



## R. K. Narayan: The Chronicler Of Everyday Lives And The Virtuoso Of Subtle Simplicity

Hariprasad N. Kamol<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Pavankumar J. Dwivedi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Parul University, Vadodara, India;

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Dept. of English, Parul University, Vadodara, India

\*Corresponding Author: Hariprasad N. Kamol

\*Email: hariprasadkamol@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

It is over the course of his creative work that R.K. Narayan, who is widely considered to be one of the most accomplished novelists in India, emerges as a narrator of everyday life. Using a literary style that is both subtle and attractive, the objective of this study is to analyze his depiction of common people and his abilities at capturing the spirit of the ordinary via his writing. The novels written by Narayan strike a chord with readers as they explore the complexities of human existence within the context of the ordinary life that they normally experience. The purpose of this study is to shed light on Narayan's unique capacity to transmute seemingly banal occurrences into deep observations on the human condition. This is accomplished via a thorough analysis of his writings.

**Keywords:** R. K. Narayan, everyday life, common people, subtle simplicity, prose style, human condition

Original works of literature written in the English language by Indian authors are referred to as 'Indo-Anglian Literature,' and the word is used to describe these works. It does not constitute a shaky extension of English literature but rather a component of Indian fiction in its purest form. Most people agree that the prominent Bengali reformer and thinker Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who also started the Brahma Samaj Movement, wrote the first piece of Indian literature in English. It has been a while since this tradition was originally followed. Numerous well-known Indians, notably the three most well-known Indian writers in English, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and R.K. Narayan, all aided in the expansion and advancement of Indo-Anglian literature, raising the bar for literary expression's quality. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, K. Nagarajan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Kushwant Singh, and Kamala Nagarajan made significant contributions to the form's deep meaning and complex technique after them. The goal was to elevate the English-language Indian book to the level of a revered classic in the Indo-Anglian literary canon.

Most people think that among Indian authors who write in English, R.K. Narayan is the most creative. Many people consider him to be among the most outstanding Indian authors who have written in English. In contrast to Mulk Raj Anand, whose art is primarily intended to act as a tool for social change or propaganda, his main goal is to satisfy aesthetic desires. In contrast to Mulk Raj Anand, who does just that with his paintings. R.K. Narayan, a writer who became famous in the 1930s, has what Britta Olinder calls characteristics. "a singular power of joining his fresh and humorous view of the ordinary world with the deeper meaning and larger perspectives he finds in the mythical treasures of his own religion". (22)

The birth of such a remarkable author took place at the beginning of the 20th century, on October 10, 1906, in Chennapatnam, which is located close to Mysore in Southern India. He eventually died away on May 13, 2001. As a result of spending his formative years by himself, Narayan developed into a reserved and sensitive young man. Even though he attended the school that his father had provided for him, he never showed any interest in learning. It appeared that his opponent, Narayan, had failed the qualifying exam for the graduate arts program. He resolved to make a life as a writer, namely in the English language. The "literary" odd jobs that I did, such as reporting for now-defunct periodicals and doing freelance work here and there, were more about fulfilling my soul than my pocketbook. He persisted in penning and submitting manuscripts. His literary

career began when, after a year of alone reading and writing, he began to express himself via his work in response to events happening around him. His occupation was that of an English language and literature instructor, but he opted to quit after just five days on the job to focus only on literary pursuits. The English Teacher (1945) and Swami and Friends (1930) are only two of the many books written by this author. Books such as "Mister Sampath" (1949), "The Financial Expert" (1952), and others 5. The Guide (1958), Anticipating the Arrival of the Mahatma (1955), and The Lawley Road (1956) Two films, The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967), were released in that year. The World of Nagaraj (1990), A Horse and Two Goats (1970), and a plethora of essays and short tales are all at your fingertips.

