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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EDUCATION –R.K.NARAYAN.

Dr. R. S. Baskkaran.

Omar Al- Mukhtar University, Al-Gubba, Libya.

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Abstract

R.K.Narayan is the most famous Indian novelist, his reputation as one of the founding figures of Indian writing in English. This paper attempts to explain the Educational view of R.K.Narayan as envisioned in his novels. He carried an untiring crusade against the memory based Indian System of Education throughout his writing career. Narayan was of the opinion that he resented anything that cramped the soul and believed in return to an educational system based not on rote learning but on story- telling, games for the young and appreciation of the Indian Culture. He did not fail to indicate his new notions of education. He aimed at an ideal education and it was possible only in a free atmosphere. Narayan was not only criticised the education system but also had given solution for the problem. He favoured the Gurugula System of learning, the age old system which gave opportunity to the students and teachers lived together, learning without books. It was sort of natural learning.

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Introduction:-

The Educational set up in Indian society with reference to the novels of Narayan is discussed in this paper. The Indian school system does not produce conducive atmosphere to the learners; instead, it gives boredom to the students. It is reflected in the first page of his first novel *Swamy and Friends* itself. Swaminathan, an average school going boy in the novel does not like to think about the school which is opened on Monday after enjoying Saturday and Sunday holidays and even the very thinking of school gives him bitterness:

It was Monday morning Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get in to the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that the dismal yellow building; the fire eyed Vedanayagam, his class – teacher; and the Head Master with his thin long cane... (SF, p.3)

Narayan boldly criticised colonial educational system. He resented anything that cramped the soul and believed in a return to an educational system based not on rote learning but on story–telling, games for the young and appreciation of the Indian culture.

Raju the hero of *The Guide* describes the bitter experience of his early education:

Corresponding Author:- Dr. R. S. Baskkaran.

Address:- Omar Al- Mukhtar University, Al-Gubba, Libya.

When the sky lightened, my father was ready for me on the *pyol*. There he sat with a thin broken twig at his side. The modern notions of child psychology were unknown then; the stick was an educator's indispensable equipment. 'The unbeaten brat will remain unlearned', said my father, quoting an old proverb. He taught me the Tamil alphabet. He wrote the first two letters on each side of my slate at a time. I had to go over the contours of the letters with my pencil endlessly until they became bloated and distorted beyond recognition. From time to time my father snatched the slate from my hand, looked at it, glared at me, and said, 'What a mess! you will never prosper in life if you disfigure the sacred letters of the alphabet'. Then he cleaned the slate with his damp towel, wrote the letter again and gave it to me with the junction, 'If you spoil this, you will make me wild. Trace them exactly as I have written. Don't try any of your tricks on them', and he flourished his twigs menacingly.

Although the lessons had seemed interminable to me, my mother said the moment she saw me, 'so you have been let off! I wonder what you can learn in half an hour!'

I told her, 'I'll go out and play and won't trouble you. But no more lessons for the day, please.'

..... 'You will go to a school tomorrow and every day'
'Father!' I cried. He was passing a harsh sentence on me.

It was what was called a *pyol* school, because the classes were held on the *pyol* of the gentleman's house.

For the first few days I enjoyed all this attention, but soon developed a normal aversion;
..... His interest in us was one rupee a month and anything else in kind we cared to carry
..... The dropping off my school unobtrusively.

Raju has become school dropout. School going and learning is boring for Raju and Swaminathan.

The writer criticises the existing educational system in his novel *The English Teacher*:

This education had reduced us to a nation of morons we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leaving and garbage. I am up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for your entire business and administration of office source. (ET, p.203)

Narayan carried an untiring crusade against the memory based Indian system of education throughout his writing career, by series of ironic jibes at schools and teachers.

Krishnaswami (2006) quotes in his article in 'The Hindu,'

Narayan is also a great favourite syllabus planner at both the school and the college level. When he became Rajya Shaba M.P. (Member of Parliament) he wanted to reduce the burden of school children. As member of the Rajya Sabha, Narayan made children the subject of his inaugural speech, highlighting the issue of the "crushing burden of the heavy school bag". "I have investigated and found that an average child carries strapped to his back like a pack-mule, not less than six to seven kilograms of books, note-books and other paraphernalia of modern education in addition to lunch box and water bottle it made many children hang their arms forward like chimpanzees..... I am now pleading for abolition of the school bag by an ordinance, if necessary – so that childhood has a chance to bloom".

