

## From Mystique to Mysticism: A Study of R.K. Narayan's Select Short Stories

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### Abstract

This paper proposes: Mysticism is present in R. K. Narayan's select short stories in different degrees and demystifies the mystic elements in select short stories of R. K. Narayan the forerunner of Indian writing in English. The hypothesis of this paper is the perception of mysticism demystifies the select short stories of R. K. Narayan. The stories which have high level of mysticism or completely mystical are analysed here. The best examples of the completely mystical stories are "Such Perfection," "The Snake-Song" and "Under the Banyan Tree". These stories are easy in plot but not in themes. The mysticism in these stories makes them tough to comprehend. It is easy to understand such stories if the readers develop perceptions of mysticism and the impacts of mysticism in those stories. Thus, it is only the clarity of the mysticism makes the readers to understand these stories.

**Key Words:** *Mystique, Mysticism, Mystic, Demystification, Mystical Elements.*

The Indian writers in English deal with universal and regional themes. Among the regional themes, elements such as history, politics, economics, social structure and religion become the subject matter. More particularly, their perceptions on religion form the theme of their writings. Thus, besides writing and translating the Indian scriptures into English, the writers enjoy the literary practice of using the aspects of religion in their writings. Hence, mysticism, reverence for the almighty, devotion to the principles of religion, spirituality and divinity form the theme.

One such instance of using mysticism is abundantly seen in the short stories of R. K. Narayan. Any work of art can be well understood with the background of the beliefs which has gone into the making of the work of art. Based on this principle, the present study proposes the followings about the select short stories of R.K.Narayan. This paper proposes: Mysticism is present in R. K. Narayan's select short stories in different degrees. It is easy to understand such stories if the readers develop perceptions of mysticism and the impacts of mysticism in those

stories. Before delineating this proposition any further, it is absolutely necessary to elaborate the term mysticism. This will also give the scope for investigating the stated proposition.

Mystic elements are predominantly present in oral literature. The grandmothers' tales and bed time stories have a grand touch of poetic justice which is always attributed to the mystic powers. Thus, naturally, mysticism becomes a fertile, spontaneous and presentable theme in Indian writing in English. It is a great revelation to know that almost all the Indian writers in English make use of mysticism in their work of art. Religious writings gradually give birth to the depiction of mysticism. The investigation begins with the explication of the term mysticism.

The most trusted Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines Mysticism as, "the belief that knowledge of God and of real truth can be found through prayer and meditation rather than through reason and the senses" (1009). This is evident that mysticism is psychological than physical. This idea is further supported by several scholars, men of letters, devotees and religious masters who say that mysticism is an abstract one which can be felt rather than a concrete one which can be seen.

The stories of Narayan are with mystical elements. The level of the use of mysticism may be high, low or moderate but there is a use of mysticism in his short stories. Without the knowledge of the elements of mysticism in the stories it is not easy to comprehend those stories. This paper tries to explain the mystic elements of his select short stories to understand the stories better. Until the readers understand the mysticism in the stories, the stories appear mystique.

Hence the hypothesis of this paper is set as, the perception of mysticism demystifies R. K. Narayan's select short stories. This paper analyses the mysticism in select stories of R. K. Narayan which has high level of mysticism or completely mystical. The best examples of the stories which are completely mystical are "Such Perfection", "The Snake-Song" and "Under the Banyan Tree." There are also several other stories with high level of mysticism. These stories are easy in plot but not in themes. The mysticism in these stories makes them tough to comprehend. It is only the clarity of the mysticism makes the readers to understand the story. In order to bring out the mysticism in the story the analysis is given in three steps. The first step deals with the thematic summary of the story, second step highlights the mystic elements of the story and the third step demystifies those mystic elements. These three steps will enhance the readers to

comprehend the stories easier and make the stories as readings of mysticism. The summaries of the stories are presented to help the readers who haven't read the stories. The highlights of the mystic elements and the demystification of the mystic elements are the ultimate aims of the paper.

