

## **The Magic Idyll of Antiquated India in R.K. Narayan Fiction**

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The problem that every writer on the orient has faced was “---- how to get hold of it? How to approach, How not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope and its awful dimensions?” India with his rich culture heritage, its various religions along with its populations, urban and rural, ostensibly appears to be the ideal ground for weaving and setting the tale in. The very vastness of the place results in offering innumerable themes to the writers and these themes in turn interact at various levels making the task somewhat Herculean in nature.

R K Narayanan is one of the most famous and widely read Indian novelists. His stories were grounded in a compassionate humanism and celebrated the humour and energy of ordinary life. Blotner in her dissertation published in 2005 calls R K Narayan as “deeply religious and confined to Hindu rituals.” In 1989 collection of essays, entitled *A Story-Teller’s World* Narayanan affirms his all commitment to reproduce in his works the India of culture and also narrative tradition, which has had its origin in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the ten- thousand –year- old epics of India.

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanswamy (R. K Narayan) was born on October 10, 1906 in Madras. His father was a provincial Headmaster. R K Narayan spent his early childhood with his maternal grandmother Parvathi in Madras. He obtained his bachelor degree from university of Mysore. R K Narayan began his writing career with *Swami and Friends* in 1935. Most of his work is set in fictional town of Malgudi, which captures everything Indian while having the unique identity of its own. R K Narayan’s writing style was marked by simplicity and subtle humour. He told stories of ordinary people trying to live their simple life in the changing world. Narayan lived till ninety five, writing for more than fifty years, and publishing till he was eighty seven. He wrote fifteen novels, five volumes of short stories a number of travelogues and collection of non-fictions, English translation of Indian epics and the memoirs “My days”. Narayan fiction characters are related to real life models. Swami, Krishna, Chandra, Suseela, Savitri, unassuming Sastri, Margayya- The ambitious financier in ‘The Financial Experts’, Raju-Ostentatious guide Vasu-rogue taxidermist exemplify the common people in the Indian society. The relevant

use of tales from Hindu mythology, the teaching of Bhagvat Gita, austere religious practice and belief ordained to attain one's aim add strength to fictional art. Ian Milligan, "Novelist like Narayan continually adds to the richness of the human experience. They bring before us the new topics, new characters and new attitudes.

All the human follies and idiosyncrasies are the visible manifestation of life, however absurd or cold might appear. Natraj with his original Heidelberg work, Vasu with pythons and carcasses, Mali with his story producing machine, Jagan with his philosophies with many other strange creatures crowd the stage of Malgudi. In Narayan's world, Women stand for traditional values and are the very personifications of the home and the hearth. They also represent the real and the unchanging and often proved to be the source of strength because of their strong conviction and unswerving moral values.

Doyle in his book remarks,"..... The life of Malgudi never ruffled by Politics proceeds exactly the same way as it has been done for centuries, and the juxtaposition of the age- old convention and the visible encroachment on the traditional values" and the lifestyle by civilization, the various human situations depicted in these Novels border on Pathos. But the old values, ".....eventually reign supreme; the modern only touches the fringes of society, never really penetrating to the core". After the storm is over characters return to, what Chandran calls in The Bachelor of Arts, "a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics".

Narayanan writes deeply traditional novels which are apolitical, universalist-humanist, yet representatively "Indian" in their spirituality. William Walsh contents that the Malgudi is a metaphor not only for India but for "everywhere": against the background of a single place .....The single Individual engages with the one, the universal problem, the efforts not just to be, but to become, Human". Indian writing in English is so inextricably linked with the political developments that even R. K. Narayan, who scrupulously avoids politics as a theme, "could not completely ignore what was happening around him. Malgudi, as we have seen earlier, was affected by the changes brought about by all -pervading presence of the British and there is a clash between tradition and modernity in all his novels".

Narayan's The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The English Teacher (1945) are intimately related to the social-political context of the colonial period. His British characters, though rather lifeless, serve as a prototype rather than characters in their own right. Chandran's opinion of Brown, one of his English teachers, illustrates this point: He is..... but merely to keep up appearance. All Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won't do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart. They must be paid this heavy amount for spending their time in the English club. Why should not these fellows admit Indians to their clubs? Sheer colour arrogance. If ever I get into power I shall see the Englishmen attend clubs along with the Indians and are not so exclusive....Anyway who invented them here?

It is striking that Chandran neither here nor at any time later in his life, especially during many crises experience after he has left his home, is made to reflect on himself as a product of an educational systems totally alien to his own cultural background. Thus, he is not aware that his ideas of love or of a career have been implanted by his English teachers. Characteristically, "Narayan leaves it to his readers to either judge

Chandran on his own merits, that is, as a character whom the author himself fails, being uninterested in the social-psychological intricacies of the people he creates”

Much the same can be said about Krishna, The English Teacher. Though he is more mature than Chandran, and thus able to expose Brown’s absurd criticism of Indian spelling habits as a proof of British arrogance, he, too, is “...never made to reflect on the role and function of the British educational system in India”. When he leaves his job in order to settle down to teaching his pupils in a way which would serve their needs as Indians, he approaches his predicament from a merely cultural point of view excluding any consideration as to the historical necessity of view decision.

Narayan’s novels “Waiting for Mahatma” (1956) and “The Painter of Sign” (1976) implicit hunt for hidden meaning, social implication commitments and concerns of the nation’s ethos. “Waiting for the Mahatma” emerges from the surviving Gandhinism and post-independence optimism of the early- to- mid-1950’s while “The Painter of Sign” emerges from the ideological disenchantment and inflexibility of Indira Gandhi’s emergency in the mid 1970’s. The novels thus represent the tension between the differently articulated and focussed nationalism and feminism of the two decades. They also reflect Narayan’s own abiding sympathies—middle class, Hindu upper caste, androcentric and conservative—They end up rehearsing the dominant gender narrative of the Indian nation, particularly as it devolves upon the bodies and the voices of the two leading female characters, Bharti in -Waiting for Mahatma and Daisy in -The Painter of Sign. However by reading against the grain to give voice to the silenced female narratives in Waiting for the Mahatma and The Painter of the Signs, one can to quote from Gayatri Spivak’ analysis of Narayan’s *The Guide* (1958), put into the field of vision the fault lines in the self-representation of the nation, precisely in the terms of the women as object seen.

By probing the submerged interiority of his women character, Narayan’s androcentric, cultural ethno-nationalism and thereby underscore the fissures in the hegemonic nationalist text of modern India. V.S. Naipaul contends that “Narayan’s novels are less --- purely social comedies--- than religious books--- at times religious fables and intensely Hindu”.

Narayan’s India, though ostensibly the contemporary one, comes across as Bharatvarsha, which is both ancient and modern at the same time. It is constantly growing and developing, but basically it has not changed much since epic times.

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