sacrifice', 'self-effacement', propagated by the official world are constantly being polemicized by the faceless people – the cunning shopkeepers, exploiting priests, loquacious railway guides, greedy film makers, who swarm Narayan's novels. Vasu in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a perfect example. Vasu held no other relation worth consideration beyond the consideration of money. He is a talented artist, but in his blunt commercialism he explodes the previous myth of the artist as a man of high mental aspirations. Similarly, Mr. Sampath's uncritical pursuit of the capitalist impulse in a self-righteous manner turned him unpredictable and unredeemable. Mr. Sampath, an attractive character, versatile and helpful, leaves his own peaceful place in the press for the glamour-world of film-making, which ultimate leads him nowhere. With all his respect for Gandhian spiritualism, Tagore's call for self-

purification and the dreams of the socialist thinkers of the time, Narayan could not help perceiving the paradoxes and ironies that haunted the middle-class of India. Supported by his grotesque characters and multi-voiced novels, Narayan initiated a greater freedom and clarity of expression. The presence of the overwhelming faceless crowd and their multi-voiced representation brings Narayan's works closer to Bakhtin's understanding of polyphony and carnival.

The most powerful expression of reality that exists outside the domain of the grim official world, according to Bakhtin, is the world of the carnival with the unadulterated laughter and frolic. We hear this fearless festive laughter in the novels of Narayan. It is not the deriding expression of the individual against a rival, as we find in the satire. Universal in scope, this carnival laughter is directed towards the funny incongruities of mankind in general. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect and its gay relativity. The pathetic display of self-importance of Raju before his simple, good natured mother and the illiterate taxi driver, Sriram's muddling up of Gandhi's speech on human love with his own pangs of adolescent infatuation, or the sweet-vendor's funny self-deceptive activities like stealing his own money break through all

pretences of self-importance that the *homo sapiens* claim to enjoy. The language of laughter exposes the clown in the garb of the king. It is healthy, as it humbles as well as strengthens humankind to face the stark reality about itself and the world.

Narayan in a sense is a contemporary of Bakhtin, and like him lived in a troubled world. To capture this world in fictional narrative, he has chosen that his characters speak instead of the author. Both Bakhtin and Narayan express their longing for the freedom of the human soul – Bakhtin through his appreciation of the carnival spirit and Narayan through his multi-voiced novels, where grotesque characters and events subtly convey bitter truths about individuals and society.

The theoretical insights of Bakhtin, it is hypothesized, will bring in a different perspective in the reading of R.K. Narayan's works. Following this position and in the light of the above discussion, the present work is organized into the following chapters:

1. Introduction.
2. Aesthetics, Language and the Novel: An Overview of Bakhtin's Theory.
3. Novel and Society: Heteroglossia, Polyphony and Dialogic Imagination in the Novels of R.K. Narayan.

4. The Hero and the World: Double Consciousness and Narayan's Unusual Heroes.
5. Carnival and the Novel: Themes and Narrative Endings in the Novels of Narayan.
6. Conclusion.

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Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

“Perhaps what is most striking about the work of Mikhail Bakhtin is the diversity of areas and range of disciplines across which it is invoked” (Morris, 1994: 1). Bakhtin indeed was fascinated by plentitude of differences and plurality, the mystery of the one and the many. “However, Bakhtin’s texts are far from mere exercises in accommodation. They may be read at many levels ... In his writings he was simultaneously an impassioned ideologue for his own outlook and an impressive ventriloquist for politically acceptable locutions” (Clark and Holquist, 1984: 2). One could simply say, as many have done, that Bakhtin’s work is social criticism because where others saw expressions, statements, or signs, Bakhtin looked for, and inevitably found ‘dialogues’, precise acts of communication, with multiple participants.

Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival as a communication model has much to recommend it. Though rooted in the folk-culture, its potency for subversion may be located everywhere in the impulse of the people or mass to gain freedom from the stasis imposed by the official world.

