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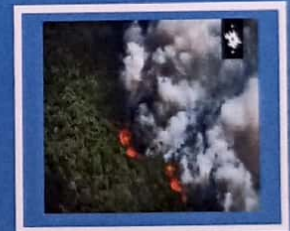
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On

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Management”***

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A Study Of R. K. Narayan's The Doctor's Word As Medical Fiction

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Abstract:

The relation between a doctor and a patient is like that of two sides of the same coin. It is a fact that people are not comfortable to visit a doctor or a physician but they have to visit them in hospitals despite of their unwillingness when they are not well. They visit them only when they are not well or are severely injured. In India, people go to doctors only when their household remedies fail. Because of this passive attitude of patients, many a times a simple disease becomes chronic and proves to be fatal. They avoid to visit a doctor because of one simple reason and it is the heavy consultation charges. In a developing country like India, the per capita income is very low and people can spend least on their health care. Another thing studied in this paper is attitude of doctors towards patients. If the doctor is strict and straight forward, people try to avoid such a doctor. The paper also emphasizes on the point on how a cordial doctor-patient relationship proves elixir for the patient's health. The impact of moral and mental support by the doctor is studied. At last, importance of optimism and faith in the doctor and his treatment at the same time and its positive impact on the patient's health is studied by taking R. K. Narayan's short story *The Doctor's Word* as base.

Keywords: Medical fiction, doctor, doctor-patient relationship, hospital, faith and optimism

Introduction:

The twenty-first century has witnessed a remarkable advancement in medical science and technology. Because of this advancement, the approach of an individual towards his health and diseases has completely changed. People have become more aware about human body and its functioning but at the same time, it can also be said that more practicality towards death is seen and it results in insensitivity towards emotions of an individual. This has been reflected in the literature. The recent theory like Disability studies has provided the scholars with new lenses to look at the particular piece of literature. By using this theory, a text can be introspected from a doctor's as well as from a patient's perspective. In this study, the text having character with physical impairment or suffering from a chronic disease is studied from social and psychological point of view. At the same time some medical terminologies related to cause and cure of the disease or disability is studied. One such branch of literature is Medical fiction. Where the setting of hospital is always in the background and to build up the main storyline, it takes the incidences from hospital, rehabilitation centre or mental asylum. A Medical fiction can be roughly defined as *a fiction whose events centre around hospital, an ambulance staff, or any medical environment*. The present text under study, a short story by R. K. Narayan, *The Doctor's Word* (Narayan) is one of the perfect examples of medical fiction. When it is analysed as Medical fiction, we find that R. K. Narayan has brilliantly created the atmosphere which makes readers feel as if they are in an environment of a hospital. He has shown the relationship between a doctor and a patient. He explains it by using the character of Dr. Raman and his fast friend Gopal. Narayan has

realistically shown the different aspects of the relation between a doctor and a patient. When the story begins in the fictional town, Malgudi located in South India, the readers find that the author has created a perfect atmosphere of Medical fiction by using the setting of hospital full of doctors, nurses and patients. Here the patients are being carried on wheelchair by ward boys, family members are waiting anxiously outside the operation theatre and praying for safety of their relative. They are anxiously waiting, by keeping their fingers crossed, in the anticipation that the doctor will come out and tell them that everything is fine with the patient. After creating a typical scene of Indian hospital, Narayan introduces Dr. Raman, who is shown busy in treating his patient. It is shown that Dr. Raman is annoyed by the trivial questions of the patients and their relatives. He gives them a blunt and straight forward advice about the condition of their health. He is unhappy and shocked at the same time when he sees the secondary attitude of people towards their health problems. He always tries to make people understand the importance of health care. When people don't understand the importance of his words, he feels annoyed and frustrated. He shares his worries and finds a relaxing time while talking to his fast friend Gopal, who is not a doctor. Gopal is a typical middle-class fellow who gives Dr. Raman realistic views about the struggle of common people for their basic needs. Dr. Raman always listens to his friend and feels rejuvenated after talking to him. They usually meet once in a week or two weeks and share talk about their lives. As the story progresses, the readers find that Dr. Raman learns that Gopal is seriously ill and he urgently needs medical help. Like a true professional, Dr. Raman examines Gopal's medical condition and does proper preliminary treatment on him. Even after giving first aid and doing preliminary treatment, he finds that the condition of Gopal is getting deteriorated by each passing minute and he is unable to free his friend from the clutches of death. When Gopal's wife asks him about her husband's condition he bluntly replies that nothing can be said at this point of time. But when Gopal, in subconscious state asks him, Dr. Raman who is very practical and straightforward, gives his friend a false hope that he will be fine soon and he too crosses his fingers for the life of his friend. At this moment, Narayan shows how faith and optimism can work wonders where science fails, and Gopal is miraculously healed and gets well.