### **“Such Perfection” for the Imperfect World**

This section deals with the thematic summary of the short story “Such Perfection” This short story is an epitome for its toughness in theme which is high in mysticism. The surface level reading of the story gives some mysterious effects and it is not easy to understand. The story has to be read with some more importance or with a spectacle of mystic glasses. The story is more than a mystery. It is a mystic story. Before going into the deep analysis a short summary of the story is necessary. The story is about a sculptor Soma and his Nataraja statue. Soma is a pious sculptor, who works hard for five years and makes a Nataraja statue which is very perfect. He has worked alone in the room with the help of a mud lamp and a chisel. He has not allowed anybody inside the room. One fine day when he has completed the work he has prostrated before the statue and admired its perfection. He has decided to talk to the village headmen and the priest for the consecration of the statue in the temple on a full moon day.

Suddenly he hears a voice inside the room which is from a stranger who warns him by saying that friend; don't take this statue outside the room because it is too perfect. This voice trembles Soma and makes him wonder how a stranger has entered into the room. Soma questions the stranger about his entry, threatens to kill him as a sacrifice and warns him not to tell about the statue outside. While getting out of the room the stranger says that such perfection is not for the mortal human beings. The stranger prostrates before the statue and prays to God to give the people strength to bear the presence of such perfect statue. Soma is confused about this warning. He goes to the priest to get ready for the consecration of the statue. Before the acceptance the priest wants to look at the statue. The priest looks at the statue and warns Soma that this perfect God is not for the mortal human beings. The priest also adds that after the first puja has been done to this perfect statue the world will be washed out and the God will make all blind. The warning of the priest upsets Soma but without any hesitation he goes to the village headmen and seeks the permission from them. The leading citizens of the village ask apology from Soma and

warns him again that the statue will not be provided with a space in the temple and it is because for the safety of the village. This time Soma gets a suggestion from the village citizens. They are ready to consecrate the statue in the temple if the statue is with slight alteration. They ask him to break a small toe/finger from the statue and make it imperfect to consecrate. This statement gets on to the nervous of Soma and he chases everyone. Soma is highly disappointed and feels that he is not given proper respect for his hardship and his God is not respected for the perfection.

This mixed emotion has made him to take a strange decision so; he alters his house to a temple. He calls a tom-tom beater who is a town crier and asks him to announce the news of the consecration of the Nataraja Statue in the new temple. The town crier announces the news and a large group of nearly ten villages have turned up. Everybody is waiting for the vision of Nataraja the whole village is in the festive mode. The village has been filled with the fragrance of flowers and incense. The rituals have started with the ringing of the bronze bell and circling of the camphor fire. The flame of the camphor has given life to the Nataraja statue. In the light of the camphor the statue appeared to be lively with lit up eyes, moving limbs and jingling anklets. When the whole crowd is awe stricken the fore saying of the priest and the village headmen has come true. There is a change in the weather suddenly and the cataclysm has begun. The bright sky has turned gloomy the wind has become rough the thunder has fallen on a huge haystack and the fire blazed. Rain started to pour than never before and the lakes on the either sides of the road have covered the road now which washed away many houses. People have come to the conclusion that this is the end of the world. Soma is worried to at this site many of his friends pleaded him to do a minute fault on the statue so that their lives can be saved but Soma is not ready for that. One of his friends warns him that this disaster is just a slight sign of God's power, if the worship continues God will be more furious. He also says that all the lives are in the hands of Soma and pleads him to imperfect the statue and save all lives. This is evident that they are expecting for another cataclysm to wash out the whole world if the statue continues with the same perfection. Soma again lights up a lamp and again the sky starts to rumble.

Even now Soma is not ready to hurt the statue instead he offers himself as a sacrifice. He tries to jump into the lake but stops to have a last sight of his perfect statue. When he manages to come home a tree has crashed his house and the statue is under the fallen walls. The statue is

unhurt except for a little toe which is found a few yards away. The thunder storm stops immediately and people hail the God for his kindness who has saved their lives. After this slight imperfection the statue has been consecrated at the temple on the next full moon day. Soma has become wealthy and honorable. He has lived till his ninety-five without touching his chisel again. The story is complicated because of the mystic themes in it. The mystic elements of the story are highlighted in the upcoming section.

