MINOR CHARACTERS IN THE SELECT SHORT STORIES OF R. K. NARAYAN: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

R. K. Narayan is regarded as one of India's great short story writers. He portrays his characters in the background of local towns and its surrounding environment. Initially, they seem mundane but as the story progresses they emerge as representative of Narayan's ideology. This is clearly reflected in the case of both major and minor characters. The minor characters in Narayan's stand tall along with their peculiar qualities such as enduring personality, witty dialogues, positive approach and amicable behaviour and attitude. This research paper is based on descriptive research and discusses importance and contribution of minor characters in the select short stories of R. K. Narayan.

Keywords

Minor, Characters, Importance, Personality, Nature, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

A character is an integral part of a story; the key to all the developments; the reason for all the happenings, the doer of all the actions. In short, a character helps a story to begin, develop and leads to its culmination part. Also, a character is the reason, we can relate to a story. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, discusses the four virtues of an ideal character; the characters should be good; characters must be appropriate or true to type; characters must be true to life; and characters must be consistent. There are many types of characters: protagonist, antagonist, major, minor and the like.

According to **the Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms (2006)**, a character is "The fictional representation of a person, which is likely to change, both as a presence in literature and as an object of critical attention, much as it changes in society. Ideas of the place of the human in the social order, of human individuality and self-determination, clearly shift historically; and this is often mimed in literature by the relation of characters to actions or webs of story."[1]

A story can never truly develop until the character in it develops. **Minor** characters are also known as **secondary** characters, as they support the major

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characters and play a very vital role in the development of story and plot. Their roll in the story is short. But often, they play a key role in the development of the story.

R. K. NARAYAN AS A WRITER

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanswami, populary known as, R. K. Narayan is an Indian English writer primarily known for his works set in Malgudi, the fictional South Indian town. In his writings, he highlights everyday life of his characters. He has been often compared to William Faulkner who created similar fictional town and explored the ordinary human life with humor and compassion. His short stories have been compared to those of Guy De Maupassant's due to his ability to describe a narrative. His content is usually simple and relates to feelings and emotions. The roots and flavor of the simplicity of his text lies in his childhood experiences.

Narayan was an active member of the Indian writing community for almost sixty years. His topics varied throughout his life along with the development of social, political and personal situations. His enthusiasm and love for writing knows no bounds. Narayan writes in traditional style, he has taken up the foreign language and Indianised it. He writes about India in the ways of Indian storytellers. "Narayan is a great storyteller and the critics regard him neither a modernist, nor a postmodernist, but rather, a traditional storyteller… He is a meticulous recorder of the ironies of life. Much of his fiction relates the unexpected disruptions and subsequent crises in the life of his protagonist."[2]

LITERARUTE REVIEW

Kumar (2009) in the paper entitled, *Remembering the Founding Fathers of Indian English Fiction*, traced the beginning of Indian English Writing starting with Bankim Chandra Chaterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* written in 1964. The paper discussed the qualities of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Narayan as Indian English novelists and short story writers. The characters, the themes, the issues, the settings and the plots of novels and short stories written by the trio are considered while shedding light on the important role they have played both in literary and social situations in India.

Indu (2013) in her paper *Indian Veracity in the Tales of R. K. Narayan*, focused on the Indian sensibility as depicted in R. K. Narayan's selected works. The paper discussed the Indian sensibilities in Narayan's works. Narayan's stories are fundamentally stories of Indian life. "Indian actuality in his books is reflected in the interminable crash between custom and innovation."[3] The paper elaborated Indian life presented in Narayan's works and the artistic and aesthetic representation of the Indian veracity.

Trimurthy and Rajendra (2014) in their research study on *Characters and Characterization in the works of R. K. Narayan*, discussed the art of characterization in Narayan's major works. According to the authors, the zest for life in the characters of Narayan's fictional world is remarkable; the people are all

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hale and hearty, irrespective of their social status. "His characters, as a matter of fact, are individuals, rather than types."[4] The study found that Narayan's objectivity in his art of characterization makes his characters vivid, alive and relatable.

