



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

## Dialectic of Being and Becoming: A Study of R.K. Narayan's *The World of Nagaraj*

**Dr. Raman Kumar**  
**Assistant Professor of English**  
**Govt. Post Graduate College**  
**Una, Himachal Pradesh, Pin-174303**  
**Email: [rmn.jaswal@gmail.com](mailto:rmn.jaswal@gmail.com)**

### Abstract

*The terms Being and Becoming are used both in a spiritual manner (as in Indian philosophy) and in an existential way (as in western thought). According to the Indian spiritualistic philosophy, being is the innermost part of one's self, one's true self. It is the Atma with which all living beings are born into this born. This being is purely selfless and is devoid of all worldliness. The present paper is an attempt to explore the dialectics of being and becoming in R K Narayan's 'The World of Nagaraj'.*

**Keywords: dialectic; being; becoming; self**

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906-2001) popularly known as R. K. Narayan, an award winning novelist, essayist and storywriter is generally considered one of the greatest Indians writing in English. He shares this honour with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. D. S. Maini has observed in this regard: "Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan- brought the Indian novel to the point of ripeness". But R. K. Narayan enjoys a place of rare distinction among these great writers too and it is partly because of the rare setting of his novels, his close association with the traditional Indian society, his simple language, his humour and irony, and



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

his characterization, which is so varied and colourful. Many critics have praised R. K. Narayan for his literariness and for his aestheticism. V. Y. Kantak has observed, "...when we come to weigh Indian writing of fiction in English to date, Narayan with his penny whistle seems to have wrought more than most others with their highly pretentious and obstreperous brass" (21). R. K. Narayan has fourteen novels to his credit alongwith a large number of short stories. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) won him great fame and was widely acknowledged as a masterpiece by the world's literary community. It also won him the much-coveted Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960.

R. K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* is largely considered and praised for its theme- the theme of generation gap between the people of second and third generation, between traditionalism and modernism. This theme of generation gap is represented through Jagan and Mali, the two central characters of the novel. Jagan is the loving father of Mali, who is a spoilt motherless son. Jagan is a second generation character and is an advocate of the traditions and customs of Malgudi society. Malgudi represents the traditional Indian society which is largely moralistic and spiritualistic. But Mali feels fed up of such traditions and customs and wants to leap-frog into an age of materialism and sensuality. A conflict takes place between the father and the son when Mali refuses to accept any restraint and follows his own wishes and desires which are largely anti-social and immoral. The novel in the treatment of its theme brings home the readers to the conflict of values of 1960s and 1970s because of the difference of ideas and behaviour patterns of the second and the third generation.

What makes *Mr. Sampath* so distinct is its characterization. The characters of the novel are so unique and peculiar that they leave an indelible impression on the minds of the readers. Though these characters are very lifelike and ordinary as they seem to be found at every nook and corner of the Indian society, but they have something very unique and peculiar about them. Now what is so extraordinary about them? The answer is that this uniqueness and peculiarity lies in the dialectic of their being and their becoming. It is the dialectic of being and becoming which gives them their peculiar nature and temperament and makes them so memorable.



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

Though the term ‘Dialectic’ owes its origin to ancient western philosophy (Greek philosophy), but its roots can be traced in eastern philosophy as well. The principles of dialectic were followed in ancient times in both western thought and eastern philosophy (Indian spiritual concepts). The concept of dialectic is based on two basic principles: First, everything (whether living or non-living) is in a continual state of change and second, this change comes because of the opposite or contradictory nature of things. So according to the philosophy of dialectic, everything is made of certain opposite things and the conflict of such opposite things results in the change or transformation of that particular entity. Even the modern psychoanalytical critics believe that one’s self, his/her personality is made of opposite things and these opposite aspects bring about some change in him or her.

The terms Being and Becoming are used both in spiritual manner (as in Indian philosophy) and in existential way (as in western thought). According to the Indian spiritualistic philosophy, being is the innermost part of one’s self, one’s true self. It is the Atma with which all living beings are born into this world. This being is purely selfless and is devoid of all worldliness. William Wordsworth’s glorification of the earliest childhood in his famous “Immortality Ode” is nothing else, but affirmation of his faith in that pure being with which all humans are born. Wordsworth has talked of this pure being in the following terms: “Mighty prophet! Seer blest! / On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find” (511). Even the western philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau have said a great deal about such a pure being and have warned against the harmful effects of becoming which corrupts and deforms one’s being. Becoming stands for one’s existence in society, one’s worldliness which gradually swallows one’s innocence and selflessness. This happens when one moves ahead on the earthly journey called life and starts learning the tricks of this materialistic world, but in this process loses contact with his/her true being. With every single step on the path of becoming a social participant, an individual moves away from his being and loses contact with it. The only



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

way to escape from the disastrous and soul-destroying effects of becoming, as suggested by Rousseau, is to “Return to Nature”, which means returning to the natural simplicity of being.