### **“Such Perfection” as a Villain**

For every story in literature there is a protagonist and an antagonist. The story highlights the protagonist more than the antagonist. In this story, “Such Perfection” there is no proper protagonist but the perfection of the statue is the antagonist or the villain of the story. It is responsible for all the disasters in the story. This section highlights the mystic elements of the story. While talking about mystic elements the mysterious elements are also included. Since it is said before religion and mysticism are siblings so mystery is also related to mysticism. The very first mystic element starts when there is a stranger in the room which has not seen anybody except Soma. The question arises that that the stranger is. The stranger begins the mystic tone of the story by giving a peculiar advice, “My friend, never take this image out of this room. It is too perfect...” (Such Perfection 78). This shocks the readers too. The readers don’t know the reason for why the statue shouldn’t go out. Later the stranger adds, “Such perfection is not for mortals” (Such Perfection 78). He also prays to God as, “God give us the strength to bear your presence...” (Such Perfection 78). The second person to bring out the mysterious mystical element in the story is the priest. The priest comes to read the statue he finds it too perfect and later he says, “This perfection, this God, is not for mortal eyes. He will blind us. At the first chant of prayers before him, he will dance... and we shall be wiped out...” (Such Perfection 79). The same words from a religious person increase the intensity of the mysticism. Later the village citizens bring out the mysterious mystic elements by saying, “Don’t mistake us. We cannot give your image a place in our temple. Don’t be angry with us. We have to think of the safety of all the people in the village” (Such Perfection 79). All these statements not only confuse Soma but also the readers. There is question that perfection is expected in each and every work in the world from the mundane to the crown. But here this perfection is opposed. They ask him to

imperfect the statue as, “Even now if you are prepared to break a small finger...” (Such Perfection 79). This statement astonishes the readers. The statue is given life and proves the presence of the absolute among the people. This is explained by Narayan as, “In the flame of the circling camphor Nataraja’s eyes lit up. His limbs moved, his anklets jingled” (Such Perfection 80). The explanation of the statue supports the idea of the power of the ultimate on the individual as:

The God pressed one foot on earth and raised the other in dance. He destroyed the universe under his heel, and smeared the ashes over his body, and the same God rattled the drum in his hand and by its rhythm set life in motion again... Creation, Dissolution and God attained a meaning now; this image brought it out... the bells rang louder every second. (Such Perfection 80)

Immediately after the beginning of the worship the climatic changes and the disaster are the evidences of the mysticism. The setting is described as:

At this moment a wind blew from the east. The moon’s disc gradually dimmed. The wind gathered force, clouds blotted out the moon; people looked up and saw only pitch like darkness above. Lightning flashed, thunder roared and fire poured down from the sky. It was a thunderbolt striking a haystack and setting it ablaze. Its glare illuminated the whole village. (Such Perfection 80)

The other problems faced by the village are said as:

The fire descended with tremendous hiss as a mighty rain came down. It rained as it had never rained before. The two lakes, over which the village road ran, filled, swelled and joined over the road. Water flowed along the streets. (Such Perfection 80)

The terror and the mysticism rise when the people shout as, “This is the end of the world!” (Such Perfection 80). The belief of the people that the disasters are made by the God is again a proof of mysticism. They say, “God has shown us only a slight sign of his power. Don’t tempt Him again. Do something. Our lives are in your hands. Save us, the image is too perfect.” (Such Perfection 81). Then Soma tries lit a lamp where the thunder starts again then he is ready to die rather than mutilating a figure of the statue. Soma decides to commit suicide as a sacrifice and intends to see

the statue as his last wish. While he returns he has to see the sight of a tree has fallen on his house and cuts off the toe of the statue. As a surprise the climate becomes normal. Later people are satisfied and say, “God himself has done this to save us!”(Such Perfection 82). All these mystic elements are explained in the upcoming section.

### **“Such Perfection” is not for Mortals**

The type of mysticism employed in this story is God mysticism. The mystical experience experienced in this story is theistic mystical experience. God mysticism has the idea of the return of the spirit to its immortal and infinite ground. The immortal and the infinite referred here is the God the almighty. Nothing is beyond God in this philosophy. The individual and the absolute have the direct connection in this mysticism. The very strong philosophy in this mysticism is the creator of everything is the giver of everything. So whatever happens is the plan of the God.

Later, theistic mystical experience involves in seeing or feeling the presence of the Absolute. There is a representation of the Supreme power. A personification or a named force represents the supreme power. The supreme power can take a human form, a semi-human or supernatural form, an animal form or a more general form such as an element of nature like wind, water and fire.

