

THE SYNTHESIS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS AND LITERATURE IN THE NOVEL: *THE ENGLISH TEACHER*

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The English Teacher was published in the year 1945, six years after the sad demise of Narayan's wife Rajam. The novel has the touch of painful autobiography of the novelist R.K. Narayan. The genesis of the novel can be traced back in the year 1935. The year was full of romantic and attractive attributes in the life of Narayan. R.K. Narayan was a young man of twenty-eight at the time. He saw a beautiful girl of eighteen years. Narayan was standing at the corner of the big city Mall. The girl was slim and attractive. She was tall and blessed with classical beauty of a diva. Her face had the finish of a beautiful statue. It seemed to be perfected by God. He was caught in love with the girl at first sight. Narayan went straight to the girl's father Nageshwar Iyer, and proposed him to marry his daughter. But there was a problem, the horoscope of Narayan did not match with Rajam. Nageshwar Iyer's astrologer predicted that Narayan would prove either a polygamist or a widower. The astrology did not favour the marriage stars had determined that he should not be happy with just one wife. But the love sick young man was not to be put off easily. He got another astrologer of his own, whom 'at the sight of a rupee,' went into raptures over Narayan's horoscope.

He was an accomplished debater and defeated the other Pandit and Rajam's parents, realizing that I was from a good and large family, and that whatever happened to me, she would always be taken care of, agreed to the marriage.¹

The prediction came true. Narayan's happy conjugal life did not continue for a long time. Only five years after their marriage, he lost his wife in 1939. She had been the source of inspiration in his early life.

Narayan confessed himself that *The English Teacher* has autobiographical touch. The real facts of his life have been recorded with great authenticity. Narayan realistically presents the tragedy of the premature demise of his wife in his book *My Days*. Rajam was married to Narayan in 1935. She became the mother of a girl child Hema. Rajam did not give company for long period to Narayan. She caught typhoid, and became a victim in early May of 1939 and left this mundane world in the first week of June. Narayan has written this dark grim truth of his life in *My Days*.

The English Teacher of the novel, Krishnan is a fictional character in the city of Malgudi, but he goes through the same experience I had gone through and he calls his wife Susila, and the child Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took the desolation that followed, with a child to look after the psychic adjustments are based on my own experience.²

Krishnan, Susila and Leela of the novel *The English Teacher* are the depiction of R.K. Narayan, Rajam and Hema. Krishnan and his wife Susila resemble with Narayan and Rajam, Leela resembles with Hema. The novel depicts the real events in the life of Narayan. Susila was wedded to Krishnan. She had a desire to study. She became mother of a girl Leela. Leela

and Susila was running smoothly in the life of Krishnan. She controlled the domestic affairs of home. She was a good accountant in domestic words. She had commanded on the domestic front of the house. The conjugal life of Susila and Krishnan was runningly smooth expert few quarrels. These quarrels cemented their love relationship. But their married life did not run for a long time. Suddenly, Susila became ill. One day Krishnan and Susila left their home in the early morning. They enjoyed the morning beauty of nature. They saw river, restaurants and other places. They came to Sastri's home. he was the colleague of Krishnan. He had earned his name in developing the colony in Malgudi. He was a colony developer. Krishnan visited Sastri's home because he wanted to buy his own house. Krishnan visited him because he wanted to buy his own house. Krishnan and Susila visited several houses. At last, they selected a home. Susila liked it. She wanted to go to lavatory and she came outside the home. She entered the lavatory. Krishnan also came outside and called her. Susila told Krishnan to go inside the home. Susila did not come for a long time. Krishnan searched her. In the meantime, he heard the feeble voice of Susila from the lavatory. He unlocked the door. Susila came outside. She was shaken. She was terrified with fear. Krishnan consoled her. She was without sleeper. Krishnan gave her solace. Later they visited the temple after leaving that place. Susila also brought some snacks for Leela from the market. But this incident had tremendous impact on her psyche. She became ill. She never recovered from this horrifying incident. After coming back to home, she felt uneasy. She did not take her food for long time.

Susila became ill. Dr. Shankar was consulted on this matter. He gave the medicine of malaria. There was no progress in her health. Susila was afraid of doctor's name. But Dr. Shankar had become friendly with Krishnan. He was a professional doctor but he had developed a personal touch with Krishnan. There were no symptoms of progress in her health, Dr. Shankar decided to take the blood sample of Susila. After the examination of blood, the symptoms of typhoid were detected. It was the same disease detected to the wife of Narayan, Rajam. She also became the victim of deadly typhoid like Shusila.

Dr. Shankar was the best doctor of Malgudi. He was adept in building the confidence in his patient. When Susila was detected typhoid, he tried to make the situation comfortable for her. He did not want to give any kind tension to the patient and other family members. Dr. Shankar said:

"I thought it was malaria..." "Malaria!" the doctor said. "I was only dreading lest it should be malaria – the most erratic and temperamental thing on earth. I wouldn't trust it. But typhoid is the king among fevers- it is an aristocrat who observes the rules of the game..." My wife's little room was converted into a sick ward. (112)

Susila was given the regular medicine but her health deteriorated. Her parents had also come to look after. Krishnan had completely withdrawn himself from other works and duties. He engaged himself in the service of his wife Susila. Glucose, barley water and mixture were regularly given to Susila. The medicines were also given at regular interval. Susila did not show any sign of recovery. Her fever did not come down from 102 and more often it shot up to 105. The doctor regularly monitored her health. He had a hope that after few days the patient will show the symptoms of her recovery. It proved a lost hope. Krishnan had the opportunity to remain close with his wife. In his personal life Narayan had deep attachment with his wife. He loved his wife immensely which has been shown in his book *My Days*. Here also Narayan's this feeling has been highlighted through Krishnan. He liked to see his wife.