Throughout all of his novels and short tales, Narayan opted to set them in the fictional town of Malgudi. It has a spirit that is fundamentally Indian, and it has become a live presence in his works. He offered his perspective on life through the fictional location of Malgudi, which is a microcosm of the Indian society. Every aspect of Indian society may be seen at Malgudi. Among the various facets of Hindu society that he covers in his writings are the men and women of India, as well as their customs, religion, superstitions, and cultural activities. Even though he wrote in English, he has imparted his worldview through the depiction of this made-up town named Malgudi. As stated by Nandan in his book titled "The Life of R.K. Narayan,"

"He weaved a world existing nowhere but striking a chord of perfect reality with readers across the English reading peoples". (43)

In his sophisticated and all-encompassing assessment of Narayan's autobiography, the well-known American novelist John Updike provides a pen-portrait of the author that is both magnificent and comprehensive. It is stated by him that "Madrda, when he was raised and Mysore, where he came to live, spontaneously forgered a fictional city" (27). R.K. Narayan, much like Mulk Raj Anand, was able to maintain his status as a writer by making writing his profession and using it as a method to create a living for himself. As Iyengar (358) puts it, he is "that rare thing in India today, a man of letters pure and simple." He does not possess any axes of any sort as well. While all three authors—Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan—deserve credit for elevating Indo-Anglian literature to prominence, Narayan remained disengaged from the beginning to the end of his work, in contrast to the other two writers. Unlike M.R. Anand, who is adamantly in favor of socialism and the theory of social revolution, and Raja Rao, a committed novelist who writes with a feeling of direct involvement in the national struggle that is sweeping through the villages of southern India, R.K. Narayan is allegedly too busy writing novels to openly and centrally address any political, social, or economic issues of the day. According to Agnihotri (p.83), he appears to accept "the principle of Art for the sake of Art" as his guiding concept.

It is possible to divide Narayan's books into four distinct groups, including the following: 1. Early novels 2. Novels that are set in the United States, 3. Novels that deal with those who worship Mammon, and 4. The political novels. His whole body of work includes around 151 short tales and approximately ten novels. It can be seen in virtually all of his works that he is an unadulterated artist who is unaffected by political movements and "isms." Neither Anand's propaganda nor Bhabani Bhattacharya's energy could ever be seen in him. Like Manohar Malgonkar, he doesn't think Indian politics are unimportant and doesn't think Raja Rao should talk about how spiritual India is important. By himself, he constitutes a class. Undoubtedly, he is a writer who delves into mundane emotions, occasionally surprising and even shocking readers, but avoiding the worst aspects of life. When it comes to family life and other relationships, he is adamant about keeping the peace.

The position of man in this cosmos and the situation he finds himself in are the subjects of the majority of his works. Narayan himself said once:

"The mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution are the necessary ingredients in fiction". (12)

According to Narayan, life is irrational, and man is always attempting to make his wishes come true. He believes that this is the case. Therefore, Narayan concludes the tale of man's rise and fall by means of the reversal of fate, and as a result, he provides a comprehensive perspective on the life of a human being. One way to characterize him is as an author who belongs to the middle class. In his works, members of the Indian middle class are shown as being involved in a fight "to extricate themselves from the automation of the past." The vast majority of Narayan's protagonists and antagonists are middle class, with many hailing from the lower middle class in southern India. The family that Chandran hails from is middle class. The concept of earning his bread and butter is something that bothers Editor Srinivas as well. The challenge of generating money is the focal point of Mr. Sampath's whole existence, and Raju, the guide, is not always free from concerns over money. These people are the typical type of human beings; they are humble, shrewd, and unremarkable in their behavior.

Undoubtedly, Narayan is a writer who chronicles commonplace individuals and situations. His stories are constructed using elements and occurrences that are neither extraordinarily heroic nor remarkable. All of his works have a calm and muted atmosphere to them. To illustrate his point, he chooses everyday occurrences that virtually all of us have experienced at some point in our lives. His protagonists are regular people who do not have outstanding abilities; yet, they achieve greatness via a series of unfortunate events and then quickly return to their initial status. In the event that one were to take the life of a schoolboy like Swami, one would discover that his existence was neither remarkable nor strange. From a similar perspective, Mr. Sampath, Chandran, Raju, Rosie, Savitri, and a number of other individuals live, love, and suffer inside a complex web of

occurrences that are just everyday.

