



## Landscape of Indian Society in the R.K. Narayan's writing

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### Abstract

One of the great Indo-English novelists R. K. Narayan wrote many novels and short stories. Out of many stories 'The Guide' gave him a name and fame. He gave a birth of imaginary town in Malgudi Days. In his novel he used realistic technique to depict Indian society, traditions, ritual, religious aspect and socio-economic condition of the India. In his writing he strikingly described the problems which are faced by Indian people, family problems, and greed of money, sex, love which may be the reason of their demises. This paper focuses on how R.K. Narayan showcases the Indian society in his writings.

Keywords : Indian people, tradition, social condition

### Introduction

One of the eminent Indo-English novelists, famous story writer Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanaswami, or R. K. Narayan was born in Chennai on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1906. After his bachelor degree from the University of Mysore R. K. Narayan went to the United States in 1956 at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation. In the initial days he started writing of short stories for newspaper "The Hindu". 'The Guide' gave him a name and fame

### About R.K. Narayan

R.K.Narayan was born in a Tamil Brahmin family on 10 October 1906 in Madras (now Chennai, Tamil Nadu), British India. He was one of eight children; six sons and two daughters. Narayan was second among the sons; his younger brother Ramachandran later became an editor at Gemini Studios, and the youngest brother Laxman became a cartoonist. His father was a school headmaster, and Narayan did some of his studies at his father's school. As his father's job entailed frequent transfers, Narayan spent a part of his childhood under the care of his maternal grandmother, Parvati. During this time, his best friends and playmates were a peacock and a mischievous monkey.

His grandmother gave him the nickname of Kunjappa, a name that stuck to him in family circles. She taught him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music and Sanskrit. According to Laxman, the family mostly conversed in English.

In his first three books, Narayan highlights the problems with certain socially accepted practices. The first book has Narayan focusing on the plight of students, punishments of caning in the classroom, and the associated shame. The concept of horoscope-matching in Hindu marriages and the emotional toll it levies on the bride and groom is covered in the second book. In the third book, Narayan addresses the concept of a wife putting up with her husband's antics and attitudes. His first collection of short stories, Malgudi Days, was published in November 1942, followed



by *The English Teacher* in 1945. In between, being cut off from England due to the war, Narayan started his own publishing company, naming it (again) Indian Thought Publications; the publishing company was a success and is still active, now managed by his granddaughter. Soon, with a devoted readership stretching from New York to Moscow, Narayan's books started selling well and in 1948 he started building his own house on the outskirts of Mysore; the house was completed in 1953. Around this period, Narayan wrote the story for the Gemini Studios film *Miss Malini* (1947), which remained the only story written by him for the screen that came to fruition.

### **R.K. Narayan's Writing Style**

R.K. Narayan portrays social realism in his writing but not photographic reality; he rather represents reality, which is artistic. In this sense, he differs from the French realists and naturalists who were interested in the naked realism of life. Narayan's writing technique was unpretentious with a natural element of humour about it. It focused on ordinary people, reminding the reader of next-door neighbours, cousins and the like, thereby providing a greater ability to relate to the topic. Unlike his national contemporaries, he was able to write about the intricacies of Indian society without having to modify his characteristic simplicity to conform to trends and fashions in fiction writing. He also employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose with gentle Tamil overtones based on the nature of his characters. Critics have considered Narayan to be the Indian Chekhov, due to the similarities in their writings, the simplicity and the gentle beauty and humour in tragic situations. Greene considered Narayan to be more similar to Chekhov than any Indian writer. Anthony West of *The New Yorker* considered Narayan's writings to be of the realism variety of Nikolai Gogol.

According to Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri, Narayan's short stories have the same captivating feeling as his novels, with most of them less than ten pages long, and taking about as many minutes to read. She adds that Narayan provides the reader something novelists struggle to achieve in hundreds more pages: a complete insight to the lives of his character between the title sentence and the ends. These characteristics and abilities led Lahiri to classify him as belonging to the pantheon of short-story geniuses that include O. Henry, Frank O'Connor and Flannery O'Connor. Lahiri also compares him to Guy de Maupassant for their ability to compress the narrative without losing the story, and the common themes of middle-class life written with an unyielding and un pitying vision. V. S. Naipaul noted that he "wrote from deep within his community", and did not, in his treatment of characters, "put his people on display".

Critics have noted that Narayan's writings tend to be more descriptive and less analytical; the objective style, rooted in a detached spirit, providing for a more authentic and realistic narration. His attitude, coupled with his perception of life, provided a unique ability to fuse characters and actions, and an ability to use ordinary events to create a connection in the mind of the reader.[84] A significant contributor to his writing style was his creation of Malgudi, a stereotypical small town, where the standard norms of superstition and tradition apply.

Narayan's writing style was often compared to that of William Faulkner since both their works brought out the humour and energy of ordinary life while displaying compassionate humanism. The similarities also extended to their juxtaposing of the demands of society against the confusions of individuality. Although their approach to subjects was similar, their methods were



different; Faulkner was rhetorical and illustrated his points with immense prose while Narayan was very simple and realistic, capturing the elements all the same

### **Indian Society in the R.K. Narayan's Writing**

In R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* the story revolves around the tension between modernity and tradition. Since the novel was written around 1930s, and the Indian society was in the transitional period of tradition and decolonization, the novel depicts the dynamics of the Indian society. Indian people developed consciousness about colonialism. As a result, India got independence.

