

## **Critical Assessment of Future Education in India As Foreseen By**

**R. K. Narayan in His Novel The English Teacher**

**S.P. Sekhara Rao**

**Assistant Professor GMRIT**

**Rajam**

**India**

### **Abstract**

Krishna is an English Lecturer. He considers himself as a poet and plans to write an epic poem sometime in the future. He marries Sushila and Leela is born. Sushila dies after a prolonged illness. This changes the attitude and outlook of Krishna towards life. In the process he meets strangers and develops friendly relationship which transforms or moulds Krishna's external behaviour. Finally, he resigns from the job of a Lecturer and joins a school as a teacher.

**Key Words: Poetry, Readings, Ghosts, Education, Values, Character**

R.K. Narayan wrote and published this book in the year 1945. The central character Mr. Krishna is working as a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College. On completion of his graduation, he joins the same college as a faculty.

In educational institutions, faculty has a timetable to follow. This is done mechanically by moving from one class to another and delivering lectures to cover the syllabus.

Krishna states that he is paid rupees one hundred as monthly salary. Though the colonial rule ended, the teaching methods remained colonial. During the British Raj it was necessary that native Indians learn English correctly and precisely so that the British administrators could comprehend the content of files prepared by native Indian clerical staff.

Establishment of institutions and curriculum design was for manufacturing future employees to do low-end jobs in the government.

The emphasis was on teaching English, History, Geography and Mathematics so that the people coming out of these institutions could be profitably employed in areas like communication, transport and local administration.

Education was converted as a means of earning a livelihood. Indian concept of education as a service to others through the knowledge gained was pushed to the background. The British concept was obtaining a degree, procure a job, do work on the job and receive a salary.

One basic disadvantage is that Indians hardly look at others as competent. They presume that they are doing the wrong kind of work. They also feel that for reasons beyond their comprehension or control, the organization or administration is not fully exploiting their capabilities and converting them into a resource.

R.K. Narayan observes that faculty are good in their respective subjects but have little or no knowledge about other subjects or other areas. In educational institutions, contributing to research papers is a never ending process. Jaggi VasuDev says *“If you copy from one paper it is plagiarism but if you copy from many it is called research”*.

Krishna thinks of himself as a poet and in course of time wishes to write and publish an epic poem.

The novel’s beginning has very little relation to its ending. Krishna undergoes an emotional, intellectual and spiritual change which could not be predicted. The change does not come as a result of a plan or a plot or through some ambitious undertaking.

He finds spontaneity and unpredictability to be stimulating, on the other hand predictability and order stifling. Order may be necessary for security but it kills creativity in the person.

Krishna is of the opinion that joy and peace come from nature. It is only through cultivation of new habits that one can achieve goals or objectives that one sets for oneself. He is also of the opinion that teachers do the job out of love for themselves and not because of the love for student’s development.

Krishna is married to Susila and begets a daughter, Leela. The novel portrays her as a firm, unwavering individual who gets things done as per her wish. The turning point of the story comes when Krishna decides to buy a house. They start a search and are particularly enamoured by a house that is at the end of the colony.

Subsequent to that visit, Sushila becomes ill and is bedridden. After prolonged illness, she succumbs to it.

Mr. Gajapathi, an Assistant Professor of English is of the opinion *“There is merit in accuracy, which must be cultivated for its own sake”*. He is also of the opinion that politics need not butt in everywhere, for clearer thinking in matters of dispute. Mr. Kumar who is a lecturer for

Political Science states “Corporate life makes the beginning of civilized existence and the emergence of its values”. (P-16)

Krishna’s predicament is unbelievable that he loses his wife after a short span of marriage and he is saddled with the responsibility of bringing up a daughter. One is generally disinclined to change. But change is the law of nature. It has its influence on all the people who are somehow connected to that change. The world is an illusion or Maya according to Sanatana Dharma or Indian culture. Living without illusions is a very great task. Doing once karma objectively eliminates the illusionary world.

Indian culture revolves around the mind. It is the mind which is the cause for the cycle of life-death- life. Swami Vivekananda says “Manah eva Manushyanam karanam Banda Mokshayo.’ Mind operates under its natural laws, wherein unpleasant memories and impressions are flittered and push into a remote corner of the subconscious mind.