Naz, Farah and **Namrata (2017)** in their research paper *The Short Stories of R. K. Narayan: A Study of Characters*, discussed the different themes in the short stories of R. K. Narayan. The study highlighted the realism and romanticism in the select short stories. The paper studies the themes of the short stories by Narayan including road side events, the family atmosphere, the innocent mischief of children, their innocent talk and tricks remind an adult of his childhood and their social relevance.

Ruchita (2017) in her paper *R. K. Narayan's Malgudi: An Imaginative Locale* talked about the fictions town Malgudi. She remarked that Malgudi, the fictional town created by Narayan as a plot for his works; is impeccable. Its historical records given by Narayan are specific yet the geographical and physical conditions of the town grow gradually.

MINOR CHARACTERS IN THE SELECT SHORT STORIES OF NARAYAN: IMPORTANCE AND CONTRIBUTION

The minor characters of the story ***The Coachman's Son*** published in the short story collection entitled ***Swami and Friends*** include the Coachman, his Son, Swami's Father, his Mother, Mani's Uncle, other family members and some onlookers.

The coachman is a shrewd and cunning person who tricked Swami into giving him one and a half *anna* in exchange of promise of a hoop. He tricked Swami into thinking that he can make the metal for the hoop by a sacred ritual. He lied to Swami, time and again. **The coachman's son**, ironically, made a minor appearance in the story. He is mostly been talked about as the means to torment the coachman and pressurize him to return Swami's money.

Swami's father and **mother** are both stock characters who stay the way they are. In this particular story, they are seen ignoring Swami's demand of a hoop. Though, a sensible thing to do as an adult, it creates an image of inattentive parents in Swami's mind. **Mani's uncle** has a cameo in this story. His only purpose is show the atmospheric difference in Mani's house as compared to that in Swami's house and to invoke doubt and confusion in Swami's mind.

In the short story ***The 'M. C. C.'*** published in the short story collection ***Swami and Friends***, the minor characters are Messrs Binns and Pea. The club entitled the M.C.C. (the Malgudi Cricket Club), which acts as an entity whose identity is in question according to Swami, Rajam and Mani.

Messrs Binns is name of a shop that sells cricket goods. According to Rajam and Mani they make the finest cricket bats by the name of Junior Willard Bats, the ones that the trio decides to buy. The company is an important aspect as Rajam's head-on approach to problems is depicted when he writes them a letter

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asking for cricket supplies. While writing the letter, the knowledge and skill of the kids is tested.

Pea is another important character who is a part of Swami's group of friend and plays a minor role in many of the stories in the collection ***Swami and Friends***. He is given the responsibility of bringing the stumps but he couldn't find them. Pea is a simple young boy who is criticized by his friends for not being able to find the stumps.

Though, by the end of the story, all is forgotten about Messrs Binns, stumps and even the M. C. C. All that mattered for the boys was the joy of playing the game. Their desire to play the game overpowered any other preposition.

The Doctor's Word is a story with a number of minor characters. Though, none of them have been named and yet they seem to be the thread that binds the story together. The characters are Gopal's family and Doctor Raman's assistants; Gopal's wife, his eldest son, other children, Doctor Raman's compounder and the nurse. These characters weren't given enough attention to develop through the story but they play a key part in the story's development.

Gopal's wife is a character that embodies concern, care and love. Her devotion towards her family shows in more than one ways. Her presence is felt throughout the text. **The eldest son** of Gopal's family is a young, uncertain and yet strong-minded boy. His silent approval to his father's treatment and his concern mixed with his responsible behavior, for his family is that the reader witness in the sidelines.

Doctor Raman's assistants have important role of delivering information to the readers. At times, they ask a question, and at times, make suggestions through which, readers come to know about Gopal's health. **The nurse** who stays with Gopal throughout the night is the one who informs Doctor Raman about Gopal's good health. The dialogues delivered by these minor characters move the story forward.

In the story ***The Missing Mail***, the only minor character is Kamakshi. Kamakshi is a young daughter of the senior clerk Ramanujam. She is depicted as a sweet, simple and shy girl. Away from the troubles of life, Kamakshi is a pure and innocent soul. She is the only child and is raised with lots of love and affection.

She is the one of the binding agents in the friendship between Ramanujam and Thanappa. Thanappa's act of risking his job and keeping the mail to himself is the result of his love for Kamakshi. Kamakshi is also the reason for Ramanujam's act of forgiving Thanappa.