The novel centers on the tension between the male and female, mainly represented by Ramani and Savitri respectively. Ramani, being fascinated by the modern life style, enjoys liaison, modern movies, parties etc. On the other hand, Savitri's faith on religion, her blind fidelity and the roles prescribed to the women show her inclination to the tradition. In addition, Babu's craze for cricket, electricity, movies, and adoption of western system of education further highlights the influence of modernity on the male. On the contrary, Gangu's and Ponni's inclination to the traditional norms and values show that females are still traditional unlike men. Hence, I will exploit 'Modernity' as a theoretical tool to analyze the text and justify the issue.

In all of the Narayan's novels, Indianness is reflected in various ways. He wrote many novels and short stories addressing humanity as a central theme. He had started writing under the influence of events occurring around him. His main concern is on the small segments of the Indian middle-class society and its mores and traditions as well as influence of modern way of life. The theme that has mostly been projected in his novels is the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in its different aspects. Though he writes in English, his attitude towards the western world is bitter. Especially, he criticizes the ex-colonizers of India who invaded the local culture and tradition of India. So, we can find the confrontation between the orient and the occident in most of his novels. It means there is tension between Indian tradition and western forms of life.

To show the traditional and western forms of life within single society, he creates imaginary setting of Malgudi which one or other way depicts the Indian reality. In fact, Malgudi is an Indian small town that stands at a nicely calculated comic distance between the east and west or tradition and modern. We see the deep reason for Narayan's choice of the small-town. The superficial influence of western or modern forces on it do not destroy its basic characters. It still retains and displays a more human way of life.

Due to his childhood spent in the care of his mother, he has wide knowledge of mythology and Indian culture and which can be seen in his most of the works. The title of his works also reflects the impact of Indian culture on him. His very first novel was *Swami and Friends*, this is the novel through which we got a fictional town of Malgudi which can be seen in many of his works, be it short stories or novels, and this town is inspired from the towns of South India. In this novel through the character of Swami, Narayan has shown the boyhood's carelessness, freeness, fears, and quest to get accepted. Just like the Indian way of telling a story in episodic form, take in that matter the example of Panchatantra, his story moves chronologically and in episodic form. For the Indian people, at the time of 1933, they were not aware or familiar with the classic English language and those who do understand English, is a form which is an everyday type of English, and Narayan has written his stories in a very simple language and without much use of jargons,



also Indians have a habit of using humour in a flow of talks, similarly Narayan has also used light humour which does not hurt anybody's feelings. His characters are typical Indians in his initial novels, not just by name but by their spirit as well, they have notions and morals of India. Narayan has the base of most of his works from the two epics, The Mahabharata and The Ramayana. Be the characters of Swaminathan, Raju or Krishnan, all are inspired from Puranic tradition. There are sadhus, sanyasis, common men, all struggling for a healthy life. All his characters struggle while growing up because of the social and religious framework. In The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran falls in love with a girl but could not marry her because she is a Manglik and in India it is believed that only a Manglik can marry the other Manglik otherwise one of the partners will eventually die, it is the social pressure due to which he could not marry her, in The Guide, Rosie belongs to a family of temple dancers, known as Devadasis.

When we talk about myths, myths are generally stories made in ancient times which people blindly believes in. myth comes from the Greek word "Mythos" which means verbal tale. Many myths give explanation to natural as well as unnatural events, these are stories which make a person feel comfortable as well as prisoned. Generally these stories are made to make people not do any harm to natural beauty of nature and to not harm other fellow humans and animals but people in India have taken them in the wrong way, instead of people feeling safe these stories are main people feel unsafe and due to which superstition is spreading. Narayan is a modern writer, but to show the Indianess in writings he has used several myths in almost each and every work of his' be it a short story or novel. Most of the myths that Narayan has showcased in his novels are taken from the Indian epics, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, BhagawatGeeta and also from a series of tale known as Panchatantra, the stories which are known to the world in the form of animal stories. Through the use of myths, Narayana just tries to show the Indian mind-set and wanted to evoke comic feeling and a light humour. Narayan is a writer who may or may not believe in Indian myths and spiritual ideology but he is deeply rooted in the Indian culture, and he even got penetrate in the core Indian life without being involved in the problems of religion, caste or class. Through his presentation of the myths, it can be said that he is deeply rooted with the beliefs of karma, soul and reincarnation

When we talk about Narayan's women characters, his female characters are neither too traditional nor too modern, they are a blend of both, they know when to sacrifice their wishes for the betterment of their family and relatives and know when to take a stand for what they feel is right for themselves. It can also be said that Narayan has introduced the concept of "New Women" in the Indian writings in English

### **Conclusion**

R.K. Narayan's The Guide is a great example of accurate portrays of Indian scenario as this technic was used by in tragedy King Lear Shakespeare skillfully exposes the chaos, illness and turmoil of Lear's dominion with unadulterated image of his art. He focuses on deteriorating Indian family relation, religious nature of Indian society, and different problems of Indian society like drought, blind faith on sadhus, and superstitious nature of Indian people. Narayan shows us the double faced society and how people change the meanings of myths as per their convenience. Through his writing, Narayan has shown us the clash between realism and myths.



Myths turn out to be a greater force or as a character which makes up the storyline. R.K. Narayan had showcases the real Indian situation through his stories and novels. He depicted the real sense of Indian society, customs, traditions and belief.

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