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A 319/TV.10

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FINAL TRANSCRIPT

A 319: LITERATURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

TV 10: BORN INTO 2 CULTURES?

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A319 LITERATURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

BORN INTO 2 CULTURES?

Indian Street scene

CAPTION

STORY

SS VT

Bangle seller's shop

Indian market

MS Narayan

Indian Street

Temple interior

Man (from "The Painter of Signs" by R.K.Narayan):

The bangle sellers shop. That single cubicle beyond the banana go down was crowded with women. Bargaining, chattering, selecting and changing their selections, and thrusting up their wrists for more bangles. The bangle seller was continuously squeezing wrists while slipping on the bangles.

"Pleasantest job" Raman reflected. He noticed that the sign board he had delivered on the previous day was still in a corner within its paper wrapper. Evidently, the man had been holding hands continuously and could not find a free moment. The lecher!

R.K.Narayan:

Indian traditional story telling I am continuing, that's all. I may not sit down under a tree and narrate.

Well, I write with a modern typewriter or pen.

They get printed and distributed. Formerly they had to be listened to.

Man (from "The Painter of Signs" by R.K.Narayan):

On the way home he stopped by at the temple to take the key from his aunt. She got up from the assembly, and handed him the key with the usual advice about food. It was eight o'clock, and the story telling would go on for at least a couple of hours more.

music

Women in temple

"Today he's going to relate Krishna's wedding with Rukmani ... and I want to stay through."
"Certainly. Don't hurry back. I'll look after myself."

Temple interior

Indian Music

MS Narayan:

R.K.Narayan:
Nowadays TV and Broadcasting are influencing all young minds.

Temple interior

In those days, the very surroundings. Because there would be so many HariKathas and Kalakshepas, roadside storytellers and above all the traditional house where a grandmother or mother were regularly reciting and telling the story.

Indian Music

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:
Gods and demons and their values are still here but in a different context and in a different complexion, different terms. It's essentially the same, a conflict between good and evil, the man righteous and the sufferer, it's all there and there's a basic philosophy that evil destroys itself in the end, and cannot last for ever. Well, that's a sort of philosophy that's a debacle for all stories, you know.

VT "Sunrise in the East"
ex Overseas Film & TV Centre
Africans playing music
and dancing

Village with children playing

Man (from "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe):
So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit between the his bobie. And he told them stories of the land, masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nyoeye knew that it was right to be playing masterly and to be violent.

Children in hut

men listening to storyteller

MS Chinua Achebe

children in hut [Sunrise in E]

MS Chinua Achebe

BOOK COVER "Things Fall Apart"

MS Chinua Achebe

But somehow, he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to younger children. Stories of the tortoise, and his wily ways. That was the kind of story that Nyoye loved, but he now knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man and so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories, and when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him.

Chinua Achebe:

It's the mother who generally told the story about the animals and the spirits and so on to her children after dinner.

So that the youngest children actually fell asleep listening to stories, and the story of the clan or the town came later and it's generally the story of the men, you know, and telling you how, where we came from, who was the founder of this village, the wars that have been fought against other villages and so on. So soon you have two streams. The mother responsible for the gentler story, the real stories really, I think and the father responsible for the history and the legends of origin and so on.

And the life of Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart".

being the kind of person he was, masculine, strong, powerful was listening to only one of the streams in the culture. The culture is saying it is good for a man to be strong and powerful, to have farms and to have wealth and prosperity and to feed his family and all that is wonderful, and Okonkwo heard that, but he did not hear the other story.

He chose not to listen so intently to the other story, the story that the women told which had nothing to do with success or getting along or being powerful or being strong, and so he came to grief.

BOOK COVERS: "Things Fall Apart" & "No Longer at Ease"

MS Chinua Achebe

I wrote "Things Fall Apart", its sequel, "No Longer at Ease" and another story, three generations in fact of the same family and this is actually in other words, it's the story of my grandfather, my father and myself, three generations. And the story of my father's generation did not get written for all kinds of reasons.

CAP

THE WRITER'S RESPONSIBILITY

MS Narayan:

G D Jayalakshmi:
But western readers may not wholly grasp all the references to Hindu mythology in Narayan's stories.