Though, in the text, the first two paragraphs are dedicated to incidents in Thanappa's life that connects him to Malgudi, they are mentioned only to provide the readers an idea of Thanappa's personal involvement with the townsmen.

The minor characters in the story ***Draupadi*** include Kunti, King Drupad, Duryodhana, Dussassana and Sage Vyasa. Kunti is the mother of the Pandavas and wife of Pandu. All these characters are important as they play an important role in Draupadi's life. Fate also plays a key role in Draupadi's life. It is very interesting to witness the intervention of the celestial beings in the story.

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Sage Vyasa is a character who helps the situations to move forward. He is the one who convinced King Drupad to let the Pandavas marry his daughter, by telling him the story of Draupadi's past life as Nalayani. He is the all knowing, enlightened soul that guides Draupadi in many difficult situations.

Nala is another story published in the short story collection entitled ***Gods, Demons and Others***. There are a number of minor characters in this story; the Gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama, Kali and Dwapara, Nala's brother Pushkara, a serpent who blessed Nala, King Rituparna and so on and so forth. A small brood of swans also play a major part in Nala and Damyanti's love story. They are the ones who took Nala's message to Damyanti that made her fall in love with Nala. The Gods play the role of both the helper and the adversaries.

The Gods, **Indra**, **Varuna**, **Agni** and **Yama** are introduced in the story as suitors for Damyanti's *Swamwara* (betrothal) and competition to Nala, but later, realizing their love; bless the couple with matrimonial bliss. They become a helper of fate that tested the couple and bless them after they have won.

Gods **Kali** and **Dwapara** try to disrupt the matrimonial bliss between Nala and Damyanti after their wedding. They are the ones who influenced Nala's brother **Pushkara** in inviting Nala for a game of tricked gambling. They even tricked the dice used to play the game between Nala and Pushkar to make sure that Nala looses every bet he made. Kali and Dwapara help Pushkar win Nala's Property.

King Rituparna is another character whose support is the key that helps Nala to bring back his wife and his kingdom. Even after losing his chance to win Damyanti, King Rituparna realizes the strong bond of love between Nala and Damyanti and helps them. After being tested by fate and by Gods, Damyanti finally reached her home with Nala and the story ended on a happy note. All these minor characters play important role in the life of Nala and Damyanti.

There are a number of minor characters in the story ***A Horse and Two Goats*** from the short story collection ***Under the Bunyan Tree and Other Stories*****,** including, Muni's Wife, the Shopkeeper, the Postman, his wife and Ruth (the American traveler's Wife). Muni's conversation with his wife gives away crucial details of his life. Muni's conversation with **the shopkeeper** is not as important but still, it shows Muni's talent of pleasing others and his ability to laugh at himself even if it is only as a means to an end.

The Postman, **his Wife** and **Ruth** are mentioned in the conversations and thus are partially present in the story. These characters become the topic of conversation for Muni and the American. The Postman, his Wife and their personal life is a topic for common gossip in the village. They are either mentioned with contempt and disgust, or to make fun of. Whereas Ruth is mentioned by the American with love and appreciation and according to the American she is a decent wife and a respectable citizen. The minor characters mentioned in this story help us to get a better understanding of the characters of Muni and the American.

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The police inspector is the only character other than the major ones who have a physical presence in the short story ***The Evening Gift*** from the short story collection ***Under the Bunyan Tree and Other Stories*.** Though there are mentions of Shankar's mother, his siblings, two younger brothers and a younger sister, but other than a letter from his mother, and the gifts brought for them, there is no other mention of them.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While analyzing the minor characters in the select short stories of R. K. Narayan, the study points out that Narayan created simple characters that have common aims and aspirations in their lives. His strength lies in the truth with which his characters become alive and are immortalized in the literary world. The characters portrayed by R. K. Narayan represent the normal, day-to-day life of middle class people living and working in the Indian Society. The minor characters in Narayan's works are depicted in the light of struggles on a personal level. His representation of minor characters mostly comprises of indirect characterization. He uses real life situations and conversations to show the latent qualities of his characters. Narayan dresses up his characters in environment and nature and moves from material world to psyche of his characters.

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