

A Study of Humour through Words and Ideas in the Select Works of R. K. Narayan

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Humour through Words

Language has a vast potential for comic possibilities. Humour arising out of words, or rather from the incongruity of words and speech, is probably the earliest and the most primitive form of humour conveyed in language, apart from pantomime, gesture and action. R. K. Narayan has used different techniques to produce verbal humour arising out of jokes, jests, exaggeration, under statement and also by the clever use of language in various ways.

Reciprocal Interference

Bergson observes that “repetition, inversion and reciprocal interference of series are methods of light comedy” (117). These methods can be applied to a series of words, events or actions. Repetition means repeats of certain words for its humorous effects. Inversion is the least interesting device and it means putting a subject in the place of an object. Narayan does not make use of this technique. Bergson explains how “the reciprocal interference of two sets of ideas in the same sentence is an inexhaustible source of amusing varieties” (138).

There are many ways of bringing about this interference, such as bracketing in the same expression two independent meanings that apparently tally. In pun, for example, the same sentence appears to offer two independent meanings, but it is only an appearance: in reality there are two different sentences, made up of different words, claiming to be one and the same because both have the same sound. The true play upon words is different from pun. In this instance, there is only one sentence through which two different sets of ideas are expressed. Here the advantage is taken of the different meanings a word may have, especially when used figuratively instead of literally.

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Alliteration

Alliteration means the reappearance of the same letter used as a means of emphasis or of amusement. Narayan does not indulge in verbal tricks like repetition, alliteration, pun, bad spelling and grammar. In the earlier works like Swami and Friends (1935) one can occasionally come across queer expressions and comparisons like “Fire-eyed Vedanayagam” (3) or “Mighty Good – For – Nothing” (8). He uses exaggeration when he describes Shanker:

There was a belief among a section of the boys
that if only he started cross examining the teachers
the teachers would be nowhere.... He knew all
the rivers, mountains and countries in the world.
He could repeat History in his sleep. Grammar
was child’s play to him (8-9).

When the teacher asks Swaminathan what he knew about the Indian Climate, he curtly replies: “It’s hot in summer and cold in winter” (16). When Shanker asks ‘the pea’, “What is a Tail?”, he replies, “A long thing that attaches itself to an ass or a dog” (31). When Swami receives his first shock in his life, when he learns that he is nicknamed “Rajam’s Tail”, his reaction is described with mock-heroic seriousness. At home Swami spends his time sitting on the Pyol and “vacantly gazing into the dark intricacies of the gutter that adorned Vinayaka Mudali Street” (Swami, 32). The description of the paper boat floating through the gutter with an ant in it shows Narayan’s ability for minute observation and description of every simple act. It gives the feeling of a big boat floating through a swift and turbulent river. Finally a thick dry leaf from a tree fell down and upset it:

Swaminathan ran frantically to the spot to see if he could
save at least the ant. He peered long into the water, but there
was no sign of the ant. The boat and its cargo were wrecked
beyond recovery. He took a pinch of earth, uttered a prayer
for the soul of the ant, and dropped it into the gutter. (Swami ,33).

Mischief and Fun

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Swami and Friends is full of mischief and fun. Swami mews like a cat and Mani barks like a dog while entering Rajam's room. Sitting on the last bench Swami and his friends pass bits of paper such as "Are you a man?" or "You are the son of a dog if you don't answer this"(16). When the teacher asks Swaminathan to stand upon the bench as a punishment, his eyes fell on the little heads below which he classified according to the types and colours of the caps they wore. When Somu and Mani were fighting in the field, somebody reported the matter to the Principal that "in the adjacent field two murders were being committed at that very moment" (41).

Repetition of Words for Humorous Effect

Similarly Narayan repeats certain words for its humorous effect. "If Mani jabbed, Rajam jabbed: If Mani clouted, he clouted: If Mani kicked, he kicked" (14). In The English Teacher Principal Brown summons his staff and informs them of an English Honours boy who did not know that "honours" had to be spelt with a "u". Sometimes the ignorance of children leads to their deceptions. Swami and his friends do not understand words like "obliged" and "remit" which they find in the letter by M/s. Binns, Sportsmen from Madras. They think that the letter was sent to them by mistake, and so they send it back.

Humour in the Opening Page of the Novel

As in Swami and Friends so also in The Bachelor of Arts we get verbal humour in the opening page of the novel:

Chandran was just climbing the steps of the College Union when Natesan, the secretary, sprang on him and said, "You are just the person I was looking for. You remember your old promise?"