The ideal of the carnival is the grotesque body that is open-ended and irregular, which has no need of symmetrical beauty, feats of self-discipline etc. Its processes and appetites constitute a common 'language' native to all humans; it is identical, involuntary and non-negotiable. Whereas the high official language is learned, intellectual, internalized and self-conscious, the language of the grotesque is associated to the body and therefore involuntary and unselfconscious. The energy and material structure of this grotesque realism is turned towards the outside world in a frank friendly way. The communal baseness or the vigour of the earthly existence is the foundation of Bakhtin's carnival logic. Its laughter is in part defiant and rejuvenating. Always in the act of becoming, it is a triumph over classical form, institutional oppression and individual death.

This spirit of the carnival is deeply imbued in Bakhtin's theory of the novel that he conceives of in a very broad framework. According to Clark and Holquist, the novel is for him not just another literary genre but a special kind of force, which he calls 'novelness'. He assigns the term 'novel' to "whatever form of expression within a given literary system reveals the limits of that system as inadequate, imposed or

arbitrary. Literary systems are composed of canons, and the novel is fundamentally anticanonical. It does not permit generic monologue. It insists on a dialogue between texts that a given system admits as literature and those texts that are excluded from such a definition. The novel is a kind of epistemological outlaw, a Robin Hood of texts.”
(1984: 276)

Thus ‘novelness’ can work to undermine the official or high culture of any society — a spirit that is imbued in the carnival tradition. Bakhtin traces this tendency in times when the novel as a special form was non-existent. He charts its history as a critique of a given culture’s higher literary forms by its lower forms, as in Cervante’s parody of knightly romances, or Sterne and Fielding’s sentimental fiction. But according to Clark and Holquist, these are merely late examples of a tendency that Bakhtin found in the Socratic dialogue. The Socratic belief in the importance of self-consciousness is played out in the drama of a dialogue that corresponds closely to the role of the novel. This role has later assumed unexpected forms as the confession, the Utopia or the Menippean satire. Bakhtin attaches great significance to the Menippean satire in the evolution of the novel as it uses the language of irreverent

laughter. As a discursive practice, the novel has its origin in the discourse of the comic. Laughter, according to Bakhtin, is the key to freedom. Freeing language from the authoritarian monologism of myths, laughter destroys the epic or any canonized form. Laughter undermines the epic through the parodic travesty forms it assumes in literature, and these forms prepare the ground for the novel. It is a ground for contest between the word and the 'inappropriate word' that is either cynically frank, profane, or devoid of any etiquette and is characteristic of the *menippea*. The novel is a game of ultimate questions because it calls into question the readymade truths of official monologism.

Placing R.K. Narayan's novels in the carnival tradition has yielded unexpected results of 'novelness'. The supposedly tame and homely world of Narayan (so different from the zealous attempts of his contemporaries to capture the spirit of a so-called crisis of history) within the Bakhtinian framework reveals an antithetical or reverse form of the ideal. History is not a linear journey. It is a form of energy that follows its own instinctive or non-idealistic impulses. While British imperialism in India instigated the idealistic revolutions for freedom and self-governance, the common mass, isolated from the strategies of

politics or incapable of the idealized intellectual involvements, pursued the material. This materialization of human life is a counter-revolutionary stance in that the power of laughter was underpinned against all serious, stratified and oppressive regimes. Thus the ordinary people that swarm Narayan's novels are not passive observers of history, waiting for their intellectual and powerful counterparts to decide their fate, but are active agents who create their own history that would forever sabotage all forms of canonization or totalitarian endeavours of the official world — whether in the form of British imperialism or their own nationalism.

Narayan's polyphonic style of presenting the world of Malgudi creates a dialogic truth that renders the average Indian, not into any preconceived stereotype, but as part of an unending discourse. The impossibility of any single character to hold the stage is substantiated by a democratic and unbiased treatment of all characters. Thus Gandhi's humanitarian doctrine is posited on equal standing with grandma's niche of gods and goddesses, the vigour and energy of Vasu's capitalist enterprise equally vies with Nataraj's smooth artistry of an elegant lifestyle. Even in an atmosphere charged with feminist disapprobation

