

Figurative Language in the Novels of R. K. Narayan: Metaphor and Simile

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Abstract

The purpose of the present investigation is to study and analyse the language R. K. Narayan used in his novels. The language is studied under the context of figures of speech that include variables of speech, *i.e.* Metaphor and Simile. I also stylistically analyzed the language under which the form, nature, and temperament are used by the author. Narayan used metaphor and simile as a great tool to help the reader to understand abstract and the unfamiliar content by linking it to a concrete and familiar concept. It became easier for the readers to understand the information presented by the author. For the present purpose some of the most read novels of R. K. Narayan are taken into consideration. Some of them are *Swami and Friends*, *The English Teacher*, *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Financial Expert*.

Keywords: R.K Narayan, language, figure of speech, metaphor, simile

Introduction – The Story Really Matters

R.K. Narayan was a pioneer and had legitimately occupied an exclusive place amongst Indo-English novelists. He casts a great impression on Indian fiction in English. He was born and brought up in Madras and his mother tongue was Tamil, but he was internationally acclaimed as the greatest Indian fiction writer in English and needs no introduction to an average reader.

Narayan's art as a novelist was largely limited to storytelling, for the story is the distinguishing characteristic of his fiction. As a genial story-teller, Narayan held his listeners simply spell-bound. He had a strong penchant for storytelling. For his writings, the story really matters. He created a world of his own and given it a name *Malgudi* which is the only

locale of his writings and his characters revolved around this imaginary town which is a microcosm of India.

Narayan's language has an important role to play in enchanting the readers. He made very efficient and accurate use of figures of speech like metaphor and simile to deliver his purpose of understanding and comparison of two or more things which are similar or alike.

Use of Figurative Language

Figurative Language refers to the high usage of figures of speech, which includes the use of metaphor, simile, irony, symbolism and imagery, etc. In Narayan's novels, there is a moderate usage and mixing of figurative language. Narayan deliberately used figurative language to decorate his writings, which made his writings ornamental. Some of the examples of his metaphor and simile as figurative language are mentioned below.

When two things are compared without the use of *as* or *like* or *than*, the use is known as metaphor. Within the non-rhetorical theory a metaphor is generally considered to be a concluded equation of terms that is more forceful and active than an analogy, although the two types of tropes are highly similar and often confused. One distinguishing characteristic is that the assertiveness of a metaphor calls into question the underlying category structure, whereas in a rhetorical analogy the comparative differences between the categories remain salient and acknowledged. Similarly, metaphors can be distinguished from other closely related rhetorical concepts such as metonym, synecdoche, simile, allegory and parable.

The metaphor, according to I. A. Richards¹ in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), consists of two parts: the **tenor** and **vehicle**. The tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed. The vehicle is the subject from which the attributes are borrowed. Other writers employ the general terms **ground** and **figure** to denote what Richards¹ identifies as the tenor and vehicle.

Narayan was not very fond of using metaphorical language. However, here are some of the examples:

Ebenazar was sitting on the stool, looking sheepish² (Page 9).

Swaminathan, 'You are a blind kitten, I will be a blind puppy²' (Page 34).

Jagan almost fancied himself as a monarch on a throne³ (Page 276).

His face was flushed² (Page 285).

‘Writer²’ meant in Jagan’s dictionary only one thing, ‘a clerk’ - (Page 289)

“Mali will be another Kalidasa,” said the cousin² (Page 292)

Bull-neck³ (Page 13)

Hammer-fist³ (Page 13)

“Actually the whole process of our work is much more hygienic and clean than paring the skin of vegetables in your kitchen³” (Page 61)

“It was more dangerous than asking for the concession from my father³” (Page 69)

“My house was becoming a Noah’s Ark³” (Page 71)

“People would get used to it in due course, cease to refer to the place as a press, and rather call it a museum³” (Page 73)

My devilish brain³ (Page 153)

Silence of death³ (Page 219).

Call me dog if they ask you for even one anna¹ more (Page 4).

Milk² is one of the forms of Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth (Page 35).

“Are you a heartless demon²” (Page 42).

I am not a baby² to worry about these things (Page 17).

Simile

A simile differs from a metaphor by keeping the three items separate **A simile is a comparison between two things, usually with the words “like” or “as”** and asking the audience to find similar features instead of saying they are the same thing. A popular mnemonic for a simile is that “a simile is similar or alike²”. Similes have been widely used in literature for their expressiveness as a figure of speech:

He got such a big medal. I wore it **as** a pendant² for years (Page 18)

And was off from the spot **like** a stag² (Page 27).

His face was awful, red, red **like** a chili² (Page 38).

He able to tackle Arithmetic **as** easily as you swallow plantains² (Page 41).

Why could not the others be **as** quick and precise as he²? (Page 47)

I am going to use my books **as** fuel in the kitchen² (Page 48).

All his determination oozed out as he saw the captain approach the platform, dressed **like** a 'European boy'² (Page 134).

It looked **like** a savage⁴, suddenly appearing nearly timid and groomed (Page 47-48).

She appeared at the kitchen **like** a vision⁴ (Page 52).

She occasionally put a foot into the room and felt thrilled **as** if it were an adventure¹ (Page 80).

When I stuck it under her tongue, and waited, it was **like** waiting for a verdict with prayers and trembling⁴ (Page 79).

There was a hint in her tone **as** if a sentry had mounted guard against a formidable enemy⁴ (Page 103).

The semi-dark air seemed to glisten with radiant presence-**like** myriad dewdrops sparkling on the grass on a sunny morning⁴ (Page 115).

The greatest abiding rapture, which could always stay and not recede or fall into an anticlimax **like** most mortal joys⁴ (Page 115).

I looked at him greatly puzzled. The man was talking **as** if he were moving to the next street⁴ (Page 161).

Chandran murmured as Jas got on his feet, wearing the barrel around his waist **like** a kilt⁵ (Page 149).

He behaved **like** a medieval warrior goaded by his lady love into slaying a dragon² (Page 169).

Mother said, 'You are looking **like** a corpse'² (Page 228).

The captain seized the lock in a marital grip, **as** if it were a hand grenade² (Page 278).

The donkey stood beside the wall **as if** it were offering itself for target practice² (Page 279).

"But don't you know what you are going to write when you sit down to ?". "No", said the boy haughtily. "It's **not like** frying sweets in your shop²." (Page 294)

Conclusion

R. K. Narayan was an effective craftsman who used tools of metaphor and simile through which he crafted the beautiful statue of his writings. He used metaphor and simile to convey ideas as well as offer striking images. The metaphor and simile used in the novels of R. K. Narayan not only make his writing more ornamental and interesting but also help us to

think more clearly about and understand his subjects. Narayan used metaphor for effective communication. He used metaphor and simile as a great tool to help the reader to understand abstract and the unfamiliar content by linking it to a concrete and familiar concept. It became easier for the readers to understand the information presented by the author. R. K. Narayan also used metaphor and simile creatively, humorously, lively to explain the complex situations and to trigger emotions which make his work more appealing, effective, pleasurable and memorable.

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References

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