

"the english teacher" by r.k. narayan essay sample

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In the timeless classic penned by R. K Narayan “ The English Teacher”, it is entirely reasonable and sound to regard Susila’s death as a pivotal turning point in the novel. Susila’s passing on to the netherworld marks a radical change in Krishna’s life, and therefore it is valid to term the incident as one which is of “ massive consequence and magnitude”. What is more befuddling and intriguing is the question of who actually caused her ultimate demise. A number of theories and characters come to mind when the question is posted. I, for one, hold Dr. Shankar responsible for Susila’s death. His demeanor, attitude and work ethics throughout her ordeal did not justify his supposed status as ‘ the most successful practitioner in town [Malgudi]”, let alone “ the greatest physician on earth”.

For starters, Dr. Shankar is way too sloppy in the way he works. When Krishna, the protagonist, first sought help from the physician, Dr. Shankar merely “ asked a few questions, wrote down a prescription and put it away”. He confidently declared that “ it is just malaria” and he has “ fifty cases like this on hand, no need to see Susila”. This type of hit-and-miss and inaccurate assumption of a patient’s illness has to be the cardinal sin in the world of practitioners. He is far too confident and casual in his diagnosis that he is able to tell to tell what illness a patient is suffering from without even being present in front of the in front of the patient. Dr. Shankar is the perfect example of what all doctors in the world should not do. His quick dismissal of Krishna’s request for him to see Susila proves just how irresponsible a doctor he is. Dr. Shankar is not meticulous enough, and in his official capacity as a

doctor, he is best described as “ an automaton dispensing medicine and healthcare”. If only Dr. Shankar had been more elaborate in his proceedings, the outcome might not have proved to be so tragic.

Another key factor in Dr. Shankar’s contribution to Susila’s demise is his cocksure and overly-optimistic attitude. It can also be said that it is this type of mentality that led to his being sloppy in his diagnosis. Perhaps he was so sure of himself that he sees no need to see the patient in person. There are a number of instances in the novel which showcases Dr. Shankar’s foolhardy ways. One classic example is his reply to Krishna’s plea for him to pay Susila a visit. His presumptuousness shone through as he snapped “ Oh, no, it is just malaria. I have fifty cases like this on hand, no need to see her. Just peep into that room and see how many persons with fever have come here.” Dr. Shankar had implied that he is very sure Susila’s illness is no different from the fifty odd patients’ over in the sickbay.

The statement reeks of over-confidence. Another incident when Dr. Shankar’s temerariousness had the better of him was when the blood test results were delivered. Upon discovering that Susila has tested positive for typhoid, he cockily declared, “ I like typhoid. It is the king among fevers and shows a great deal of regard for those who understands its ways.” It is also ironic and bewildering to see Dr. Shankar “ dreading malaria- the most erratic and temperamental things on earth”, when he had earlier been so confident of curing Susila’s supposed malaria illness. Dr. Shankar has a way with words, in addition to having a glib tongue which says the words patients

want to hear most according to their predicaments. When it was malaria, he sounded so confident.

When it turned out to be typhoid, he still remains as confident. How can one accept a doctor who does not even apologise after his cocksure approach led to a grave mis-diagnosis of a patient's health? Instead of expressing regret for being too confident of his flawed diagnosis, he even initiated a tasteless banter about liking the fact that Susila had contracted typhoid. Dr. Shankar is simply too confident and sure of himself and his abilities. Had he been more cautious, Susila might not have met with the tragic end.

For all the reverence and adoration his many supporters display, Dr. Shankar is to be blamed for Susila's death. He was lionized everywhere he went; the extent of his fame was akin that of a luminary. Whether or not he is solely responsible can be contested, as there are a few incriminating evidence which points to Krishna's lack of decisiveness as one of the main causes of her demise. That said, it is fair to say that had Dr. Shankar been more professional and meticulous in his diagnosis, Susila's death might have been avoided. He regarded the illness as too predictable but as it turned out, the outcome was nowhere close to what he had expected. In this case, something which he had thought would be very predictable turned out to be a mishap. Placing this incident in juxtaposition with the fallacy of the hermit's prophecy enables one to draw parallels on the theme of unpredictability. It brings forth with it many ironies and paradoxes that are, at times, unfathomable.