and revolt, where wives are betrayed (as in the cases of Savitri and Sampath's wife) or the beloveds are exploited (as Raju exploits Rosie's talent to mint money, or Raman attempts to violate Daisy's honour) the men too have their own stories. Instead of following a monologic intention or goal, the novels turn out to be the ground for incessant debate. The democratization of language results in the creation of the ambience that promotes intertextual ideals. The characters may seem average and common, but they are not vulgarized. Even in their carnal weaknesses, the Rajus, Vasus and Jagans create their own unique ideals to bless their erratic lives with a touch of a human and pathetic beauty. In this world if the birth of a superhuman is not predictable similarly a villain's perversion is not going to shake the earthly ambience. This is a world of joyful relativity that is almost utopian.

This non-idealistic amoral world is not ashamed of its petty squabbles, tricks and exploitations. The unsentimental rendering of the victims has the effect of stark inevitability; on the one hand the victors too are not left to remain smugly self-satisfied, on the other the seeds of bohemian restlessness in their nature turn their lives unpredictable and irredeemable. The episodic history of Raju's life from the Railway

guide to the Swami on the bank of Sarayu launches him finally at the door of death; he leaves behind him an unfulfilled history of cherished dreams woven around Rosie's love, an elevated aristocratic life and also a weak secret corner for his estranged mother — never to be recovered or retrieved. Thus thrown from one episode to another, swung in the dilemma of unheroic triumph and glory the characters of Narayan with their human fallibility remain indefinable forever.

The rogue characters of Narayan wear the carnival mask that defies all expectancy for symmetry and beauty by highlighting the orifices, while glorifying the carnal appetites. This frees them from the binding strictures of social norms and turns their lives into an unrestrained celebration. While the serious modes of literature depict time as being gradually wasted at the cost of growth and maturation, here time is conceived as of profound experience. The characters violate all natural boundaries and instead of suffering the tedious process of maturation and growth they choose the shortest route — they metamorphose.

Narayan's characters are gifted with an overdose of wit and practical intelligence; however, this bounty of nature is balanced by a

lack of the other mental faculties leading to the depth in character. So, very often, they display much shortsightedness on their part when faced with problems requiring a depth and richness of understanding. Thus Raju loses Rosie forever as he proves insensitive to her mental requirements, Jagan's escape in the name of *banaprastha* is the proof of his inability to solve the puzzle of his son who has all the maladies of a new generation, and the otherwise clever Margayya inadvertently misappropriates his wealth to buy his son's affection while spoiling him in the process. These characters are irreverent to all social codes and possess their own unique worldviews that launch them in precarious positions in society. This happens in the case of Sampath. That Shanti and his wife would live in blissful harmony sharing him under one roof is Sampath's ardent dream – a dream which could only be actualized in the fantasy world of imagination. For Margayya the value of money outgrows all its material boundaries into the realm of everything noble and elegant, i.e. for him, a noble and respectable life entails a history of selfish acquisition. This is in utter contradiction to the official value-system, and the prudence of the idealists against the material. This contradiction with social ideologies turns Narayan's characters

ambivalent. Their story is forever double-voiced, emanating a sense of both praise and abuse, crowning and decrowning, ridicule and celebration. These stories are anticanonical, as they cannot be categorized as completely happy and harmonious or tragically sad, in the process exposing the limitedness and inadequacy of a given system to depict truth. Because of such duality and ambiguity in the structure, these stories turn into travesties of the given canonical genres.

The story of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* has the potency of a passionate love-story. Chandran is a youth fresh out of college who falls in love with the vague image of a tall girl clad in a green saree. Chandran in his shyness had hardly looked into the girl's face, but his passion creates a Platonic ideal that he starts worshipping day and night. Yet the inbuilt irony in the novel turns the story into a parody of romance, for after suffering innumerable sleepless nights, incessant day dreams, desperate window-gazing, and the ultimate *sanyashood* when the girl's parents do not relent to their marriage, Chandran immediately starts cherishing the next girl that his parents wish him to marry. This fickleness on Chandran's part fractures the myth of love as ideal, an ideal that is immortalized by the world-famous romances of Romeo and

Juliet or Laila and Majnu. Narayan's use of irony awakens the readers to the everyday realities of life where fickleness of youth in love continues to create paradoxes.