Attitude Of People Towards Health Care:

Traditionally in Indian scenario, visiting a doctor is not considered good. People have a misconception that only diseased people go to doctors and one should visit a doctor only when one is critically ill and there is no conception of routine check-up or healthcare in India. The only reason behind this is the prevailing poverty. According to World Health Organisation, India ranks 145 in Attainment of goals Health Distribution in 195 member countries of WHO. It is because the per capita income of the people in India is very low and they are striving hard to fulfil the basic needs i.e. food, clothing and shelter of their large family. So, to spend even the micro share of their income on health care is very difficult. As we are seeing in this global pandemic of COVID-19, thousands of daily wage labourers are migrating on foot from one state to another covering thousands of kilometres to satisfy their basic needs without caring about the danger of getting infected. Many a times people repeat the medicine which doctor has prescribed them in the previous illness. They think taking same medicine for similar symptoms will cure their disease. No one should take medicines or

repeat prescribed medicine without consulting a doctor. Another thing which people do when they get ill is, they choose that doctor, who charges a low consultation fee. They are not concerned whether the doctor is specialized for treating their particular problem or not. This shows the passive attitude of people towards health. One can notice the same in the short story *The Doctor's Word* where Narayan has sketched a fictional character of Dr. Raman, who is a very skilled surgeon. He is very straightforward person. He is very upset to find people neglecting their health problems and avoiding consulting a doctor in the early stage of their illness. He is annoyed when people consult him when they are on the last leg of their illness. He doesn't understand why patients do not come to him in the early stages of their illness so that he can treat them more effectively and without any risk. He discusses this issue with his friend Gopal: People came to him when the patient was on his last legs. Dr Raman often burst out, "Why couldn't you have come a day earlier?" The reason was obvious __ visiting fee twenty-five rupees, and more than that people like to shirk the fact that the time had come to call in Dr Raman; for them there was something omniums in the very association. (*The Doctor's Word*, 41)

From the above passage of the short story it is very clear that the most obvious reason why patients consult Dr. Raman when they are left with no option is the consultation charge, which is twenty-five rupees and it is quite heavy on the pockets of the poor patients. When this point is analysed in the real circumstances, it is noticed that it is a fact. One of the major reasons for the passive attitude of people towards health care is economic backwardness because of which people are unable to afford the heavy consultation charges, costly tests and medicines. This secondary attitude and ignorance are the reason why the average life span and the quality of life is adversely affected in the recent past.

Approach Of Doctor Towards Patient:

This paper attempts to study how the behavioural conduct of the doctor makes a great difference to the patient's health. It is the psychology of any doctor not to get emotionally involved with any of his patients because doctors have to take a tough call for the patient's well-being in crucial situations. Doctor treats his patient as a subject so that he can take tough decisions in difficult situations for the good of the patient but if the doctor is attached emotionally with the patient, it will affect his decision making. This notion is prevailing from ages in medical science. When the readers start reading R. K. Narayan's short story *The Doctor's Words*, the central character of the story is Dr. Raman, who is a perfect embodiment of stereotype doctors of Government Hospitals in India. He treats each of his patient as a body which he wants to bring back to proper working condition. He tells the actual condition of the patient very bluntly on their faces and people take his words as verdict passed by the judge. Dr. Raman remains busy with his practice and patients, and time just passes by. One day Dr. Raman finds that Gopal's eldest son is waiting for him. He comes to Dr. Raman to give him the message that Gopal is not well from last couple of months and at that time Dr. Raman realises that he and Gopal had not met with each other for last three months. After finishing his work when Dr. Raman goes to meet Gopal around three in afternoon at that time, he finds that Gopal is in a very serious condition and he has to be operated as soon as possible. Notice these lines, *There was hardly any time to be lost. He took off his coat and opened his bag. He took out an injection tube, the needle sizzled over the stove.* (*The Doctor's*

Word, 42) By forgetting his tiredness of his work in hospital, he immediately starts treating Gopal at his home.