So, Being is the natural self of an individual, whereas Becoming is his attempt to adjust himself in the social set-up and the resultant involvement in the worldly materialistic or carnal pleasures of life. The character of every human being living in society is characterized and determined by that particular point between the extremes of being and becoming at which the pendulum of his/her personality rests at that particular point in his life. The dialectical tension or conflict takes place when a human being living in society tries to grow by learning and getting exposed to the social milieu in order to acquire the skills required to play the roles in society in accordance with the social norms and demands. While trying to fulfill the demands which the society makes on his personality he may become a normative member of society, perfectly adjusting himself to the social roles he is expected to play. But his complete identification with his social roles without any sanction from his real being, the inner centripetal, leads to an alienation from his own-self, resulting in a schism in his personality. Eventually, one part of his self leads him to one direction, while the other part pulls him into some opposite direction. Because of these pulls and pressures and complexity of inner forces, man remains in a state of fix. He behaves in an unpredictable manner and the pendulum of his life wavers between the two poles of spiritualism and sensuality, asceticism and carnality. At one time, he touches the pinnacles of glory and spiritualism and at the other he falls into the bottomless pits of sensuality and carnality.

R. K. Narayan’s *The World of Nagaraj* deals with a character named Timi. The novel webs round the social world of Nagaraj which is jeopardized and thrown out of the gear with the entrance of Tim, his nephew. The novel is a dialectical study of the protagonist Nagaraj, who is a normative member of society though he has certain oddities and eccentricities of character, and Tim, who turns out to be a social deviant in the course of the novel. Tim represents the young men of post-independence era who were the by-product of the western culture and became “victims



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

of the many ills of modern culture overtaking the calm and sequestered life of Malgudi” (Sharma 173).

As the title suggests, the novel deals with the peaceful world of Nagaraj which is thrown topsy-turvy with the entrance of Tim. Tim is the son of his elder brother Gopu who lives in a village. But he is full of hatred towards fields and cattle and runs away from there when his father scolds him on some issue and comes to Malgudi without telling anyone at home. His poor mother and father feel concerned, but he does not care at all for their feelings and sentiments. He comes to live with his uncle Nagaraj and aunt Sita, the childless couple, who live all alone in a big house in Kabir Street. They look up to Tim as their own son, but he turns out to be a great source of trouble for them as the story unfolds.

Tim feels attracted towards the showiness and gaudiness of the materialistic culture and becomes a pastiche being in his thinking and beliefs like Mali. He is a third generation character and like many other third generation characters of R. K. Narayan, he deviates from the social customs and traditions and hankers after western culture. He prefers black coffee because, “Americans drink pure decoction without milk or sugar, they call it black coffee” (56). He like Mali is a psychopath and lives a life of delusion like him. Nothing rational gives way into his psyche and he leads a life of his own will and desire.

Tim comes to live with Nagaraj and disturbs the peace of his home with his ways and manners. He does not pay any heed to the concerns of his uncle and aunt and often comes home late. The poor couple keeps on waiting for him till late in night, but is unable to raise any objection. He is admitted in the Albert Mission College, but drops out of it at his own will without telling anyone like Mali. He keeps on wandering here and there and does not do anything. “From the minute he got up from bed the young man moved up and down the house and then constantly went out on his bicycle or the neighbour’s scooter, and returned home late” (58). The love of Nagaraj and his wife gets him spoilt and pampered. Even Gopu comes to know of this fact and scolds Nagaraj for spoiling his son, “You have spoilt him beyond repair: you are



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

Narada, mischief-maker” (44). Gopu is not happy with Nagaraj’s upbringing of Tim and says, “If he is growing in your shadow, he will be another Nagaraj. We do not want another Nagaraj in the family” (42).

To add to the trouble of Nagaraj, Tim starts visiting Kismet Bar, a club of the fashionable young spoiled people where, as the Talkative Man tells, “one can get everything from ice cream to whisky” (59). Without anyone’s knowledge he starts taking wine and tells lies time and again. He befools the poor couple by giving lame excuses. Nagaraj feels disturbed by his ways and manners. “He realized that his mind had lost its poise. His thoughts constantly revolved the subject of Tim, with many questions unanswered and he found it exhausting” (61). Thus, the peaceful world of Nagaraj is disturbed by Tim’s dubious ways and manners, but Nagaraj, being a cowardly uncle, is unable to keep a tab on his escapades. He thinks of Tim as a dog which does not change its nature of living in dust even if you make him stay in an aristocratic atmosphere. Tim sticks to his ways of deceiving others and living like an “unleashed donkey loafing about” to and fro. Nagaraj does not tell Gopu about the state of affairs and is held responsible. Gopu writes to Tim,