“Such Perfection” is a story of God mysticism. In this has the arrival of the almighty among the people. There is a common statement that no one is perfect. This perfection is not for mortals. The immortals are perfect and that is why they are immortals. The perfection of the statue is nothing but the presence of the immortal Lord Nataraja among the mortals in the mortal world. Lord Nataraja comes among the people as various forms like a statue in the beginning and rain, thunder and fire at the end. There is a strong connection between the Lord Nataraja and the individual Soma and the people in Soma’s circle. Lord Nataraja gives them everything both good and bad like the happiness of visualizing the perfect statue and the sadness of facing the disaster too. There is no one beyond Lord Nataraja in this story. No one could save the people even Soma the creator of the statue. It is believed in the story that Lord Nataraja has been the ultimate power who has made the tree to fall and cut the toe of the statue to stop the cataclysm.

This story highlights the theistic mystical experience of the mystics. Soma the pious sculptor sees and feels the presence of Lord Nataraja. There are several representations of the

Supreme power Lord Nataraja. Many personifications and named forces represent the supreme power Lord Nataraja. The supreme power Lord Nataraja has taken a human form in the beginning of the story as a stranger in the room and a more general form such as the elements of nature like wind, water and fire.

All the clarifications above on the mystic elements prove that the story is completely mystic. Only the perception of the mysticism will demystify the mysticism of the story. To add some more for this idea of imperfection, the tale on Puri Jagannath or Lord of the Universe is taken. This tale is about the imperfect statues of the Puri Jagannath temple. The king ordered a sculptor to make one statue of a huge stone. A stone-craftsman has accepted and asked for a separate room and prohibited the entry of others. The works were going good one day when there was no sound from the room the queen open the door and suddenly the craftsman disappeared immediately. He is none other than Viswakarma, the craftsman of the Gods. So only the immortal people can do, keep and see the perfect image of God. The mortals cannot do, see or have a perfect one. (Raman 76)

If the mysterious mystic elements are understood by the readers then the story can be demystified easily. These mysterious elements in the story make the story with high level of mysticism and make the story an epitome of readings in mysticism. The next story to be demystified is “The Snake-Song” which is also with some mysterious and mystical elements. This story is written in the style of using the anonymous talkative man as the protagonist/persona/narrator.

#### **“The Snake-Song” and the Divine Music**

This section presents the thematic summary of the short story “The Snake Song.” “The Snake-Song” is a story of the talkative man. It follows the technique of flash back. The narration begins in the present and goes to the past and comes back to the present. A group of people are returning from a Carnatic music concert in which the talkative man is also one who is very much upset and quiet. Everyone questions his silence then he talks about his history and connection with music. The talkative man studies flute in his youth under a great guru in Kumbum a village eighty miles away from Malgudi. His master is a great musician, but he is satisfied to play only

at the village temple. However, the talkative man has some big plans of becoming a rich and a successful musical star by winning a contest in Madras.

He took it as his aim, ambition and goal. He started to practice his flute. He began with bhairavi raga enjoying it. The raga gave a divine touch to his place. At that time at his door a sadhu who is a religious hermit comes and begs for a coin. The talkative man refuses him. The sadhu comes back, hearing the music and asks the talkative man to just let him in to listen to the beautiful flute music. Again the talkative man refuses the sadhu this time the talkative man is arrogant in tone. The sadhu then curses that the talkative man will never play music anymore and he will also sell the flute for a handful of dried dates. The talkative man is disturbed now by the curse he goes outside the hut and searches for the sadhu but he could not find him. He comes back to the house with the hope that the sadhu will be back. He continues to play, leaving the door open, and hoping the sadhu will come back so that he can ask for an apology. The house is profound with divinity with the bhairavi raga. It appears as if it is a heaven where God lives. The talkative man identifies himself as a God along with the sparkling images of the Gods in the room because of the raga.

Next he shifts to another raga called punnagavarali. This time he gets another special visitor. It is a black, venomous and huge serpent. It is believed that punnagavarali is a raga which can hypnotize a serpent. In the beginning the talkative man is surprised and happy to see the serpent. He admires its beauty and thinks about its connection with lords. Later after repeating the same raga more than thrice he changed to another raga. This time the snake dislikes it and looks as if it approaches him to ask for not to shift from the old raga. The talkative man repeats the same raga for more than twenty times. Whenever he tries to pause the snake shows its disgruntlement. He comes to the conclusion that either he will die of snake bite or of dry throat. At one point he throws the flute and prostrates before the serpent. The serpent disappears; the talkative man explains the event happened in the previous night to his master. The master warns him not to play punnagavarali at night and he asks him to apologize to the sadhu otherwise he cannot play even if he plays the snake may come at any point. Then the talkative man goes in search of the sadhu whom he has never seen and waits to get repentance from him. He never touched the flute from then.