"No," said Chandran promptly, to be on the safe side. "You promised that I could count on you for a debate any time I was hard pressed for a speaker. You must help me now. I can't get a Prime Mover for the debate to-morrow evening. The subject is that in the opinion of this house historians should be slaughtered first. You are the Prime Mover. At five to-morrow evening". He tried to be off, but Chandran caught his hand and held him: 'I am a history student. I can't move the subject. What a subject! My professor will eat me up'".

“Don’t worry. I won’t invite your professor.”

“But why not some other subject?”

“We can’t change the Union Calendar now.”

Chandran pleaded, “Any other day, any other subject.”

“Impossible”, said the secretary, and shook himself free.

“At least make me the Prime Opposer,” pleaded Chandran.

“You are a brilliant Mover. The notices will be out in an hour. To-morrow evening at five...” (1).

Chandran did move the proposition and ‘felt he was already a remarkable orator’. Here in this extract we have an insight into Narayan’s characteristic handling of his material: The right man for the wrong thing and vice versa; and the man’s awareness of his self-importance and the attempt to be equal to the task despite the incongruity, for such is his craze for personal distinction.

Humour through Deflation

There is another verbal humour arises through the deflation of the professor Raghavachar. Chandran cuts professor to size- a size with which the student feels quite comfortable. It is this which makes survival possible for Narayan’s heroes: the illusion of their own loftiness coupled with a healthy disrespect for others, teachers not excepted. At first he felt nervous when he went to see the professor. He suddenly pulled himself up,

Why this cowardice? Why should he be afraid of Raghavachar or anybody? Human being to human being. Remove these spectacles, the turban, and the long coat and let Raghavachar appear only in loin-cloth and Mr.Raghavachar would lose three quarters of his appearance. Where was the sense of feeling nervous before a pair of spectacles, a turban and a black long coat? (26).

In the last sentence of the passage quoted above we get an instance of Narayan’s wit, clever use of language which amuses and delights.

Humour in Tragedy and Pathos

The English Teacher is over-flooded with tragedy and pathos but Narayan has restrained his sense of verbal humour in different situations and characters. Mr. Brown, the principal of Albert Mission College leavens his sermon with humour “It would be a serious enough blunder even from a mathematics honours man” (6). Krishna and his colleagues were talking on the spelling of the word ‘honours’ but Gopal, the teacher of Mathematics, did not seem to be agreeing with them. Narayan makes fun of Gopal, “His precise, literal brain refused to move where it had no concrete facts or figures to grip. Symbols, if they entered his brain at all, entered only as mathematical symbols” (8).

Solemnity and Humour

When Krishna returned to his hostel room, he found two letters. There was a pale blue envelope from his wife. He humorously explains his wife’s letter as, “I knew the pale blue envelope from my wife who was in the habit of underlining the town three times, she seemed to be always anxious lest the letter should go off to some other town” (17). Susila in the early years of her married life, she used to read out her stanzas from the poems and she would laugh at everything. Even the most solemn poem would provoke her, especially such poems as were addressed by a lover. “My true love hath my heart and I have his”. She would laugh till she became red in the face. “Why can’t each keep his own or her own heart instead of this exchange?” she then searched all Krishna’s pockets saying, “In case you should take away mine” (43).

Sarcasm and Humour

On the third birthday of Leela, Krishna and Susila went to a restaurant. Susila was so much pleased with the marble walls that she ran her fingers over them. She told Krishna that she would like to have tile walls in her house. She was a bit discouraged when Krishna told that in civilized cities marble tiles were used only in bathrooms. Later, when in order to please her, he says generously that he will have coloured marbles fitted along the walls of her room, she quips: “So that you may call it the bathroom” (60). Mr.Sastri, a colleague of Krishna arranged a house with the help of the contractor. “The contractor commanded the boy, “Are all the house open?” ‘Yes master’, ‘Don’t say ‘yes’! Keep them open he said, ‘Yes, master’ he said?” (58).

Human Foibles, Eccentricity and Humour

Krishna with the help of his student went to see a rented house. Krishna liked one house at first sight. After seeing the house, Krishna decided to engage a friendly conversation with the owner of the house but he owner did not want it. “He had his pocket filled with fried nuts, and was ceaselessly transferring them to his mouth” (25). When Krishna checking out the hostel room, Singaram joined with him in packing up and loading his things. He walked behind the creaking cart and warned the driver: “When you unload, remove the trunk first and the table last. If I hear that you have been broken any leg, I will break your hear” (27).