Savitri's story too has all the anxieties of a feminist text, and along with Savitri's pathetic attempt of committing suicide the message against male dominance could hit real hard. Yet the dialogic nature of the work along with Savitri's own submission to the more practical requirements of life like the duty for one's own children and the economic security renders a different dimension to her story, It is a story from the heart of middle-class life and it requires no banner to convey the truth.

Materialization and debasement are characteristics that constitute the basic tenets and also the logistics of Narayan's novels. This carnival tendency fortifies the stories with an earthy solidity, thereby preventing any highflying abstraction to mystify the material truths of human life. Thus Raju remains the fallible human being beneath his ascetic garb, solidly feeling the crunches of hunger along with a fear of losing his face to the worshipping crowd. The Swami in *A Tiger* performs the impossible task when he befriends the awesome tiger, but Narayan

brings him down to earth by supplying a very human story of his past. For Narayan, the solid materiality of human life should provide the ground for all truths; the tendency to legitimize abstract thoughts or ideas by compromising or adjusting human life to fit into them results in confusion. In an interview Narayan had stated:

I'd be quite happy if no more is claimed from me than being just a story-teller. Only the story matters, that is all. If readers read more significance into my stories than was meant originally, then that's the reader's understanding of things. But if a story is in tune completely with the truth of life, truth as I perceive it, then it will be automatically significant. (quoted in Benson & Conolly, 1994: 1082)

Narayan's statement implies a rejection of the grand canonized past that is usually held as the measuring ground for the present reality. Similar views may be heard in Arnold Bennett's private notes:

Every scene, even the commonest, is wonderful, if only one can detach oneself, casting off all memory of use and custom, and behold it (as it were) for the first time; in its right, authentic colours; without making comparisons. The novelist should cherish and burnish this faculty of seeing crudely, simply, artlessly, ignorantly; of seeing like a baby or a lunatic, who lives each moment of itself and tarnishes the present by no remembrances of the past. (quoted in Allen, Walter, 1949: 24)

Narayan, like many humanists, takes recourse to the actual, lived experiences as referential operations of the human mind as a basis for

literary theory. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Augustan humanist recommended an honest and compulsively dualistic look at human realities because:

Man is both a consistent and an inconsistent being, a lover of art when it imitates nature and of nature when it imitates art, of uniformity and variety, a creature of habit that loves novelty. The principles of art must conform to this capacious being ..." (quoted in Fussell, P., 1969: 123)

This capaciousness of human reality is played upon by a novelist's dialogic and polyphonic technique. In Bakhtin's view, the primary dialogic dimension of the novel is rooted in its concern for truth; truth is the stake in the novel's interaction with life. The novel does not pretend to possess a ready-made truth, but as in Socratic dialogue it is born between people collectively searching for truth.

It often happens that in order to foreground a favourite idea writers and critics tend to use rhetoric with subtle maneuver that submerge all other dissenting voices or ideas. In her work *Practising Postmodernism Reading Modernism* (1992), Patricia Waugh has criticized the reductionist and totalizing tendency of both the defenders and detractors of postmodernism. She has shown how, for polemical purposes (to highlight Postmodernism as a refutation of the

epistemological ground of Realism) the defenders have generalized Realism as the expression of a belief in a commonly experienced phenomenological world where language functions simply as a medium through which the reality is re-presented. Waugh points out that this is a purposive or strategic ignorance of the use of irony and linguistic playfulness in many realistic works. Similarly, she points out that the detractors like Eagleton ignore the specific strategies of postmodern artefacts in order to proclaim a generalized condemnation of postmodernism as the logic of commodification. According to Waugh, the only escape from such generalizations of theorists is a close engagement with actual works of art because "literature can only examine an ideology by embodying it (even if in an ironic mode), so that if theorists can operate through reductive totalisations, fictional texts by their very nature have an inbuilt resistance to this." (1992: 59)

While Bakhtin's long term legacy is perhaps yet to be assessed, he has at least drawn aesthetics out of the realm of passive appreciation and academic curiosity. Under his influence, the aesthetics of verbal art is joined with the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human life. If, as

Bakhtin claims, the novel carries on an uninterrupted dialogue with life; then any theory of the novel must do the same.