### **Unexpected Guests in “The Snake-Song”**

This section presents the mystic elements in the short story “The Snake-Song.” The mysterious mystic elements start in the story when the talkative man’s master is described with godly quality as, “When he played on the flute, it was said the cattle of the village followed him about” (The Snake-Song 94). The arrival of a sadhu is the best example of the mystic elements in the story. The sadhu is a hermit or recluse who asks for food. The sadhu has seen Kasi and Rameswaram the two pilgrimage of Hinduism. The use of bhairavi raga in this short story is again presents a mystic element. The sadhu’s request provokes the mystic elements of the story. The sadhu says, “You play divinely. Won’t you let me in? You may not give me food for my stomach, but don’t deny me your music” (The Snake-Song 95). Later the mystic elements attain the peak when the sadhu curses the talkative man as, “But remember, this is your last day of music. Tomorrow you may exchange your flute for a handful of dried dates” (The Snake-Song 96).

The psychological trouble faced by the talkative man after the curse shows the mystic elements. The man says, “But my mind was troubled. His parting words... what did he mean by them?” (The Snake-Song 96). The talkative man surrenders himself to the God to save from that curse. The talkative man says, “I looked at the pictures of gods on the wall and prayed to be protected from the threat of the unseen mendicant” (The Snake-Song 96). This shows the direct connection between the absolute and the individual and becomes the example for mysticism. Later after a few minutes of bhairavi he felt one among the Gods. The talkative man explains the elevation of himself and his place as, song after song flowed from that tiny bamboo and transformed may lonely cottage. “I was no longer a petty mortal blowing through a piece of bamboo. I was among the gods. The lantern on the wall became a brilliant star illuminating a celestial hall...” (The Snake-Song 96).

Then the talkative man shifts to punnagavarali raga. The mystic experience continues when the talkative man imagines and admires the beauty of the snake. It is believed that punnagavarali raga can hypnotize a snake. The imagination of the snake as a celestial being is said as:

And I came to the snake-song in punnagavarali. I saw the serpent in all its majesty: the very venom in its pouch had a touch of glory: now I saw its divinity as it crowned Shiva's head: Parvathi wore it as a wristlet: Subramanya played with it: and it was Vishnu's couch... The whole composition imparted to the serpent a quality which inspired awe and reverence. (The Snake-Song 96-97)

As the talkative imagines about a snake the heavenly creature enters his house. The arrival of the snake is narrated as a thriller story by Narayan as:

And now what should I see between the door and me but a black cobra! It had opened its immense hood and was swaying ecstatically. I stopped my song and rubbed my eyes to see if I was fully awake. But the moment the song ceased, the cobra turned and threw a glance at me, and moved forward. I have never seen such a black cobra and such a long one in my life. Some saving instinct told me: "Play on! Play on! Don't stop"... The snake, which was now less than three yards from me, lifted a quarter of its body, with a gentle flourish reared its head, fixed its round eyes on me and listened to the music without making the slightest movement. It might have been a carven snake in black stone, so still it was. (The Snake-Song 97)

The above words show that the snake is not from the mortal world. It has some innumerable powers and appearance. The glorifications of the snake increase the intensity of the mysticism in the story. The snake acts like a heavenly being and communicates with the talkative man with its action. Talkative man attempts to change the punnagavarali raga but the snake shows some difference to it. The snake's reaction is explained as, "After playing the song thrice over, I commenced a new song. The cobra sharply turned its head and looked at me as if to say, "Now what is all this?" and let out a terrible hiss, and made a slight movement" (The Snake-Song 97).

