

REVIEW ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

R K NARAYAN-THE SOOTH SAYER

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ABSTRACT

R K Narayan, an eminent and prolific writer in English, depicted the society with all its aberrations. A writer is expected to view the society with detachment and then make suggestions or modalities that need to be implemented for the well-being of society. Mr. Narayan exhibited considerable concern for the society and predicted the direction in which the society should move under the prevailing circumstances. It was for the intelligentsia, society, administrators and academicians to ponder over the issues raised by Mr. Narayan and take remedial action and change the direction of the society from what it is going to be to what it should be. While talking of responsibility, people in positions of power seek increased power and decreased responsibility. It is human nature to blame other people for the present state of affairs. What India needs now is an able administrator who is willing to accept responsibility and change the deteriorating educational standards. The system needs a new beginning and a new process to give it the necessary direction and strength, so that educational standards constantly improve and reach levels of excellence.

Key Words: Education, Society, Excellence, Educational Standards, Prediction

Introduction

Most of us have read R K Narayan's books, enjoyed the portrayal of his characters, the natural setting of Malgudi and its description at length. Mr Narayan wrote his novel *The Bachelor of Arts* in the year 1937, well before our independence. I am of the opinion that he was trying to tell us of the future happenings in Independent India.

Indian History

If we go back and study Indian History, we see that from about 800 AD, we have been ruled by people external to Indian culture and ethos. If we go by the description, or detailing the chronology of external aggressors, we have Chandellas of BundelKhand, then came Mahmud Ghazni, who is credited with destroying temples and looting the riches from this country. Then we had visits by Genghis Khan, Khalifas, rein of Tughlaq, Bahamani

Kings in South India. The Mughals and finally the British ruled India till it got independence in 1947. After having gone through the book, Bachelor of Arts, several times during a span of 15 years, a new thought has come to me that Mr Narayan was actually telling us through this book, as to how the future of India is going to shape.

Education

A country's future is shaped by its education. India had five Universities in 700BC. It was the centre of learning for people from other countries. In fact, the history of India is that which was written by non-Indians. They praised the educational system prevailing at that point of time in India. When the British started establishing their hold on Indian Territory, it was Macaulay who wanted to destroy Indian culture through British education, specifically by teaching English to the

native population. He played a major role in introducing English education in this country. He initiated English as a medium of instruction.

"We must do our best to form a class of people who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern". "This class of people has Indian blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". "To this class we have to give the responsibility of refining the local dialects, enrich the dialect with scientific terms borrowed from Western literature and render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of population".

The affect of this, we are able to see very clearly in modern day Pakistan, where elite live in luxury and the vast majority live in poverty and face innumerable obstacles in fulfilling their basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.

The results of a study carried out in Kenya has shown that improved teacher ratios, increased technology in education has not yielded the results predicted or anticipated through such innovative practices. In fact, there has been very little change as far as the output is concerned, despite increase in inputs, living conditions, availability of reading material. "Since language is the basis for communicating knowledge, teaching has to be done in the local language up to primary level, till the student is able to master the local language. The system has to be reformed before the inputs can do their job"

The book starts with a history student required to condemn historians in a college debate. Debates are not really serious issues, they are primarily meant to expose the student to critical thinking and to improve communication skills.

Mr Narayan brings out elegantly, the plight of today's education where the student is made to switch on and off his mind, depending on the subject of study during the hour. There appears to be no continuity in the process of learning something to its logical end before moving to another subject or another area that needs to be learnt.

We also see from the description that there are only about 70 odd people in an auditorium that can accommodate 1000 people. This shows both the

apathy of faculty and students to learn to listen to others. Our own mind is full of ideas that we seldom like to listen to others. Unfortunately, much of learning takes place through listening. "It was a quite a big gathering for a union debate" sums up the whole issue. The next one, almost repeat what their principal speaker has said, only brings us to the conclusion, the bankruptcy in education. Education should lead us to critical thinking and come to independent conclusions. Mostly parroting others ideas has come to be called modern education.

Appearances are deceptive and it is difficult to conceal them. Education is a service to society in terms of moulding future generations but the same is being undertaken without sincerity or commitment.

It is strange that co-curricular activities take up so much time of the student that he/she is hardly left with any time to concentrate on curricular activities. No wonder, the students coming out of our educational institutions lack depth of knowledge that is commensurate with the qualification that is conferred on them. With superficial knowledge, they are neither useful to themselves nor to industry. Thus resulting in a burden to society or bring mediocrity in to the system instead of excellence.

History is a record of human culture and development. Unfortunately, Indian history that we read today has essentially been documented by foreigners, mostly by Chinese or Europeans. Somehow Indians failed to record their own history. Thus having to rely on what is available.

Mr Narayan greatly understood the futility of an education system that neither produced skill nor proficiency. He also visualized the consequence of such a system. He prophesied that people would get into organizations through recommendation or through influence or through corruption. From a critical reading of the characters portrayed by Mr Narayan, we see that the work done is not at all related to the education one acquires.

The view, that education means acquiring a few degrees and using those degrees to acquire a job, to make a living. The purpose of education has been degraded to the extent that it becomes the source for making a living.