But I liked produced an immense satisfaction in my mind. throughout I acted as her nurse. This sickness binds us together more strongly than ever. (118)

Susila like Rajam, never retained her health from typhoid. Susila was seen by the best physician of the region because of the personal effortsof Dr. Shankar. Dr. Shankar was personally known to the best physician. He arranged the doctor but Susila did not survive. Every effort of Krishnan and her parents proved futile. She remained ill for more than three weeks and at last she liftsthe world. Rajam had also met the same sad fate. Krishnan was broken. He was shaken. It was a terrible blow to Narayan to lose his wife at this young age. Though Krishnan did not marry and never become polygamist but he remained the widower. The astrologer had predicted that Narayan will become either polygamist or widower. Krishnan felt too much depressed by his wife's departure. After her last rites Krishnan felt poignant pain in his heart.

There are no more surprises and shocks in life, so that I watch the flame without agitation. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else.... Nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter. (140)

Krishnan was completely cut off from the outside world. He was devoted to secure the lost happiness of his daughter. He did not like the company. He had gracefully accepted the dual role assigned to him by the god. He acted as father and mother for his little daughter, Leela. He did not want to see any kind of unhappiness in his daughter's face. He gave bath to her with expert hands. He dressed her. He was helped by the old lady in doing these things. Krishnan's mother also visited occasionally to see his granddaughterdespite illness of his father. Her mother wanted to take his daughter along with her in the village. But Krishnan disliked the idea to separate his daughter from her. He did not want to part with his wife's legacy. In his personal life Narayan never married after the departure of Rajam to another world. Hema reminded the only child. Leela is the depiction of Hema from the pen of mighty novelist. Krishnan got peace in the company of his daughter. The same feeling was felt by Narayan in his daughter's company.

Even sad and harrowing memories were cherished by me; I seemed to acquire a new peace, a new outlook; a view of life with a place for everything. (146)

The novel also depicts Krishnan's communication with the spirit of his departed wife. Narayan had established his psychic union with his late wife Rajam. There are certain facts which are beyond the sphere of science. But Narayan has made his recorded statement that he did have communion with the spirit of his departed wife. It is unwise to believe that all that is outside the preview of science, is fantasy and superstition. Krishnan wanted to search the ultimate reality. In the process of searching the mysterious truth, he passed through an inferno of complexities and confusions. He embraced spirituality as a last resort to know the truth about his wife Susila. he was helped by the gentleman of village Tayur. His wife Susila felt the plight of Krishnan. She tried to make communication with him. The gentleman was communicated on behalf of Susila's spirit.

'Here we are, a band of spirits who've been working to bridge the gulf between life and after-life. We have been looking about for a medium through whom we could communicate....

'The pleasure is mine,' I said. And then my hand wrote: 'Here is Susila, wife of Krishnan, but as yet she is unable to communicate by herself. But by and by she will be an adept in it. Will

you kindly send the following as coming from her to her husband.’ and then I received the message I sent you and they also gave me your name and address! (166)

After getting the message from his wife, a tremendous transformation was observed in the life of Krishnan. The hopeless Krishnan became hopeful Krishnan. The ray of hope gave a new touch in the life of Krishnan. Whenever he failed to contact with his wife, he became dejected. The gentleman from Tayur was their communicator. Once he had gone outside from the village Tayur, Krishnan failed to contact his wife. He became a dejected man. Later his wife’s spirit suggested him to make direct access to her. It was a difficult process. He succeeded in making contact with his wife. He became successful spiritually in making union with his wife. They were physically separated but finally they became successful to communicate with each other.

“Susila! Susila!” I cried. “You here!” “Yes, I’m here, have always been here.” I sat up learning on my pillow. “Why do you disturb yourself?” she asked.

“I am making a place for you,” I said. Edging away a little....” How beautiful!” I said looking at it. “Yes, I always wear this when I come to you. I know you like it very much,” she said. I gazed on her face (279)

Literature and philosophy did not show the path to Krishnan to make psychic union with her. But the spiritual path illuminated his life.

The novel *The English Teacher* is a beautiful autobiographical novel. Narayan like other creative writers makes an adroit use of autobiographical elements in this novel. Only a few novelists are blessed with a gift of blending imagination and personal life.

Narayan in his personal life disliked the upper hand given to English system of education. He liked English but not the English system of education. Krishnan’s opinion has been aired more often in the novel. The headmaster of the children’s schools also advocated the education should be free from materialism. Narayan was staunch advocate of the simplicity of education. He wanted to build the character of the students for building a nation. The nation should make her people know about her culture.

Krishnan words about education is in fact resembles with Narayan’s view on education.

“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 all your business and administrative offices. (270)

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2. Narayan, R.K. My Days: A Memoir, Indian Thought Publication, Madras. 1975, p.135
3. Narayan, R.K. The English Teacher, Indian Thought Publication, Madras, 2019, 49th Reprint, p.112 (All subsequent references will be incorporated in the text).