



INNOCENCE OF THE RUSTICS AS PORTRAYED BY R.K.NARAYAN IN HIS SELECT NOVELS: A MACROSCOPIC OVERVIEW.

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Abstract

Innocence is basically defined as a quality or fact of being innocent and there are numerous meanings attached to it. The characters in the novels of Narayan have a nuclear innocence and the rustics especially, have a role to play and they express the voice of the community. They also play the role of a chorus to the main action. This paper gives a macroscopic insight to the rustic community and the characters that are portrayed as rustics in the four novels of Narayan. The characters though minor, play significant roles like the ficolles, the catalysts and the foils.

Keywords: *Innocence, Macroscopic, Symbolic, Ficolles, Rustic Community.*

Introduction

Innocence is basically defined as a quality or fact of being innocent, and is understood in a number of connotations. When we refer to the dictionary, we find numerous meanings attached to the word. All these meanings serve as a point of reference in analysing the nature and treatment of innocence in Narayan's novels. Almost every character in the novels of Narayan has a nuclear innocence as the generally shared human mannerism and the typology of innocence is focussed on three distinct categories of the characters in Narayan's novel, namely (a) the children, (b) the grown-ups passing through the second childhood and (c) the rustics.

The rustics in the Malgudi novels, as the rustics in Hardy's novels for instance, appear chiefly as background characters. They express the voice of the community. They also play the role of a chorus to the main action. It is through the background of the rustics that the significance of the flat characters is realized.

The Rustic Ranga in Swami and Friends

The rustic Ranga who is passing from the neighbouring village in the novel *Swami and Friends*, passes through the Mempi Forest in his bullock cart and notices the unconscious and feverish Swami lying on the open ground. He takes the nearly dead Swami to the Forest Officer encamping nearby and thus plays a crucial role in restoring Swami to life.

Ranga is only a minor character bereft of any individuality and he exists as a mere dot. But his character illuminates for a moment when he plays the role of a saviour. He is realized as a ficolle, a character serving a specific purpose. (Harvey, 237) Following the pace-setting trend of *Swami and Friends*, Ranga seems to install the rustics in the later novels of Narayan. As a rustic, Ranga is realized as a naïve, unlettered, God-fearing and essentially a benevolent person.

Role of the Rustics in the Bachelor of Arts

The rustics in Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* figure with all the characteristics of that class symbolized in Ranga. Interestingly, the rustics in *The Bachelor of Arts* too seem to be saving the protagonist, Chandran, if not from death, certainly, and more importantly, from self-deception. The rustics as a typical village community receive the desperado Chandran as a sanyasi and regard him as a genuine ascetic 'under the vow of silence.' They believe that Chandran is a true sanyasi and they represent the gullible community. Ironically enough, when Chandran, pricked by conscience, decides to leave Koopal village, the gullibles entreat him to stay on and thus, they compel him to play the role of a sanyasi. The rustics may be realized from two points of view. As they entreat the sanyasi to stay on and thus bless them with his spiritual presence, they seem to install a similar village community in *The Guide*. In this novel they symbolize the traditionally realized religiosity and their essentially spiritual need for a holy presence of a saint. One may also note the undaunted faith of the community in the spiritual power of an ascetic.



The rustics may also be realized as they play the chorric roles. It is in this symbolic sense that their presence, though mute, acquires wider dimensions as the collective unconscious before which Chandran, the dissembler, squirms and finally quits the scene, giving up the borrowed role of a sanyasi. As the faith in the rustics entreats the fake saint to stay on, and the collective unconscious of the rustics almost compels him to leave the scene, Narayan's irony acquires a double dimension. The irony seems to be Chandran's realization of the illusory existence dawned through the rustics.

Portrayal of the Rustics in the Dark Room

The Dark Room portrays the rustics unlike the usually conceived background characters. Here, they play different roles. Appearing as a pair of husband and wife, they do not exhibit the feel of the community and have rather individualized roles. The rustics are Mari and his wife Ponni. Mari works as a day time locksmith and plays a petty burglar at night, visiting the neighbouring Malgudi. Mari, like his cousin Ranga in Swami and Friends, plays the role of a saviour. He saves the drowning Savitri whom at first he takes for "Mohini, the Temptress Devil." (131) Mari is perhaps, the only comic rustic in the Malgudi novel. When, for instance, a coughing old man paralyzes his burglary, Mari quips: "Your cough will burst you soon, don't worry." (130) Mari is also a drunkard but, unlike many of his prototypes he is a devout husband and loves and respects his wife and strikes a clear contrast to Ramani, Savitri's husband. In his last appearance as he cries "Locks Repaired" (210) and as Savitri feels unable to call him back, the rustic underlines her helplessness. Although a minor character, Mari is illumined as the saviour of precious life and becomes one of the ficolles in the Narayan novel.

Ponni, the overpowering wife of Mari, is realized from two specific angles, the comic and the symbolic. As a comic caricature, Ponni is realized as a cocksure woman who has mastered the art of totally paralysing the drunkard. In fact she feels thrilled to relate the story of controlling the drunken husband: "I trip him up from behind and push him down, and sit on his back for a little while; he will wriggle a little, swear at me, and then sleep" (136-37). Ponni symbolizes a happy and respected wife who strikes a clear contrast to Savitri. In fact it is through Ponni that Narayan presents the perfectly happy wife in her primitive surrounding. She may be realized as a foil to Savitri.

Depiction of the Rustic community in the Financial Expert

Narayan presents yet another sight of the rustic community in The Financial Expert. The rustics in this novel can be viewed through different angles. At the outset they are introduced as the 'blanket-wrapped rustics' (15) squatting in a semi-circle and telling their perpetual economic problems to Margayya in the novel The Financial Expert, under the banyan tree. As one considers them in the context of the typology of innocence, their entire existence appears illustrative of their naiveté. The rustics from the neighbouring villages are basically unlettered and fail to follow Margayya's quizzical ways. But, sandwiched miserably between the humiliating harassment of the bank officials and the perennial financial worries, they have no other way left but to accept the verdict of their master, Margayya. Narayan underlines the irony in human life as the naïve rustics regard the cunning schemer as their saviour.

As regards the character delineation in The Financial Expert, some rustics seem to have been given individual traits. Kanda is a perpetual borrower. The narrator says: "He was a gambler and drank heavily, and he always asked for money on the pretext of having to marry his daughters, of whom he had good number." (5) Although such caricatures underline deft touches of comicality, they seem to be basically cast to project Margayya's native shrewdness as the Financial Expert. Most of the rustics, however, are chiefly realized, as in The Bachelor of Arts; echo the voice of the community. They also reflect the cultural ethos and perform the chorric function. Their importance in Margayya's life can hardly be exaggerated. They are realized as an inseparable part of the rise and fall of his fortune. The final scene, as one anticipates Margayya's return to the folds of the banyan tree, can be symbolically interpreted as the rustic community's willingness to accept the prodigal son. It also indicates the community's mute but suggestive assertiveness.



Although the rustics in The Financial Expert are flat and serve as the background characters, they also play a centrally related role. Thus, they are the sympathizing and protective community in the context of Margayya and they can be symbolically regarded as Margayya's essential naiveté, goodness and foibles.

Conclusion

Taken in their entirety, the rustics give an impression of an improved version of character delineation as compared to the earlier types like the children and the grown-ups passing through the second childhood. As for the treatment of innocence, most of the characters in this typology are minor or secondary characters and they play significant roles like the ficelles, the catalysts and the foils. The typology also marks the characters for their chorric and symbolic function. It is in the diversified nature of the roles played by Narayan's flat characters that one reads their significance as characters.

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