

Realization of Spiritual Resurrection through Divine Ecstasy in R. K. Narayan's *The English Teacher*

RAM PRAVESH SINGH

Abstract. The soul of religion and spirituality resides in faith. And the existing of faith is based on realisation. We believe in god, soul, unseen forces in Nature and there in mortality. We pay homage, offer prayers or worship then in our own wage. We realize somehow or other atleast in a pious moment the divine presence of the invisible forces. R. K. Narayan narrates his realisation of the immortality of the soul in his autobiographical novel *The English Teacher*. It is a detailed love story of Krishna and Susila. True love and its manifestation in life and also after death is the main theme of the novel. The conjugal life of Krishna and Susila was very happy and ideal but Susila dies of typhoid leaving Krishna in the ocean of sorrow. In course of time a moment comes in his life when he has ecstatic vision of his wife's vision. They talked as if she were alive. Krishna thinks it a moment of rare immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death. It cannot be underestimated simply as mere physical projection of Krishna's psychic ecstasy. R. K. Narayan reveals his life-felt experiences of divine existence through his novels with intention to inspire people to pay heed to their own such realisation and share others so that the sanctity of individual as well as the social life may be maintained. In today's world of materialism dominated by modern science and technology, faith in supra-human existence has been fast decreasing. Man is running after material glamour which often results into degradation of moral values. Spiritual bent of mind makes us morally strong. We should maintain a harmonious balance between physical and spiritual perceptions of life. Perhaps this is the message R. K. Narayan wants to convey through this novel.

Keywords : Autobiographical novel; conjugal life; spiritual resurrection; divine ecstasy, supra-human existence.

The soul of religion and spirituality resides in faith. And the existence of faith is based on realization. We believe in God, soul, unseen forces in Nature and their immortality. We believe not only in many gods and goddesses but also in great souls of eminent saints in almost all religious communities. But they cannot be proved either in laboratory or by reasoning. That is why in the modern age of mono-dimensional materialistic science spirituality is losing its ground. People's minds are being corrupted by the dominance of the mundane realities. They are being converted atheists which make their lives superficial and selfish. Humanity is under the threat of its down fall. So philanthropists all over the world have been trying their best to serve mankind through their ideas and realization so that human values may be saved. We pay homage, offer prayers and offerings or worship them in our own ways. We realize somehow or other at least in a pious moment the divine presence of their souls having powers to bless us which win our hearts and

minds. R.K. Narayan, a great Indian writer of English fiction, narrates his realization of the immortality of soul in his autobiographical novel *The English Teacher*. The protagonist of the novel Krishna is literary creation of his own image. An extract from Narayan's autobiography *My Days* may be pertinent here in this context:

More than any other book, *The English Teacher* is autobiographically in content, very little part of it being fiction. The "English Teacher" of the novel, Krishna, is a fictional character in the fictional city of Malgudi; but he goes through the same experience I had gone through, and he calls his wife Susila, and the child is Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after, and the psychic adjustment, are based on my own experience... The dedication of the book to the memory of my wife should to some extent give the reader a clue that the book may not be all fiction... (*My Days*, 188)

The English Teacher is a detailed love story of Krishna and Susila. True love and its manifestation in life and also after death is the main theme of this novel. Conjugal life of Krishna is nothing less than a blessed one. Susila in her indigo coloured saree and jasmine decorated hair look like a vision to him. They are happy. Outings for cinema, restaurant, park, beautiful places, merry-making and day-dreaming are common affairs in their lives. Krishna lives intoxicated in her love. His wife is to him not merely a physical form but also an abstract sense of beauty and sensibility. But his charming life gets a severe jolt. During the course of search for their own house Susila suffers infection of typhoid and in spite of the best efforts of her husband and parents to cure the disease she succumbs to it. Krishna is drown in the ocean of sorrow. He is now a broken man. He feels himself unable to do anything due to the emotional shock of his wife's death. He feels himself crippled. So he goes to contact a tantric who may help him to envision the soul of his dead wife. He is hankering for his wife's communion which is expressed through his own words:

I am an imbecile, incapable of doing anything or answering any question. I'm incapable of doing anything except what our priest orders me to do... there are no more surprises and shocks in life, so that I watch the flames without agitation. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter. (*The English Teacher*, 106-107)

Krishna begins to revive his energy. He goes to the college and performs his duties mainly of teaching English. But his attention is naturally drawn towards the childlike innocence of the divine world. At times he deviates from the devotion of his teaching in which scientific, psychological, logical and intellectual discussion and debate does not appeal to the visionary spirit in him. So he resigns from the college and joins a children's school where he enjoys the heavenly innocence. A farewell party has been arranged by Albert Mission College to honour Krishna who is also an ex-student of the college. Krishna returns home with a jasmine garland in his hand. But he is emotionally plunged into a grave sense that Susila is no more for welcoming delightfully at home. An extract from *Indian Writing in English* by K.R.S Iyengar may be enough to visualize Krishna's ecstasy:

He reflects sadly on the way that there is no Susila at home to receive the garland. Back in his lonely room he cries in his access of despair: My wife, my wife, my wife. Now the miracle happens, for she is by his side:

Susila! Susila! I cried. 'You here'! "Yes, I'm here, have always been here'. I sat up leaning on my pillow... I looked her up and down and said: 'How well you look'! Her complexion had a golden glow, her eyes sparkled with a new light, her saree shimmered with blue interwoven with 'light', as she had termed it... There was an overwhelming fragrance of jasmine surrounding her... I picked up the garland from the nail and returned to bed. I held it to her... She received it with a smile, cut off a piece of it and stuck it in a curve on the back of her head. She turned her head and asked: 'Is this all right'?