In response, the Deputy Chairman said: "The entire House associates with Mr.R.K.Narayan and I feel that the whole country will notice it."

The examination system as it is practised in India is particularly primitive.

To quote Narayan (1974): "the whole aim of our education is to strain the faculty of Memory."

April is the cruelest month for Indian students. Two weeks before the examination, Swami and his friends were seized by a phobia of examination.

Instead of inculcating a natural interest in studies the system of education practised in India only creates disgust for books. Reading outside the school and examination preparation, is rarely thought of.

The conversation between Swaminathan and his father during the vacation is suffused with deep irony. Father asked Swaminathan:

‘How many days it is since you have touched your books?’
Swaminathan viewed this question as a gross breach of promise:
‘Should I read even when I have no school?’
Father asked again ‘Do you think you have passed BA?’
‘I mean Father, when the school is closed, when there is no examination, even then should I read?’
Father said vehemently:
‘What a question! You must read.’
‘But Father, you said before the examinations, that I need n’t read after they were over’.
He quoted the instance of Rajam as a norm:
Even Rajam does not read. (SF, p.64)

It is worth examining how Narayan’s criticism works. Rajam bitterly complained of a home tutor who came and pestered him for two hours a day thrice a week. Narayan drives home the point that reading is rendered unpleasant to Indian students. Narayan expands on the theme when he records Swaminathan’s protest, before a more sympathetic Granny. “If one has got to read even during holidays, I don’t see why holidays are given at all.” (SF, p.65)

He even showed a spirit of revenge to his mother’s joining hands with father in setting him to the torture of learning, by pulling the sheet under his young brother and made him roll on the ground. When Swaminathan sat in his father’s room to do a simple equation problem in arithmetic, Narayan represents artistically, his own disinclination towards figure work:

Father held the Arithmetic book open and dictated:
‘Rama has ten mangoes with which he wants to earn fifteen annas. Krishna wants only four mangoes. How much will Krishna have to pay?’ (SF, p.66)

Narayan touches humourously on the inadequacy of formal education, when Swami, Mani and Rajam could not make head or tail of the letters they received from Messers Binns, Madras. The concern had asked to send twenty five per cent advance payments with their order. When Rajam expressed his inability to interpret it, Swami said: “I am surprised that, you cannot understand this letter” (SW, p.89)

In the opinion of Narayan the educational methods are defective; you got 80 percent in the last examination. The first part of the novel ‘*The Bachelor of Arts*’, Narayan expresses his views on education from the other student point of view. At the higher level, text books and examinations replace the appeal to the big stick of the lower one, as potential threat to students.

As a young man with a poetic turn of mind, Krishnan in *The English Teacher* subjects his own profession of teaching to serious assessment, though as a teacher he behaves as any other teacher in his circumstances would do. Narayan’s treatment of education is suggestive not cavilling and the eccentric Head Master of Leela’s School, introduced later in the novel, represents the positive aspects of Narayan’s own conception of the ‘Leave alone’ system of education.

Narayan’s opinion against the system of Western education speaks through the hero Krishnan of *The English Teacher* that he is both a product and an operator of that system by being a teacher of English:

In it I was going to attack a whole century of false education. I was going to explain why I could no longer.... feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories, while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage. (ET, p.205)

R.K.Narayan (1974) in his article, “My Educational outlook.” He points out:

My educational outlook had always been different from those of my elders and well wishers. And after five or more decades, my views on education remain unchanged... I am not averse to enlightenment, but I feel convinced that the entire organization, system, outlook and aims of education are hopelessly wrong from beginning to end; from primary first year to Ph.D.

The examination system as it is practiced in India is particularly primitive. To quote Narayan (1974) “the whole aim of our education is to strain-in the faculty of memory.”

Narayan (1974) warns the powers: “If our education system is not to continue as a well-endowed elaborately organized, deep-rooted farce, a remedy must be found immediately.”