After Sushila’s death, Krishna is disturbed but continues with daily activities more like an automaton rather than as a human being.

In the process there is a cinematic twist. A boy delivers a letter. The contents of the letter indicate that his wife Sushila is trying to contact him. I presume this idea to insert a ghost reading coming from the hugely popular American Edgar Cayce who is credited with recording more than fourteen thousand readings between 1920 and 1940.

The changes in the novel are not abrupt and they are more in the nature of a caterpillar moving from one leaf to another.

After a number of readings he finds that his daughter is attending a school very close to his house. He meets the headmaster of the school and the discussions between them bring to the surface, profound flaws in the present education system.

Most important and critical observation stated by R.K. Narayan in the novel is “The main business of the Educational Institution is to shape the mind and character of the students”. In reality, what is happening on the ground is that unless a few thousand of rupees are spent, a school cannot be started. This only multiplies the expenses and the same has to be recovered from the student in the form of fees or the school has to mortgage its soul to the government for recognition and obtaining grants. Swami Vivekananda says “the purpose of Education is to bring out the perfection already in man”.

The emphasis is shifted from the curricular activities to co-curricular activities. Students taking part these co-curricular activities are made to pass examination with external help and some quota is earmarked for them to get jobs. Such people are called modern and vigorous.

The school run by the headmaster without any frills, concentrates on teaching through illustrations and all human conduct is reduced to truth.

Indian society reveres the father and mother. Children are expected to be under the control of the father. In fact, mythological character Ram proceeds to a forest for fourteen years on the instruction of his father.

A teacher is supposed to influence and nurture the capabilities of students. This can happen only when the teacher himself has some worth and values to transmit. Every transformation need not be a miracle for it to be permanent. It should come from a gradual process and not a sudden event.

Most of our troubles appear to be external whereas the root cause is always internal to the human being. If we want change, fighting with internal elements, we will be able to generate lasting solutions.

The idea that students should be allowed to explore by developing a system that will make them wholesome human beings. Some of these ideas are being implemented at various palaces in India through organizations and individuals like ASHA, PRADHAN AND JAGGI VASU DEV.

The present day education has reduced us to a nation of morons, strangers to our own culture and followers of another culture.

Scientifically based prediction of life is thwarted by death and mystical prediction of death is thwarted by life. These episodes show limitation of man's ability to know and predict the world. He attacks the educational system as it was designed by the British to suit their needs. The same system cannot be applied to an independent country which should concentrate on the economic and spiritual growth of the Indian population. The author is not able to digest India's adherence to an educational system which stifles the students and alienates them from their native culture.

Krishna is a poet and having read John Milton more than fifty times, is influenced by Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The same idea is used in a different context with a different meaning to suit the situation. Krishna loses Sushila in flesh and regains her as a

spirit. English education has bred a class of youngsters showing undue respect to British culture and contempt for Indian culture.

Contempt for once own language and literature and embracing a foreign language is a sure recipe for confusion and ambivalence. The effect of which, is being felt today with ninety percent of our students lacking employability skills. We also see that highly qualified people are applying for low end jobs. Adequate opportunities suitable to their qualification are not forthcoming.

The novel should be perceived in the backdrop of Independence and with a large agrarian population that was milked dry by British policies before the grant of Independence.

In India, education industry is striving and has developed into a business model that is highly profitable. Educational institutions are expanding, opening new branches and creating new courses. Sadly, the students have become the victims of this corporate view.

A time has come for radical changes to be brought in the educational system so that at least future generations do not suffer the same predicament which the current students are undergoing.

#### **Conclusion:**

R. K. Narayan carefully camouflages his criticism on the present educational system. He strongly objects to the continuation of British System of Education in India. He wants Indians to develop a system that is more useful and beneficial to the current Indian population. Special emphasis is placed on respect for elders, imbibing strong moral values and developing unblemished character. He suggests that copying will lead this Country nowhere. What is required is clarity in thought and commitment in action. The road to success may be thorny, but it will lead to satisfaction or contentment.

#### **References:**

The English Teacher by R.K. Narayan, First Edition, Eyre & spottiswoods, 1945.