He tells about the critical condition to Gopal's wife and tells her that the eight hours after surgery are very crucial for Gopal and if he survives this time he will live for another forty years but at the same time, he says that he doesn't assure for his life and if the family wants to sign the will, they should do it right now. After a few hours of operation when Dr. Raman's assistant gets excited by seeing the improvement in Gopal's pulse rate, Dr. Raman tells his assistant that it might be a false flash-up. He asks Gopal's wife to go out of room along with the younger children because he knows they might get frightened by seeing blood during the process of the operation. This shows that he is strict but not senseless. It also shows that Dr. Raman doesn't believe in giving the false hope to any of the patients and their family members. Such blunt approach of doctors has been shown by Narayan taking the example of Dr. Raman in the present short story. From this discussion, we can infer that sometimes doctors need to behave bluntly do avoid distraction because of emotions.

How Faith And Optimism Work Wonders Even When Medical Science Fails:

Theoretical facts, logical reasoning and experimental evidences are the base of medical science. It doesn't believe in miracles. R. K. Narayan in the short story *The Doctor's Word* has shown Dr. Raman as the embodiment of an ideal doctor, who believes only in medical science and reason. He doesn't believe in miracles. He doesn't want to give any false hope to any of his patients and same he does with Gopal and his family. That is the reason he remains quiet when Gopal's wife expresses her gratitude towards him and says that he has brought back Gopal's life from Yama's hand and saved her husband. Dr. Raman knows that the eight hours after surgery are very crucial and Gopal's pulse rate is sinking, which was not at all an encouraging sign. He is worried about the life of his friend. But when Gopal asks Dr Raman about his condition, that time Dr. Raman lies for the first time in his entire life of medical practice. He gives Gopal a false hope and tells him that he will be fine soon. Gopal has a firm belief in his words and says that he has complete faith in his friend, Dr. Raman and on his treatment. This faith brings an optimism in Gopal and he gains that much of courage and inner strength that he pulls off even the death challenge. The story ends showing Gopal is saved and Dr. Raman is wondering upon the mystery as to how this miracle has happened. Medical science does not believe in miracles it believes in reasons and evidences. But sometimes nature has some other plans. One should remain optimistic in all situations and try all possible efforts without caring about its result. If one is optimistic and persistent in efforts, miracles may happen like in the case of Gopal. Notice these last lines of the short story uttered by Dr Raman...*He has turned the corner. How he has survived this attack will be a puzzle to me all my life...*(The Doctor's Word, 46) In this manner, Narayan has shown the power of staying optimistic and having faith.

In this difficult time of COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher appeals to the readers not to repeat the mistake of hiding the symptoms and doing treatment without consulting the expert doctors like Gopal and his family did. It may cost their life. A proper treatment in the supervision of an expert doctor can cure the Covid-19 disease. We should not think about the treatment but should take precautionary measures by following the guidelines of social distancing, keep ourselves and our surroundings clean, washing our hands with soap or

handwash till 20 seconds and use sanitizers if water is not available and sanitize things we use from time to time and each time we use them. As R. K. Narayan suggests faith and optimism can work wonders in any difficult situation and even can defeat death, we all must keep faith and remain optimistic so that soon this difficult time ends.

Conclusion

This paper introspects the short story, *The Doctor's Words* by R. K. Narayan from the patient's as well as from doctor's perspective. It also shows how Narayan has skilfully handled the theme of hospital to show the psychology of the patients towards their medical health. Moreover, it has been noticed that because of the poor economic backwardness, people avoid visiting doctors till their illness becomes chronic. By portraying fictional characters, Dr Raman and his fast friend Gopal, Narayan has shown how optimism and faith can work wonders even in the case of medical science.

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