Such is the outlook of Narayan on the western system of education which was implemented in India. He described the reality of the Examination Hall of today. Narayan criticised how examiners behaved and sometimes they fell asleep, one Examiner was sitting in drowsiness: “One supervisor was drowsing in his chair; another was pacing up and down, with an abstracted look in his eyes.” (SW, p.46)

Our weak Examination pattern gives too much importance and emphasis to write and not to develop other skills like listening, speaking and reading which are also very important for learning any language.

Narayan (1974) criticises the evaluation system of our education:-

Your examiner, he is also a human being subject to fluctuating Moods caused by unexpected domestic quarrels or a bad digestion just when he is sitting down to correct your papers; also, not being an adding machine, occasionally he may slip and arrive at 7 while totalling 8 and 3. Please forgive him.

Narayan criticises the question paper, its secrecy and the paper evaluation in our examination system:-

If I became Vice-Chancellor, my first act would be to abolish all secrecy that surrounds question papers. Instead of permitting wild speculations or as it happens nowadays, advance sale of questions in the black market, I would take advertisement space in newspapers and publish the questions in every subject, adding under each a credit line; ‘Set by Professor So-and-so’. I would not hesitate to announce with courage the names of those who are going to evaluate the answers and decree failures and successes. (1974)

Narayan offers remedy for the present education system:-

Memory is not so important today. Our need is for more libraries and multiple copies. The only condition I make for my boys is that they spend at least six hours a day in the library a month before the examinations and while writing the answer I permit them to refer to the books. (1974)

Narayan also highlights the corruption in the education system through his novel *The Financial Expert*, Margayya inducts himself into the Administrative Committee and manages a pass for his son, till the matriculation examination. There he goes paper tracing, but with no positive result.

Margayya (*The Financial Expert*) resorts to carefully considered bribery in order to secure his son’s future through the hallowed halls of learning. In the novel *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan cannot understand his son Mali’s sullen obstinancy where going to school is concerned.

R.K.Narayan does not fail to indicate his new notions of education. He aims at ideal education and it is possible only in a free atmosphere. His views on education of children find full expression in other novels *The English Teacher* and *The Bachelor of Arts*. *Swamy and Friends* with their class mates, their fear for masters and their frequent quarrels with their school mates brings into focus various aspects of student life – a life which a youth had to lead in the masters’ house staying with him doing all service to him and learning from him was an old education system called *Gurugula* system of education. He went on to recommend the ancient Sanskrit method of learning which took many years, and dispensing with books, relied on memory. “It’s a sort of natural training”. But modern circumstances are different and Swamy does not praise his masters but curses them; Narayan loves his masters, learns his subjects and all the more loves the college atmosphere. The only defect is that he takes the period of study as a casual and pleasurable period of his life.

Lord Macaulay proposed to produce cheap clerks through the medium of English education. Lord Macaulay in his famous Minute of 1835:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect; to that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (Krishnaswamy and Lalitha Krishnaswamy, 2009).

Conclusion:-

Swami Vivekananda says that India wants man making education. Hence Narayan line of thinking is the same.. Narayan carried an untiring crusade against the memory based Indian system of Education throughout his writing career by series of ironic jibes at school and teacher. He resented anything that cramped the soul and believed in a return to an educational system based not on rote memory but on narration and games for the young and appreciation of Indian Culture. The main impulse behind his consistent rejection of colonial education has been his deep concern for his own culture. The writer advocates his educational philosophy in his novel *The English Teacher*. He criticises the Education System of Macaulay which produced mere clerks for the British Empire. Education as it is practised in modern India has caught the Western model in the wrong end. It is unfortunate over the years in spite of many education commission reports, nothing concrete has been achieved. It is worked out on the basis of memory with no effort to develop analytical reasoning. It does not allow the scholars to flower forth into intellectuals. Narayan feels that this education has reduced our nation to a nation of morons; we have become strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture. Such is the outlook of Narayan on the western system of education which was implemented in India. Education as practiced in India is legacy of Macaulay that was interested in churning out clerks for British administration. The Education System should undergo drastic revision if Indians are to be the Managers and intellectually superior in coming era. Indian should awake to the great opportunities and potentials of emerging world order and to take lead roles in it.

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