'Wonderful', I said, smelling it.

Is Krishna dreaming? Is it anything more than the physical projection of Krishna's psychic ecstasy? Even so, isn't this a resurrection greater than life! "The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved", Krishna concludes his autobiographical narrative; "It was a moment of rare, immutable joy—a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death". (*Indian Writing in English*, 370)

R.K. Narayan plays the role of a social worker through his literary creations which arises in man pious feelings and realization. He takes an individual and a family as units of civilized society. Through a family of Krishna, Susila and Leela

he portrays ideal social norms before mankind. If the couple have ideal relationship their lives exist on all the three planes—physical, intellectual and spiritual. J.M. Purohit's observation in this regard deserve mention:

The novel presents the man-woman relationship on two levels, the worldly or domestic and the spiritual... it is after a long feeling of nihilism that Krishna comes to have spiritual experiences through occultism with the help of a friend. Like Narayan, he establishes a close contact with his dead wife, and at a certain hour for many days himself in her company, feeling her presence without seeing her. In her company he writes down very fast on the paper many things under her directions. In just thirty-five minutes, twenty-four hundred words are written with an extraordinary speed. Under her spell he moves step by step towards attaining receptivity and clarity of mind. His attitude to life is completely transformed and he feels profound impact of her. She helps him to comprehend the meaning of life and death, thus getting relieved of the pain at heart. Death is explained to him as only the vanishing point of the physical body which embodies a personality and makes it work in the temporal world.

(Major Novels of R K Narayan, 189)

This episode of Krishna's life reminds us of the divine miracles prevailing in almost all religions. Buddhists' search for Dalai Lama's as the incarnation of Lord Buddha, Hindus' worship of Kuldevta and Kuldevi (ancestral gods and goddesses), miraculous blessings of sufi saints, and above all Resurrection of Jesus Christ after his Crucifixion are such holy instances that can never be denied since they are beyond the limits of material science, human psychology and all rational reasoning. A passage from Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia may be quoted to strengthen the view that the realization of spiritual resurrection is a grand reality, at least far greater than mere physical existence:

Jesus: In CHRISTIANITY, the son of God and the second person of the Holy TRINITY. Christian doctrine holds that by his CRUCIFIXION and resurrection he paid for the sins of all mankind. His life and ministry are recounted in the four GOSPELS of the NEW TESTAMENT. He was born a Jew in Bethlehem before the death of HEROD the Great in 4 BC, and he died while Pontius Pilate was Roman governor of Judaea (AD

28-30). His mother, MARY, was married to Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth (see St. Joseph). Of his childhood after the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, nothing is known, except for one visit to Jerusalem with his parents. He began his ministry about age 30, becoming a preacher, teacher, and healer. He gathered disciples in the region of GALILEE, including the 12 APOSTLES, and preached the imminent arrival of the KINGDOM OF GOD. His moral teachings, outlined in the SERMON ON THE MOUNT, and his reported miracles won him a growing number of followers, who believed that he was the promised MESSIAH. On Passover he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, where he shared the Last Supper with his disciples and was betrayed to the Roman authorities by JUDAS ISCARIOT. Arrested and tried, he was condemned to death as a political agitator and was crucified and buried. Three days later visitors to his tomb found it empty. According to the Gospels, he appeared several times to his disciples before ascending into heaven. (*Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia*, 182)

In this way it may be concluded that R.K. Narayan, by creating Krishna and Susila in his autobiographical novel *The English Teacher*, reveals his life felt experiences of divine existence with intension to inspire the human folk to pay heed to their own such spiritual realization and share others so that the sanctity of pious individual as well social life may be maintained. In today's world of materialism dominated by science and technology faith in supra-human existence has been fast decreasing. Man is running after material glamour which often results into degradation of moral values. Material gain is, no doubt, good but it must not be achieved at the cost of goodness in life. We may have economic success along with maintaining the moral standard in life. Spiritual bent of mind never provide hurdles for material achievement. We should maintain a harmonious balance between physical and spiritual perceptions of life. It will be an all round healthy life. Perhaps this is the message R.K. Narayan wants to convey to the modern civilization through his autobiographical novel *The English Teacher*. Once again an observation of K.R.S.Iyengar on R.K.Narayan's fiction may be relevant and may serve as an eye-opener of the sensitive human beings :

It may likewise be said of Narayan's latest novels that we do witness in them, amid all the small talk and crazed thoughts, all the comic gestures and frantic movements, the miracle of Faith enacting its own mysterious

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sunrise in minds darkened and deadened by
the galloping herds of the sickness of modern
life. (*Indian Writing in English*, 385)

Ram Pravesh Singh

Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of English
M.G.P.G. College, Fatehpur, U. P.

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