Seizing Every Opportunity for Humour

Susila is hospitalized because of typhoid. Even though the atmosphere is pathetic, Narayan cannot stay away from humour. The way in which the pain travels is humorous here: “Last night, the other began and gave a long-winded account of a pain in the back of the head, which traveled all the way down to his ankle and went up again” (73). The humorous episode narrated by the Doctor to Susila who laughs so much that her sides begin to ache: “He then narrated his experience of a home, ... where a daughter-in-law fell ill and was in bed for two weeks or so, and put on weight. Her husband came to him privately and said, ‘Doctor, please keep her in bed for a fortnight more. It is almost her only chance of being free from the harassment of her mother-in-law” (76). In his later works Narayan does not very much depend on verbal effects for humour. It can be seen that Narayan uses a very simple, prosaic style and there are no “tricks and turns”, and other artifices of words that produce verbal humour.

Wit and Humour

“Wit” and “Humour” are always taken to mean the same thing. Wit is basically playing with ideas. William Hazlitt describes wit as an arbitrary juxtaposition of dissonant ideas for some lively purpose of assimilation or contrast, generally both. It has also been described as ‘contrast of ideas’, ‘sense in nonsense’ and ‘confusion and cleverness’. George Eliot calls wit “reasoning raised to a higher plane” (218). Leacock defines wit “as being an expression of humour involving an unexpected play upon words... There could not be real wit without humour” (HH, 57). The essence of wit is a quick pounce on similarity. The witty comment will often consist of an amusing comparison of two things that normally would not be thought of as similar. Though wit

is often based on similarities between things, it can take other forms as well. Sometimes witty comments achieve its effect by looking at a situation from an incongruous point of view. To understand the comment we have to shift to that point of view from the ordinary one: doing so amuses us and we express our amusement in laughter. In written humour there is always some word or phrase in which the whole matter of the joke is fused and from which its power radiates. Humour always operates on a dual principle of an ambiguity, and a contrast or incongruity between appearance and reality.

Hazlitt considers wit essentially as a species of the ludicrous. Leigh Hunt included wit and humour as two species of the laughable, even though laughter need not result from both. According to him humour deals in incongruities of character and circumstances, as wit does in those of arbitrary ideas (10). It has been said that brevity is the soul of wit. Wit thus being brief expresses itself by leaving things unsaid. Thus wit unearths something hidden and concealed. Because of its keener edge and effective stroke, wit has often been associated with satire and sadism; humour is related to depression, narcissism and masochism” (Gortjahn, 33). Narayan does not make use of the ‘tricks and turns’ of words to produce humour, but there are indeed very mild and subtle verbal effects in his early works and some of the stories.

Humour through Ideas – Incongruity of Ideas

Incongruity of ideas is a very fertile source of humour which may be expressed without any special departures in the use of the single words. Hence the two run close together. Narayan delighted in the expression of humour through ideas. Even though he laughs at or points out the discrepancies, disorders and oddities in human society, his humour is not essentially satirical. His satire is mild and gentle and does not go to the extent of attack or ridicule.

Transposing

According to Bergson, “a comic effect is always obtainable by transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key” (140). The means of transposition are so many and varied that the comic here is capable of passing through a number of stages from the most insipid buffoonery to the loftiest forms of humour and irony. For example, if the solemn is transposed into the familiar, the result is parody. Similarly inverse transposition may be even more comic.

According to Bergson the most common contrast is between the real and the ideal, between what is and what ought to be. He further argues that here again transposition may take place in either direction:

Sometimes we state what ought to be done and pretend to believe that this is just what is actually being done: then we have irony. Sometimes, on the contrary, we describe with scrupulous minuteness what is being done, and pretend to believe that this is just what ought to be done: such is often the method of humour. Humour, thus defined, is the counterpart of irony. Both are forms of satire, but irony is oratorical in nature, whilst humour partakes of the scientific. (142-43).

Humour in Narayan's Sketches and Essays

Narayan delighted in the expression of humour through ideas which can be found in his essays and sketches. Even though he has not written parodies and burlesques like the western writers, Narayan always tried to write discursive essays. As he himself says:

I have always been drawn to the personal essay in which you could see something of the author himself apart from the theme... The personal essay was enjoyable because it had the writer's likes, dislikes, and his observations, always with a special flavour of humour, sympathy, aversion, style, charm, even oddity... the mood may be somber, hilarious or satirical and the theme may range from what the author notices from his window, to what he sees in his waste-paper basket, to a world cataclysm. (A writer's , 8)

Next Sunday (1956) and Reluctant Guru (1974) are collection of essays and sketches which Narayan contributed to the Sunday edition of "The Hindu", a Madras daily. Selections from these books and later essays are put together in A Writer's Nightmare (1989) and A Story Teller's World (1989). Inspired by modern English essayists like Robert Lynd, E.V. Lucas and a host of others, these essays cover a wide variety of interesting contemporary topics.