Many literary commentators, according to Waugh are drawn to Bakhtin because his concept of dialogism sees knowledge of world, self and other, as always historically situated, relational, open-ended and perspectival, a process shifting through time and space. This frustrates all tendencies of reductionism and totalisation because Bakhtinian insights “show how consideration of the literary text may modify one’s reading of theory; just as theoretical awareness may modify one’s aesthetic experience.” (1992: 60)

Addressing not simply the characteristics but the metaphysics of literature as well, Bakhtin has led literary theory beyond its traditional confines to include such diverse disciplines as epistemology, sociology and linguistics. The term he uses to portray his activity is not ‘literary theory’ but ‘philosophical anthropology’; others describe it as an ‘existential philosophy’. The impact of Bakhtin’s thought has been felt throughout the human sciences, and his legacy may travel far and wide.

Analysing the novels of Narayan with the help of Bakhtinian insights has rescued his works from the totalitarian academicist view in which Narayan is categorized as a pure humanist, or the defender of Indian values, or simply a caricaturist. When he is pinioned as a humanist, critics categorically ignore the importance of linguistic playfulness like ironies, parodies, travesties and other self-reflexive modes that thwart or subvert the apparent movement of the story towards an idealistic goal. Thus Raju's sainthood is often seen as a journey of a rogue towards a humanistic salvation, or Raja the tiger's tale is unanimously accepted as a fable where the tiger with the help of a guru, emerges from darkness to enlightenment.

Critics often see a pattern of dialectical journey of the imperfect man towards order and unity. In their search for such a definitive pattern they overlook the episodic nature of the novels that forestalls or cancels any unification, but depicts human life as an amalgamation of irrational and multidirectional movements or tendencies.

Again, in assessing Narayan's humour, critics have tended to evaluate it as an irresponsible and lighthearted attempt to caricature the middleclass fun and foible for the sake of pleasure. But when placed in

the carnival tradition, Narayan's world exposes the serious nature of laughter. The language of carnival laughter brings home to the reader a different dimension of truth that is usually submerged under all sorts of tendentious endeavours of the serious official world. Thus the life of the Malgudi people is the history of the subaltern force that exposes life in its basics and continues to question and rectify the workings of the mainstream authoritarian world. One cannot deny the influence of art and literature over human life. Even the most simple-minded observer of art and literature will look back at his/her own life to detect the reassuring forms of the identical that would enable him/her to metaphorically legitimize art and literature. This process may operate vice-versa. After all, man has nothing but his own life to fall back upon to solve each and every problem that invades his intelligence. Even the extreme version of existentialism cannot work otherwise. In fact it is ironical how the futility and meaninglessness of human life often projected through literature has endowed human life with a sad glory, as if the tragedy of human existence is more attractive than any form of positivism. So, while art endows life with meaningfulness, life too legitimizes art with the solidity of its support.

In this sense the serious monologic works that lead the readers to a sense of personal experience proves attractive, for the cathartic effect on the reader results in a sense of finality of meaning. As the scientists are trying to arrive at a final theory of the universe, so does each and every nondescript person, puzzled by the chaotic state of life, hanker for a finalized impression. Thus monologic writings satisfy the reader more than those writings, which render life as chaotic and unfinalizable. Yet a final theory means a dead end. The polyphonic and carnival world of Narayan defers any final conclusion. The open carnival world acts as a gibe against the solipsism created by man's monologic tendencies. Carnival in literature democratizes language by frustrating its tendency to centralize meaning. It relativizes all ideologies by providing a uniform platform for their mutual contestation. Finally, carnival emanates a profound sense of acceptance of man as an imperfect, grotesque and clumsy creation – a fool with noble hopes and beautiful dreams. However, a subtle difference with the humanists may be perceived. Humanists like Samuel Johnson have displayed a protective tenderness towards the idea of man's precarious location between the fact of mortal dissolution and his noble hope for dignity and

redemption, which is touched with pathos because hope deceives. In their conception of human endeavours there is a lingering fear of finding in the end nothing but a "broken promise and an unregarded grave." (Fussel, 1969: 135) But the carnival world, though accepting man's imperfections, is fearless, as its concept of the human kind is rooted in a feeling of community. It is the individual who dies, but man as a part of the greater community is immortal.

