

Krishna (Narayan's novel *The English Teacher*) Disillusioned

Character Krishna is disillusioned with his teaching profession, in which he stuffs information into students who only memorise material in the days before the exam. Although fed up with his meaningless life, he carries on, not knowing how to change. In the opening pages, he compares himself to a contented cow regurgitating material in a dull, predictable routine. Then, with his dry humour, he adds that even 'a cow might feel hurt at the comparison.' Through his friendship with his daughter's school teacher and appreciation of his teaching methods, Krishna comes to realise that he is the product of colonialism. He is an English-speaking Indian who finds himself culturally hollowed out by the western education that shaped him and is shaping his students. He is an accurate and reliable but uninspired clerk, who must seek vigour and new ideas during his morning walk. Krishna begins to change when he marries a woman who embodies Indian culture and when he accepts the responsibility of being a father. In several delicately described scenes, we see Krishna's appreciation of his wife's goodness, beauty and serenity. He also begins to appreciate the headmaster's qualities and his philosophy of education. Krishna's love for his wife is measured by the depth of his grief after her untimely death. Again, however, this jolt stimulates change. Although he is not religious, he relies on a 'medium' to enable him to communicate with his dead wife and to reach, through her, a greater understanding of himself. In the end, Krishna says that he has 'a moment of immutable joy.'

Activities Krishna spends (or in his view, wastes) much of his time teaching college students. He takes long morning walks and reads poetry in the evening. He also spends time playing games with his daughter and teasing his wife.

Illustrative moments

Disillusioned Early on, Krishna articulates the nature of his disillusionment with his profession. Coming back home from teaching, having waited impatiently for the bell to ring, he reflects: 'I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis...while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage.'

Loving Krishna's tender love and respect for his wife is a strong undercurrent of the novel. In one moving scene, we watch him read a letter from his wife (she is living with her family until his salary is capable of supporting them both). Before opening it, he brings it his nose and smells it, trying to experience her sensual presence before he reads her words.

Serene Krishna's transformation from disillusionment to serenity is captured at the end of the novel. The inner calm that has eluded him throughout his life comes to him unexpectedly in the middle of the night. As Krishna explains, 'The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful for Life and Death' ('grateful for life and death' was Narayan's original title, which the American publisher considered too dark).