Next Sunday, a collection of fifty-five essays and sketches, reveals Narayan's personality as a humorist in the essayistic mode. It covers a wide variety of topics such as red-tapism and bureaucracy, education, leisure, marriage, parenthood, humour, wit and various forms of human oddities and contradictions. In the title essay, which is placed towards the end of the book, Narayan reflects on the anticipated freedom and leisure of Sunday and its overcrowded schedule, and finally postpones a particular work to the next Sunday. "Government Music" is a satire on Indian bureaucracy and the government's enthusiasm for nationalizing everything. "When music came to be nationalized the director-general of music will say in his administration report: During the period under review two hundred thousand hours of vocal and sixteen hundred hours of instrumental music were provided for a total audience of 1,25,000..."(11).

Poking Fun at the Original Constitutional Provision to Retain English for Only 15 Years

Narayan has repeatedly written about the importance of English language in the Indian subcontinent where each state has a different language. "Fifteen Years" is a very interesting argument between the English language and the Indian judge who, though he speaks very good English, is out to banish "the language of those who were our political oppressors". The English language pleads on the ground that it has been here for two hundred years and that the red tape, parliament and courts still continue to use it and the criminal and civil procedure codes are still in English. The judge finally rules that English is going to be deported. "The utmost we shall allow you will be another fifteen years..." The English language asks, "Fifteen years from what time?" The judge felt so confused that he allowed no more discussion on this subject and rose for the day (16-17).

Humour in Allergy

"Allergy" is a playful exercise of pure wit. Narayan begins with a brief account of the good old medical system where the doctor wrote with one hand, while feeling the pulse of the patients with the other, and "the compounder in the adjacent room issued ready-made mixtures out of gigantic bottles and placed his stamp on the prescriptions with an air of dismissing sickness for ever" (28). Narayan mocks at the modern craze for new scientific terminologies. About 'allergy' he observes that in the course of one week he heard four different doctors mentioning 'allergy' under four different conditions. People suffering from rashes, cough, high

fever, and even those feeling fidgety are all said to be allergic. It has become “a very generous and compendious word meaning anything” (30). Narayan concludes the essay by saying that “it will be possible to say some day, pointing at a passing funeral, “That man is not dead, but is only allergic to life” (30).

Humour Out of Politics

“Two-way Democracy” is a plea to call back or “de-elect” unwanted or erring politicians already elected. In the essay “On knowledge” the paradox is very clear. Just as a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, so too are much knowledge and unnecessary knowledge. “The test of a man’s worth will ultimately have to be not how much he knows, but how much he has avoided knowing” (100).

Humour in Foreign Lands

“A Writer’s Nightmare” is a humorous nightmare account of how Narayan found himself in a strange country called Xanadu, where the government had to start a new department called the controller of stories. The government explained the matter thus: “Through an error in our Government printing section, five tons of forms intended for the controller of ‘stores’ were printed controller of ‘stories’, an unwanted ‘i’ having crept into the text” (124). Since the stationery was inadvertently ready, the government was obliged to find a use for all this printed stuff by starting a department of stories. The rest of the essay deals with the explanation given by the minister at the parliament about the working of this new department.

Making Fun of the Varieties of English

Reluctant Guru, which contains forty essays, is further testimony to Narayan’s ability to write engagingly on any relevant topic. Narayan himself is the reluctant guru, reluctant to play the all-knowing mystic before a group of students and the faculty of a mid-western university. “My Educational Outlook” is a satire on the Indian system of examinations and the secrecy attached to examinations. In “Toasted English”, Narayan makes fun of American English. “Murder for Pleasure” is a thought-provoking study in which he wonders how a detective story, which begins with a murder, and a tragedy which concludes with a killing, can be a source of pleasure. “Taxing Thoughts” is a hilarious account of the government’s policy of taxation. While

the citizen hates all associations with tax, Narayan fears that the tax authorities may tax even walking and breathing. For Narayan 'culture' is a trouble-free word that came handy to politician, scholar, dreamer and the wind bag alike. A Professor started off his lecture with "Culture may be divided into agriculture, horticulture, apiculture, sericulture, pisciculture, and of course you must have heard of cultured pearls" (65).