The carnival tendency in literature saves it from the possibility of getting stilted. Though the comic genre has never managed to secure the mainstream status, by taunting and teasing the serious modes it has always indicated that the truth of human life is more capacious than it apparently seems. For this reason the great minds like Shakespeare were never satisfied with pure classical forms. Shakespeare's practice of mixing tragedy and comedy is an attempt to underline human desire as multiform and never uniform. Even in the purest of his tragedies the carnival makes an inroad in the form of the clown. In *King Lear* it is only the clown who is beyond class or status, and thus beyond the *whipping ego that delimits the human mind*. The clown obeys no social boundaries and the conventions of the hierarchical world – from the

king to the beggar are within his casual access. The language of the clown knows no inhibition, and he incessantly knocks at the stark and closed world of the tragedy with his unpopular opinions. All the veiled social criticism of Shakespeare are uttered by the fool alone, and later by Lear when in his madness he leaves the shammed world to enter the openness of the carnival. In the carnival lies the essence of human nature; without the fool's carnivalesque presence or Lear's inclusion in the apparently insane and chaotic world, the requirement of the tragedy to grasp the truth of life in its essence would have remained unrequited. In answer to Jonson's objections against fools A.C. Bradley imagines Shakespeare speaking thus:

"Come, my friends, I will show you once for all that the mischief is in you, and not in the fool or the audience. I will have a fool in the most tragic of my tragedies. He shall not play a little part. He shall keep from first to last the company in which you most object to see him, the company of a king. Instead of amusing the king's idle hours, he shall stand by him in the very tempest and whirlwind of passion. Before I have done you shall confess, between laughter and tears, that he is of the very essence of life, that you have known him all your days though you never recognized him, ..." (Bradley, 1904: 258).

The fool is traditionally derived from the Morality plays as a means of entertaining the 'groundlings'. It may be conjectured that the

daily engagements of the lower classes with the basics of life render them worldly-wise, and the essences of life are not obstructed from their view by abstract ideologies. King Lear's obsession with rhetorically heightened sycophancy blinds him to the true essence of a daughter's love; it is the fool who sees through Lear's foolishness and impractical project of dividing and distributing his kingdom.

The novel too is a genre that is so structured that unpopular and down-to-earth truths are foregrounded. Bakhtin traces the roots of the novel to the serious-comic and carnivalesque modes of popular culture. He assigns the subversive potentiality of the novel to its association with lower (class) identity and class resistance. The carnivalesque aspect of the novel is an antidote to the abstracted, disembodied concept of meaning that the Platonic philosophical tradition has formed. The novel resists the dominance of a single meaning and instead fosters heterogeneity.

Bakhtin's theories have emerged from his understanding of the world as a place of incessant riot of colours that refuse to mingle and merge into the austere and uniform white. Like the rainbow it is at once diverse and coordinated. The spatial experience, the capacity of the

moment to hold all diversities that counts more than the promise of steady temporal progress, has been important to Bakhtin, and there is no compulsion to capture the moments in universal categories. Time holds immense possibilities; instead of attempting to capture and freeze time into absolute universalities, Bakhtin beholds it as a flowing river that, in its encounters with the resisting earth, creates its unique loops and bends. Bakhtin's thoughts emerge out of the feelings that moved Whitman to write his 'Song of Myself'. The movement of the poem frustrates any progression – it moves erratically in evocation of ecstasy and confession, in identification and recognition, in rapturous union with earth and spirit – it celebrates both personal and universal. To be precise, it is out of the humble sense of being a part of the human history, community and life-force that inspired Bakhtin, Narayan and many others. This recognition comes out tellingly in Whitman's poem — 'Song of Myself':

I resist anything better than my own diversity,
Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.
(Whitman, W. 1973: 45)

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