After playing several times due to dry throat and loss of energy he can't play anymore, he accepts his failure and prayed to the serpent as, "Oh, Naga Raja, you are a god; you can kill me if you like, but I can play no more..." (The Snake-Song 98). This strange communication between a human being and a serpent heightens the mysticism in this short story. The snake disappears

when his eyes open which also becomes mysterious and mystic. The next day he narrates the incident to his master where the master replies:

“Don’t you know you ought not to play punnagavarali at night? That apart, now you can never be sure you will not get the snake in again if you play. And when he comes he won’t spare you unless you sing his song over again. Are you prepared to do it? (The Snake-Song 98)

These threatening words from his master make him more terrified and his master also adds, “You can’t play with a serpent. It is a plaything of gods.”(The Snake-Song 98). The talkative man asks for repentance and his master gives him a way to overcome this trouble as, “Perhaps all will be well again if you seek your visitor of that night and beg his forgiveness. Can you find him?”(The Snake-Song 98). All these incidents make the story as a mystic story. The talkative man searches for the sadhu which is not yet come to an end. The sadhu and the serpent make the story as mystic story. The above mystic elements are explained and demystified in the upcoming section.

### **“The Snake-Song” or the God-Song**

This section demystifies the mystic elements of the story “The Snake-Song.” This story is also a type of God mysticism and the mystical experience experienced here is the theistic mysticism. The elaborate explanation of who a sadhu is, the serpent and their role in Hinduism will demystify the mystic elements of this story. These elaborations are taken from various online articles on Hinduism. As it is said before that the sadhu and the serpent make the story a mystic one. Their arrival in the plot of the story makes the plot run actively.

The sadhu is the first visitor to the talkative man. The sadhu is not shown in the story only his voice is revealed. He asks for the food in the beginning, later he asks for some kind words and treatment and at last he asks permission to enter inside the house to listen to the divine raga bhairavi. The sadhu is not given all the three by the talkative man and as a result the angry sadhu curses him that he will quit his music career. This curse comes true. The answer for the question that the sadhu is will make the story easier.

**The Article “Sadhu” Under the Religion Facts says:**

Sadhu is a way of life in Hinduism. It is renunciation of the world and asceticism. The sadhu is also called a Hindu holy man. The term sadhu comes from the Sanskrit term accomplish and can refer to any religious ascetic or holy man. They include saints of various traditions, men and sometimes women who have left their homes to concentrate on physical and spiritual disciplines, and also hermits, magicians and fortune-tellers.

They are often called as swami. The term swami is more specific and usually refers to an ascetic who has been initiated into a specific religious order. A Saivite (follower of Shiva) sadhu is generally referred to as a sannyasi or dasnamisannyasin, while a Vaisnavite (follower of Vishnu) ascetic is often called a vairagin. Sadhus generally take vows of poverty and celibacy and depend on the charity of householders for their food. Sadhus usually have only the possessions they carry with them: a staff (danda), a waterpot (kamandalu), an alms bowl, a rosary, and an extra cloth. They have some sacred objects like trident (trisula) by which they invoke the divine presence by reciting mantras. People have a desire to gain spiritual merit by feeding these religious mendicants. People believe that the service done to these people is the service done to the lord. So, hence this sadhu becomes a demi god or a representation of god.

In this story “The Snake-Song” the sadhu is ill-treated by the talkative man. The talkative man has aggravated the anger of the sadhu and made him to curse. Initially the talkative man does not care about the importance of the sadhu. Later after the curse and the exit of the sadhu there is a change in the behaviour of the talkative man. The talkative man is disturbed because of the curse he realizes the power of a sadhu. He goes in search of the sadhu but he fails in his mission later the sadhu’s curse has also come true. According to the author the master and the talkative man the sadhu is none other the God himself or his devotee. God has stopped the plan or proposal of the talkative man to become a great musician because of his intellectual arrogance. The proverb man proposes and the god disposes has come true in the case for the talkative man. The mystic experience of the talkative man makes the story tough in plot and theme.

The next visitor to the talkative man’s house is the serpent. The serpent takes various symbols in literature, religion and art. Here in this story the serpent makes the story mystic. Snake plays a main role in Hindu religion and spiritual practices. Ancient Indians feared and revered the snakes. Hindus worship snakes in temples as well as in natural habitats. They offer

the snakes with milk, incense and prayers. V. Jayaram, a scholar in Hinduism says, “The snake in Hinduism represents eternity and materiality, life as well as death, time as well as timelessness and three processes namely creation, preservation and destruction.” (Jayaram). The snake is the symbol of infinity as Ananta or Adishesha who is the bed of Lord Vishnu. It is the symbol of desire as one who is bitten by a snake dies, one who is bitten by desire will be going through the cycle of birth and death. It is the symbol of divine thread and sacred ornaments as it is wore by Lord Ganesha, Goddess Parvathi and Lord Shiva. The coiled snake becomes the symbol of the kundalini energy (Libidic Energy). It becomes the symbol of tamas the destructive energy. There are many symbols associated with the serpent as poisonous speech, misfortune, demi-gods, kala, death or time and prana.