Boy, what is happening? You never write, and we do not know whether you are studying or wasting your time. If your uncle thinks he can leave you to live the existence of an unleashed donkey, he is mistaken. I’ll make him answer for your deeds... (65)

Later in the novel, Tim gets married and brings home a wife who loves playing music and singing songs. She disturbs the peacefulness of whole house by her noisy ways and practices. She regularly practices at harmonium without bothering about the comfort of others and does an intrusion into the peaceful and quiet existence of Nagaraj. The din of her blaring harmonium impinges upon his mental equipoise and pushes him into a tight corner. Nagaraj has to spend his maximum time outside his home. He is cornered in his own home, but feels afraid to tell all this to them. He forgets his work on Narada and feels utterly helpless in his own house.



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

He decides to do his work on Sage Narada in the nearby temple, instead of doing it in his own home, but is rebuked for such an idea by his wife, “When you are not able to find silence in your own home, how can you find it in the temple?” (134) In a state of utter helplessness he prays to God, “Please give that girl better sense than to sing, and inspire her not to deafen us with her harmonium and film hits” (94). In this state of dejection, he requests his wife Sita for help, “You must come to my rescue. I simply cannot write a single sentence unless Saroja mends her ways” (143). But even his wife can not help him. So, he decides to save himself from this incessant torture by stuffing cotton wool into his ears. “I shall also acquire a lot of cotton wool and try and pack it all in my ears so that even a thunderclap may sound like a whisper” (185), he thinks.

Thus, Nagaraj is subjected to great mental trouble and torture which he is unable to stand with. To add to his trouble, Tim decides to employ his wife at the Kismet Bar to entertain the customers with her music and songs. He does not give least concern to the family reputation and to the aristocracy of the Kabir Street and puts his family reputation at stake. Nagaraj is utterly distressed like Jagan when he comes to know of this fact. “Nagaraj felt stunned. He never thought it would come to this. A daughter-in-law of the family to sing to a set of drunkards at Kismet” (113). But Nagaraj, being a cowardly guardian like Jagan of *The Vendor of Sweets*, is unable to stop Tim from his deviation and suffers deep inside. He feels, “Life is getting more and more complex. All that I seek is freedom, peace of mind and scope to write my book” (117). The Talkative Man sees through Nagaraj’s state of mind and comes to his rescue in the same manner as the Cousin has come to the rescue of Jagan, and advises him, “Don’t worry. Let them do what they like. Young people of these days are different” (113).

Later in the novel, Tim takes away his wife Saroja with him without telling anybody in the house and starts living in the outhouse of Kismet bar and employs her there. But Nagaraj does not dare ask him anything, and for this he is rebuked by his brother Gopu, “Two solid persons, a husband and wife living in your care, leave the house and you don’t bother about it. Two solid persons just disappear, vanish into thin air, and you ask no question and have no



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

answer” (148). Gopu comes to Malgudi to take away Tim and Saroja with him to the village, but Tim refuses even to recognize him at the Kismet bar. The disheartened father takes it to his heart and leaves Malgudi without intimating even Nagaraj, holding him responsible for all that trouble which Tim has caused. He breaks all his relations with Tim and disowns him. In utter despair he declares,

I have no son. I disown him. You (Nagaraj) have misappropriated and ruined him completely. You may adopt him and assign your property to him as your successor so that you may have someone who will have the right to ignite the funeral pyre when you die... (171)

So, Tim is a heartless fellow who does not have any pricks of conscience in refusing to recognize his father, and leaving his uncle and aunt embarrassed. He is a shameless fellow and returns to Nagaraj after a fight with the secretary of the club at the Kismet bar. He comes back to him unmasked in the same manner as he had left him earlier in the novel to keep his life out of the gear, and Nagaraj, being a cowardly uncle, can not do anything, but accept and tolerate them.

Thus, the dialectic of being and becoming results in social and moral deviation in the case of Tim who does not care for the feelings and sentiments of his father and mother, uncle and aunt and does whatever comes into his heart

## Works Cited

- Kantak, V. Y. “R.K. Narayan’s Fiction: A Poser to Criticism.” *R.K. Narayan: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. Ed. C. N. Srinath. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000. 21-35. Print.
- Maini, D. S. “The Malgudi Man.” *Tribune* 9 Jan. 2005. Print.
- Narayan, R. K. *The World of Nagaraj*. 1990. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 2001. Print.
- Sharma, C. P. *The Novels of R. K. Narayan: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Prasangik Publishers, 2007. Print.





# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 July to September, 2019

---

Wordsworth, William. "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*. Oxford: Carendon Press, 1972. 508-513. Print.