R.K.Narayan:

Let them. I couldn't care less. I told you I'm not bothering about my readers anywhere. I write for my own satisfaction, and if it appeals, OK. If it doesn't appeal, I don't care. I'm not going to write to please anybody else, to attract anybody's attention. That's one point that you must always bear in mind, that a writer, I mean at least a writer like me, doesn't care for the public. So all the fan letters I get leave me cold.

MS Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

I think every writer has a responsibility to their society, whether African or non-African. Whether they recognize these responsibilities is another matter. I think anybody who is telling stories - and this is really what I see myself as doing, I see myself in the tradition of the story

tellers - and the story teller cannot really exist without those who listen to the story. His responsibility is to tell them good stories, useful stories, powerful stories, whatever, improving stories, whatever you want, so it is for me quite basic. I know there are people who say this is not the case, you know, I am just me, I just enjoy myself. I think that's a situation in which I don't want to get into it, but certainly we in Africa do not fall into that temptation of thinking that what we are doing is simply our own thing.

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

I write only for my own satisfaction. That is I want to get it out of my system, that's all. And that's a profession, you know. I have to do my quota of work. That's all my satisfaction and that I've done what I wanted to do. I'm not a man who reads my books, and how they react to it. A book as I mentioned a little while ago, has a life of its own, it's like a little seedling which you plant and it grows up into a tree on its own. And I realize more and more when as I see letters from readers who get so much out of a story or a novel. I am surprised, and feel that once a book leaves my table, and after it is printed and read I've no responsibility. I won't be able to gauge the reactions and the value of a book. A piece of writing has an organic life of its own, and if it is strong enough it survives. Otherwise it is dead within a few months. Like the best sellers.

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

I think in Africa what we're doing is celebrating humanity and I use that word because it seems to me so appropriate in this situation where you have had a long period of denigration and you must restore celebration to people because this is essential to our humanity.

This humanity has been questioned,
or somehow undermined.
It is our responsibility to restore
it.

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

Primarily I write to express
myself. I don't care who my
readers are, what happens to, their
reactions, I don't care. If you go
on thinking of your readers and so
on you become a journalist,
probably, a writer for a newspaper,
or a feature writer. Not a
creative writer.

CAP

AUDIENCE

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

People will say "Now is your story
African or universal?" I mean,
they never put that question to
British writers or American
writers. It is assumed that what
they are writing is already
universal, you see. It's only
Indians and Africans who have to be
asked whether they are writing
universal stories or African or
Indian stories. I think this is
really nonsense. We write - all
good stories are universal and you
don't need to make any particular
effort to achieve it. If the story
is set in an old familiar
environment that is simply where it
is set, and we do our best to
familiarize ourselves with that
environment in order to appreciate
that story.

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

I hate all labels in literature.
There is such a thing as
literature, that's all. It's like
saying "the Indian sky". African
sky. North American sky. Sky is
the same everywhere, and literature
is like that. Culture is like
that.

There are certain local colourings, that's all, but to classify a set of writers as Commonwealth writers seems to me a very offensive way of. It's a sort of a profession which has grown, commonwealth specialists and professors and seminar champions and so on. It gives something to do for a lot of others but I don't like that word at all.

CAP

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

VT Indian Steam Train
ex Huntley Archives RT:13"

STILL Lord Curzon
India Office Library

VT Indians in Exam Hall
Huntley Archives RT: 7"

"heads" Victoria penny

"tails" Victoria penny

MS Narayan

Man (from "A Writer's Nightmare" by R.K.Narayan):

When he said "Quit India, we meant it to apply to Englishmen as well as their language.

And there doesn't seem to be much point in tolerating you in our midst. You are the language of the Imperialist,

the red tapist, the diabolical legalist, the language which always means two things at the same time."

And the English language replies

"You probably picture me as a trident-bearing Rule Britannia, but actually I'm a devotee of goddess Saraswati. I have been her most steadfast handmaid."

R.K.Narayan:

Excellent.

Woman:

Do you feel that?

MS NARAYAN

R.K.Narayan:

Yes. Yes I think it's right. It's a long time since I read that passage. I don't remember it, but I think it's very, very sound statement. English needs no defence now.

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

I remember the first reader, the first English reader I had, and it had this story which also fascinated me. It began something like this. Once there was a wizard. He lived in Africa. He went to China to get a lamp. That was the first paragraph. Now not much of a story, you might say, but then I was absolutely fascinated. This idea of Africa, the idea of the wizard, the idea of the far-away China. What was this lamp about? So slowly the stories in English were introduced, and it was just, again, one more complexity in an already extremely complex environment.