In this story the snake becomes a symbol of demi god first. The talkative man imagines and associates the snake as a god as a result the snake arrives. The raga punnagavarali itself has the word naga in it which means a snake. The raga has hypnotizes the snake and it has come to do its duty assigned by lord. It is also the symbol of the poisonous speech. The talkative man hurts the sadhu with his speech as a result the snake the symbol of poisonous speech arrives and threatens him. The snake makes the talkative man to feel sorry for his action and stopped his to touch the flute for his lifetime. This is the mystic element in the story. The god in the form of the snake has disposed the plans of the talkative man for his intellectual arrogance. This demystification of the mysticism in the stories makes the story clear to the readers.

The next story which has to be analyzed under this chapter is “Under the Banyan Tree”. The protagonist Nambi in this story corresponds William Shakespeare’s character Prospero in *The Tempest*. As Shakespeare takes Prospero as his voice to state that he is going to stop writing drama anymore, Narayan took Nambi as his voice to state that he is going to stop writing. Now thematic summary, mystical elements and the demystification are as follows.

### **“Under the Banyan Tree” as an Autobiography**

This story has an autobiographic tone. The protagonist Nambi is an old man, who lives in the temple and lives his life by narrating different stories. He is not educated formally. Though he is an illiterate he acquires the power of narrating stories from his Goddess. His stories are excellent and there are many people in the village who adore his art of storytelling. Nambi’s life

has been going as a routine. His stories are also new and interesting. On an unlucky day he cannot start his story. He is quite upset in the beginning and people are also disappointed. They say that Nambi has become old and he has lost his power of storytelling. Nambi is furious to hear this he shouts in the beginning and later he goes for a meditation to the Mother Goddess Shakthi. On one fine day Nambi calls everybody stating that he is going to tell an interesting story on that day. Everybody comes with a usual expectation. Everybody sits and ready to hear the story of Nambi. This time it is more a farewell speech rather than a story. Nambi says that Mother Goddess Shakthi given him the power to narrate stories as a gift, he has used the gift sufficiently and now Mother has taken back the gift because it is no more useful to him. People are shocked to hear this. Later, after that Nambi has never spoken a word more. This is not only the story of the mystic Nambi but also the mystic writer R.K.Narayan. Narayan a pious person, who received only a UG degree from the university states that he has acquired the power of writing from the Ultimate Power the Absolute. Now it is time for the Absolute to take back the gift of power of writing. Narayan readily accepts it and gives a farewell to his readers and writing career. Apart from the autobiographical elements the mystic elements of the story is important for this thesis.

“Under the Banyan Tree” above the Earthly Level

The mystic elements of the story begin when the protagonist Nambi is introduced. Nambi is an illiterate who can narrate stories from his mind. He lives in the little temple of Goddess Shakthi of the village Somal. He lives a saint like life in the temple and in the village. He says, “Don’t blame me if you get no story at the next moon. Unless I meditate how can the Goddess give me a story? Do you think stories float in the air?” (Banyan Tree 188). This shows the connection between mystic Nambi and the Absolute Goddess Shakthi and the mysticism in the story. Nambi’s meditation is described by the Narayan as:

He would be sitting in the sanctum, before the Goddess, with his eye shut, in deep meditation. He sat thus as long as he liked and when he came out, with his forehead ablaze with ash and vermilion, he took his seat on a stone platform in front of the temple. (Banyan Tree 188)

Nambi puts everything in the hands of the Goddess Shakthi. The beginning and the end of the story is decided by the Goddess for that day when he narrates the story. His total surrender

is exposed as, “Now friends, Mother says this will do for the day” (Banyan Tree 188). This is again being one with the God the characteristic of a mystic. Not only his triumph is considered as Goddess’s plan but also his disaster of the struggle he faces to narrate the story is also questioned to the Goddess. Nambi says to Goddess Shakthi, “Oh, Mother, great Mother, why do I stumble and falter? I know the story. I had the whole of it a moment ago. What was it about? I can’t understand what has happened.” (Banyan Tree 190). He requests the Goddess not to desert him and he even in his hardship he believes, “Oh, friends. The Mother is always kind. I was seized with a foolish fear...” (Banyan Tree 190). This is the optimistic vision of a mystic.