Non-sense Humour

Narayan at times shows a tendency to indulge in nonsense humour. In the modern big cities children have no idea where the milk at home comes from—may be from the milk shops or milk cans. Whatever be the topic Narayan writes—on music, colour, weather, noise, cast—system, brain—drain or election games—his genial humour and good sense make them quite readable and enjoyable. "Elephant in the Pit" is a moving account of elephant—hunting and how the villagers capture an elephant. He falls into the pit, but dies. It is indeed a touching account and shows Narayan's capacity for pathos. As a keen and critical observer of life, Narayan shows genuine flashes of humour and wit and most of the pieces have a touch of Bacon or Addison.

Fantasy and Humour

"Sorry-No Room" in A Writer's Nightmare is an interesting fantasy in which a soul reaches the portals of heaven "far ahead of his time". He explains to the guard in a humorous way how he happened to be there. But the guard directs "him to the gates of hell where admission is more difficult than at other places. The standards here are much stricter, being reserved for VIPs from the world of politics, diplomacy and business. When asked how they are chastised and chastened, the guard explains:

That's only a formality here. Not for them the vigours. Although they are put through all that in a routine manner, the purging of sins is gradual and in agreeable doses. We apply a system called "Tempered Torment", "Cold Branding", and "Cushioned Flogging"—but all that is a formal procedure once a day. On the whole they are at peace with themselves and do not want a change. (163).

The guard assures to put him on the waiting list, for sometimes a vacancy occurs through a freak cancellation or absence. He asks the soul to go back to earth or "float around the galaxies

or better still get on to one of those satellites and you'll be near enough earth too, and may be you could also communicate with your kith and kin" (163).

Argument and Humour in Self-Protection

"Love and Lovers" is an imaginary conversation with a professor who finds fault with Narayan's use of love and sex in his works. In "History is a Delicate Subject", he pleads for proper judgment in history. While he recommends that birthdays of the living be overlooked, he advocates total abolition of the birthdays of those who are no longer with us: "The two-hundredth birth anniversary of someone who died a hundred years ago is an impossible concept. One is either living or dead, can't be both. It is illogical to perform a Memorial service to someone and follow it later with a birthday celebration of the same person" (189).

Respect and Humour for Pick-Pockets

Narayan has certain respect for pick-pockets. Once a pick-pocket restores his favourite parker pen. One thing he admires in them is that they are gentle and non-violent. His delicate skill and sensitive fingers could be put to better use. "His genius for painless extraction must be utilized, his presence or pressure is no more than that of a butterfly flitting past" (192). "Misguided Guide" is an account of how the producer and director of The Guide spoiled all the artistic values of the book and even shifted the locale Malgudi to some North Indian town where the customs, tone and culture are entirely different. Here Narayan describes his bitter experiences with the film world.

British and American Contrasts

Narayan speaks about colonial India and imperial England, and the wide chasm that existed between the two. Two centuries of colonial rule changed the very socio-political life of the country—the creation of "Brown sahibs", the civil service cadre, British superiority and racial segregation, mission work and conversion, British educational system etc. are some of the aspects that Narayan talks about. He also mentions the British planter who loved to live here and died leaving behind their fortunes to Indian beneficiaries. In "India and America", Narayan talks about the spread of American influence after the Second World War; grants, fellowships, technical training and cultural exchanges. While the English man was content to isolate himself

as ruler and keeper of law and order, leaving Indians alone to their religion and ancient activities, the American chose to live like Indian, tasted Indian food, wore Indian dress and tried to understand everything about Indian life. Narayan himself was one of the beneficiaries, and was awarded a Rockefeller grant which enabled him to visit America. The rest of the essay deals with and account of his American experiences and concludes with the hope that though entirely different in attitude and philosophy, they could complement each other's values.

Age No Barrier for Wit and Humour

Published in 1993, Salt and Sawdust is a delightful new collection of stories and essays which shows Narayan's sparkling wit and humour even at his old age. In addition to short stories, this book has a section called "Table Talk" which according to Narayan is a new form of writing: "Table Talk unlike an essay could come to life without too definite a form, on any theme, a few lines without the compulsion of an argument conclusion, stimulated by a passing scene or mood, or a wisp of an idea floating down from somewhere and vanishing the same way" (vii).