The education system does not help the students to embark on a career that is in tune with the learning that they have done over the years in the college. We see students struggling to get jobs even after two or three years after graduation.

Mr Narayan rightly portrays the importance and usefulness in the following traditional systems. We see this very clearly in matching of horoscopes before marriage. The consequence of matching the horoscopes reveals the events that will take place in the future.

Chandran runs away from home and becomes an aesthetic or sanyasi. It is treated as second birth or "born again". We see this, in the case of Adi Sankara, where he got extended lease of life after taking Sanyasa.

Education should help individuals to understand and interpret the problems to find reasonable or meaningful solutions. Education should help the use of intellect and curb influence of impulsive action.

We also see that at some point of time in life, the impulse loses its force or strength and intellect regains its lost ground. This he portrays beautifully through the return of Chandran to his parent's home. This is the strength and hallmark of Indian society.

We see, Chandran, interested in becoming a distributor for a news paper. To be a distributor one does not require any educational qualification nor would it help to develop business through mere qualification.

Mr Narayan through the character of Chandran pushes his ideas on various aspects of life. They could be related to prevalence of dowry system, formalities during the marriages, greed that exists to make that extra rupee or the economic dimension of earning for forty years and spending for forty years.

In this social milieu, people should be married when they reach a particular age, irrespective of their financial status is intriguing. Falling in love is something which people always do. All movies are made with the intention of making the hero and heroine fall in love with one another. In a conservative society, like Indian society of the 1930's, social movies played a very important role.

The concept of love leading to marriage is a concept predominately written by European English writers as it finds an easy market and brings plenty of money to the authors. In India, the belief is that love takes time to develop and remains for a long time. Infatuation on the other hand is more physical and intense and fades with time. No wonder many of the love marriages are leading to divorce. The concept of marriage as a permanent relationship between two people which stands for a life time has not been understood. There is no such term or word as divorce in Indian literature as there is no opportunity to take such recourse.

'Every vote is purchased with coffee and Tiffin.' Corruption starts in educational institutions. Educational institutions are supposed to be **islands of purity** in a sea of corruption, but unfortunately, the seeds of corruption are sown in the very institutions of learning.

"You begged, borrowed and stole votes at the union elections".

He talks about self-respect and cowardice. As one is growing old, one need not fear their parents. One needs to exhibit independence and valour.

This is a wretched country. It is not customary to take people to cinemas, unless they are part of the family. Acquaintances and friends from the opposite sex are not to be seen in public.

It is generally observed that many students spend days and months in the colleges without making any effort to learn. Suddenly, by November, the examinations are staring in the face of students. This has led to what we call continuous learning and evaluation in today's education. From November, students plan their study for the examination, but the plans are never implemented in letter and spirit. Reading five thousand pages, four times over, ie 20,000 pages in one twenty eight days, is the target. Present students are not responsible by nature. He himself used to study for two hours before going to school.

Non availability of flowers is something worrying his mother. Economics is brought into picture and tried to be related to religion.

Abstaining from classes has been whimsical. Teachers reprimand students in an open class for not giving up such opportunities that they have.

Imagine two hundred students in a class and what learning can really take place. Instruction is generally collective but addressed to individuals.

The system is, if one starts something in one department, all other departments must follow suit to show that they too are active and creative.

The ignorance on historical matters is appalling. Even Mahatma Gandhi vouched for learning from history.

Each meeting that is conducted is selfless sacrifice on the part of the student, not getting any material benefit or additional marks for undertaking that activity.

The problem with teaching faculty is that once they start, they cannot stop till 45 or 50 minutes because of their condition in taking subject classes for a similar duration.

He also brings out the importance of mother in Indian cultural ethos. A critical observation, that "mother is a sacred object. It is a commodity whose value we do not realize as long as it is with us. Mother is a rare commodity".

An idea once embedded in the mind, is very difficult to erase. Mr Narayan suggests a unique method wherein he proposes to weaken the idea rather than erase it, by strengthening another idea. This leads to Chandran changing his mind towards marriage and then finally accepting it.

All in all, the narration depicted in the novel 'The Bachelor of Arts', Mr. Narayan foresaw and was able to predict how the society would behave once it obtains freedom from colonial rule. He also listed out the problems and forced us to think on those problems.

Unfortunately, neither the society nor the administrators, nor the students paid any heed to the issues raised by him.

No wonder, Eighty percent of our engineering graduates lack the skill or the knowledge to find employment.

We also see that out of the large number of students who take employability test, only a few qualify.

India's skills report, 2015, compiled after gathering information from 125 institutions, concluded that Indians lack necessary skills.

This has forced the government to impart skill development training outside the colleges, whereas the same should be done within the colleges.

India had an opportunity to be the manufacturing hub of the world as it had a large work force but lost out to China because of lack of adequate skills. Today, the governments, educational institutions are coming out with new catchy phrases such as entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity without knowing how they are going to achieve this within the colleges.

Conclusion

A Critical analysis of reading *The Bachelor of Arts* has led me to conclude that Mr Narayan was a soothsayer, a forecaster, a prophet but regret to say that nobody paid attention to what he was trying to convey through his novels, for which the Indian society is paying a heavy price today in trying to understand and address the problems visualized by Mr Narayan.

Reference

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