STILL "What's this by thunder"
RT: 9"

STILL 2 hunters by gorge in
Njoro river. B T Batsford RT:9"

STILL African from "Tales that
Thrill" RT: 7"

The story which you had perhaps read without any consciousness of what was going on, the adventure stories, the story of the white man, for instance, wandering into a certain place and being surrounded by savages and cannibals, these stories initially were just stories.

Chinua Achebe

If you think back now you realize that you were even on the side of the white man in those stories. You were as terrified of the savages and the cannibals as you were intended to be, you see. You were on the wrong side. You did not realize that you were of the party of the cannibals and the savages. You thought you were on the party of the white man, and so this was the real, for me, the turning point. The moment you realized that you were not of the party of the explorer, but of the party of the explored. Then you knew that your story had not been told.

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

There's a brand of English language which has developed in India, which is vaguely American English, it is an Indian English, and no apology is needed for that.

It's a world language happened to be the Imperialist language, that doesn't take away its value.

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

Some of them are saying, I've heard someone say "Oh no, I want to write about my people. But how can I write it in a foreign language?" And my answer is "For God's sake, write it in your mother tongue. Who is stopping you?" You see, but the reason why you are agonizing and wasting their time is because they've been told that somehow to write in a particular language is wrong, you see, and there are people who cannot write in anything but English or French or Portuguese. Why stop them, you see? Surely it's better to have a story in Portuguese than no story at all?

CAP

RELIGION

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

No British teachers at all. Only Indian teachers, who were mostly converts, you know, and they were more fanatical than any missionary could be. And they spent the time attacking our gods, and insulting Hindu religion, insulting Hindu gods. They were very partial to Christian students and prejudiced against non-Christian students. They would say that Lord Krishna was a lecher, and he had so many women ran about with him. You worship gods like that, and you worship stones. See in my "Swami and Friends", one Ebenezer attacking the gods. I think that's the kind of style they adopted, you know.

STILLS: Pictures of Krishna
ex postcards

MS Narayan

Woman in temple
STILLS: gods from postcards

VT church exterior

crucifix

STILL: Krishna [postcard]

TC "Major religions of the
World" Scottish Central
Film Library"
African Church Interior

Choir singing

MS Chinua Achebe

Costumed procession

Man (from "Swami and Friends" by R.K.Narayan):
"Oh, wretched idiots!", the teacher said, clenching his fists. "Why do you worship dirty, lifeless wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they see? No. Can they bless you? No. Can they take you to heaven? No. Why? Because they have no life." He then turned to Christianity. "Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to heaven. He was a real God. Trust him and he will take you to heaven. The kingdom of heaven is within us." Tears rolled down Ebenezer's cheek when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Sri Krishna. Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that arch scoundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practise dark tricks on those around him?". He paused for breath.

Chinua Achebe:
My parents were early Christian converts. My father was a teacher with the Anglican mission.

Chinua Achebe:
So I grew up in a Christian home, Christian atmosphere. We prayed in the morning and at night we read the Bible. We went to church, but also there was the community, the bigger community which was not all Christian, by any means. They were the ones who had the festivals, who had the masquerades, and I was very curious to know what was going on there.

Man walking through village

Church exterior

Man (From "Things fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe):

That night, a bell man went through the length and breadth of Umbatta, proclaiming that the adherents of the new faith were henceforth excluded from the life and privilege of the clan.

The Christians had grown in number and were now a small community of men, women and children, self-assured and confident.

R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan:

There is no question of any west or, westernized those days. There was only one kind of living, that is Indian kind of living. There was no kind of westernize, except that a few who probably spent a few years in Oxford and in the Indian Civil Service, and they affected a lot of western habits.

House exterior

Indian floor

But normally, 99% of the households were traditional.

So there is no question of their influence being on any domestic life anywhere.

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe:

The point I'm making really is that I was born into two cultures, the foreign missionary, Christian culture and the indigenous culture and that was really, I think, it was the - not conflict - but the coming together, the meeting of these two streams that created the necessary tension for me.

Taking part
R.K.Narayan
Chinua Achebe

With the voices of
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Bhasker

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