Looking at the World with a Heart of Humour

Writing in this vein, Narayan gives humorous pieces on, among other things, language, personalities, travel and government. In the first piece entitled "Table Talk", Narayan mocks at the government's policy of 'force-feeding' Hindi through "profound and prolonged interviews", features and other programmes for five hours at a stretch. South Indians neither understand nor appreciate Hindi. Even when the English news comes up, the news readers look dull and monotonous. They are "in a hurry to reach the last line of the script within the allotted time, and grin with unconcealed relief, only when they say 'Good-night'" (74).

Narayan suggests English subtitles and summaries for all Hindi programmes, and as a reciprocal courtesy North Indian stations should telecast national programmes in southern languages and thereby achieve national integration. "Permitted Laughter" reminds one of the horrors of emergency clamped during 1975. "Reflections on Frankfurt" is a humorous account of what went on in a book fair at Frankfurt. Narayan also heard rumours that he was to be awarded the Nobel prize that year, that is, 1986. But to his relief it did not happen so. Narayan does not

like public attention, greetings and felicitations. In a serio-comic manner he describes the arguments one might have heard from the committee room before the decision on 16 October.

Directory of Enemies More Important than a Directory of National Heroes

In “The Enemies” Narayan thinks that instead of compiling a long list of our national heroes, why not compile a directory of enemies of society. “This enemy does not rob or shoot, but invents something which causes damage and destruction, unintentional though” (129). The man who first got the idea of polishing floor tiles, the man who invented air horn, young man who pull out the silencer from their motorcycles etc. must go into the black list. “Korean Grass” is a very funny and satirical account of a minister’s enthusiasm to undertake a ‘foreign tour’ on some silly pretext or other like studying about the cultivation of Korean nation, with limitless pasture, providing milk for the millions (164). The minister wants his daughter and son-in-law also to accompany him as he is not allowed to travel alone after his last operation. “Minister without Portfolio” describes how the Prime Minister rejected the minister’s proposals for the foreign tour and asked him to concentrate on the problems of his constituency and strengthen the party there. A few days later the minister comes across a newspaper report that at the Bangalore zoo a little girl, who was watching the animals, was mauled by a tiger. The minister soon orders his secretary for a first hand report, but later found out that it was all an exaggeration. Any way he decides to go to Bangalore and orders his secretary to find out if an Air Force plane will be available to fly to Bangalore airport and a helicopter from the airport to the zoo, which will also enable him to have a survey of the flood-affected areas and assess the relief measures needed. His dreams extend to a visit to Africa at a later date to study the precautions at safaris in Kenya.

Talkative Humour –The Judge

“The Judge” is a humorous narrative by the Talkative Man who describes his experiences as a judge when he had to pronounce his judgment over a baffling murder case. At last he went to the temple at Tirupati Hills to pray and seek guidance of the Lord. While he was praying, his spectacles were snatched away by a monkey. When he got another pair of glasses after a couple of days, he ordered the immediate release of all the seven accused. The Talkative Man says: “I viewed the monkey as a bearer of diving message in response to my prayer” (183-184). Some one from the audience asked him how and when he was a judge. He replied by quoting Falstaff.

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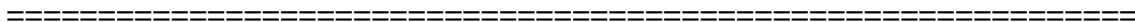
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“No...if reasons were as plenty as black berries I would give no man a reason upon compulsion (184).

Insightful Humour in Lively Prose

Narayan thus writes essays, sketches, skits and light commentaries on contemporary matters very much in the line of A.G. Gardiner and Robert Lynd. Very often he uses polite and euphemistic words to describe a mean act. He also assumes mock-heroic seriousness to describe simple matters as when he gives elaborate details about making coffee-the quality of milk, water, coffee powder and various other factors. He also makes his observation on the right temperature at which coffee must be sipped. This section, which deals with the coffee temperature, he calls it “Thermodynamics of coffee” (STW, 45). In his introduction to A Story Teller’s World, Syd Harrex observes that Narayan’s short essays reflect the milieu of the early 1950’s and his “non-fictional prose is most lively and rewarding when applied fiction techniques shape the writing, and when perspectives of humour mellow the author’s opinions just as they irradiate most of his novels and short stories with the wisdom of comedy”. (xii).

It can be seen that Narayan has the humane and sympathetic outlook on life and he points out the frivolities and shortcomings with an amused tolerance and indulgence. He uses mild satire and poke fun at almost every fad of his days. Narayan excels in epigrammatic statements and his conversation is indulged in as a social pleasantry.



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