The farewell speech of Nambi or Narayan is the powerful words in mystic literature. At last the most powerful lines of Narayan is:

It is the Mother who gives the gifts; and it is she who takes away the gifts. Nambi is dotard. He speaks when the Mother has anything to say. He is struck dumb when she has nothing to say. But what is the use of the jasmine when it has lost its scent? What is the lamp for when all the oil is gone? Goddess be thanked... These are my last words on this earth; and this is my greatest story. (Banyan Tree 191)

The story has two levels of readings. One is the autobiographical level of reading that is the story of the writer Narayan. Another one is the mystic short story which has high mystic values. The effort of the thesis is to bring out such mystic elements in this story. Among the autobiographical elements these mystic elements are showcased to concentrate on this story as a mystic story. The demystification of the mysticism of the story comes in the upcoming section.

### **“Under the Banyan Tree” and Goddess Shakthi**

The relationship between Nambi and Goddess Shakthi is the best example of mysticism. Nambi is a mystic like Tenali Rama and Kalidasa from India. A short intro of Tenali Rama and Kalidasa will demystify the mystic elements of this story. Tenali Rama also called Tenali Ramakrishna is known as Vikatakavi (jester poet) in India. He is a Telugu poet who hailed from the present-day Andhra Pradesh region, generally known for his wit and humour. He was one of the Ashtadiggajas or the eight poets at the court of Krishnadevaraya, the Vijayanagara Emperor between 1509 and 1529. Tenali Ramakrishna composed works on Hinduism. Ramalinga, as he was originally called, is said to have been Shaivite by birth but he eventually converted to

Vaishnavism and changed his name to Ramakrishna. He has no formal education he got the vision of Goddess Kali and acquired the knowledge of writing poetry.

Kalidasa is a Classical Sanskrit writer. He is widely regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language. His plays and poetry are primarily based on the Hindu Puranas. Much about his life is unknown, only what can be inferred from his poetry and plays. He is also a poet who has acquired the knowledge of writing through the Goddess Kali. Goddess Kali is an incarnation of Goddess Shakthi.

As Kalidasa and Tenali Rama, Nambi in this story also acquires the knowledge of narrating story from the Goddess Shakthi whom he considers as his Mother. He has totally surrendered himself to the Goddess Shakthi. Surrendering oneself to the Absolute is a chief characteristic of a mystic. Nambi a mystic enjoyed the gift of storytelling given to him by the Goddess Shakthi. He has been growing popular day by day. Everything should have an end according to the philosophy of Vedanta. The gift of storytelling also comes under this everything. Since the gift is fully utilized the Goddess has taken back the gift from Nambi. Nambi has no right to deny it and he has to accept it as the law of God. Nambi never feels for this. He accepts that if Goddess wants to speak she uses him as her voice if everything is over she takes back his voice. The role of the Absolute on exercising the power on the individual is pictured in this story. Nambi never speaks a word more after his farewell speech. This is the height of mysticism in the stories of Narayan with mystic themes.

After the clear demystification of the mysticism in the stories, they are easy to comprehend. These stories are full of mysticism so it is easier to highlight the mystic elements. There are also several other stories with same level of mysticism. Apart from stories of high level of mysticism there are stories with moderate and low level of mysticism.

Perceptions of mysticism demystifies R. K. Narayan's select short stories is the hypothesis set for this paper. The above stories are with mystical elements. The mysticism in them is as follows: In "Such Perfection" Lord Nataraja has saved his people. In "The Snake Song" the God visits the talkative man in the forms of sadhu and serpent and makes him stop his music career. In "Under the Banyan Tree" Nambi the central character emphasizes the truth that God is responsible for each and every act of the mystics. The mystical elements make the story

tough to be comprehended. This paper tries to remove this obstacle. It moves the readers from the level of mystique to mysticism. After perceiving the mysticism of these stories the mystic elements are demystified. The stories are well read and understood better. Further, the stories are taken to another level beyond normal short stories. The stories become as readings in mysticism.

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