There is a belief that R.K. Narayan investigated and brought attention to the dysfunctional aspects of the social order without showing any bias. Iain Findayson observes:

“Anyone familiar with the area of India known to Narayan and his readers as Malgudi will recognize it as a sort of Swiftian flying island, landing and folding itself into the landscape of the Chelsea Hotel, New York, as into Mysore and Madras. This modestly memorable memoir ranks with the best of Waugh and Wodehouse” (36)

Narayan is greatly concerned with the establishment of a feeling of community among those who are entirely immersed in one other via the medium of storytelling. A unique blend of comedy and sarcasm, as well as an underlying feeling of beauty and tragedy, can be found in his writing. He “writes with complete objectivity.” (Wallis,133)

In the role of “an artful delineator of character,” Narayan is exceptional. As he puts it, “I am completely focused on character.” “If his personality comes to life, everything else will be a piece of cake.” Throughout his career, he has created a diverse array of portraits including students, educators, parents, grandparents, journalists, artists, financiers, filmmakers, eccentrics, cranks, sanyasis, and beautiful, charming, and suffering women. Everything is brought to life with incredible precision, creating an actual cosmos of genuine and unusual men and women. The book *Swami and Friends* is a narrative of the revolt of an extrovert schoolboy against his training as a missionary. This is a character-driven tale that focuses on the life of Swaminathan when he is attending school. In point of fact, it is a novelette, and reading it is a pleasurable experience. Another book that deals with the theme of college life is titled “The Bachelor of Arts.” A young guy named Chandran, who is twenty-one years old, has his feelings captured in *The Bachelor of Arts*, much to Swaminathan's school days in *Swami and Friends*. In a similar vein, *The English Teacher* describes a teacher's day-to-day work and goes into detail on the traits the instructor should have. According to H.E. Bates, “Mr. Narayan's rendering of human relationships has perfection of phrasing and a depth of understanding that makes Chandran's life very real” (p.26). This is a quote from the author. *The Bachelor of Arts* provides Graham Greene with a fresh perspective on life, and he comes to the following conclusion:

“It was Mr. Narayan with his **Swami and Friends** who first brought India in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life, alive to me and in **The Bachelor of Arts**, he continues to fill in his picture of Malgudi, a small town in Mysore. Narayan has created wonderfully memorable characters in **The Bachelor of Arts**” (47)

The people in Narayan's literature are shown as belonging to the middle class and to the everyday realism of Indian society. In reality, the story of a rural printer's failed endeavor to establish a film production firm is told in the book *Mr. Sampath*, which was released in the US under the title *The Printer of Malgudi*. Three books—*The English Teacher*, *Swami and Friends*, and *Bachelor of Arts*—form a trilogy included in *Malgudi-on-Sarayu*. A lament on domestic discord centered on the life of the hero, Ramani, an insurance company branch manager, is found in *The Dark Room*. In contrast, Margayya, a financial wizard, is brought to life in *The Financial Expert* through the use of mild irony, making for a delightful read.

As a backdrop for *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Narayan used the Indian Freedom Movement. His realist fiction's foundational nationalism came from this movement, as it did from a great many other Indian writers of the time. A sense of time and place and identity are all part of this nationalism. The narrative of Raju, a former inmate who is mistaken for a holy man upon his arrival in Malgudi, is told in *The Guide*, Narayan's most famous and refined work. “The Vendor of Sweets” depicts a shopkeeper who, in pursuit of a life of contemplation and tranquility, abandons his profession and the concerns of his family. *Sampath* is described as “a great living character in the annals of Indo-Anglian fiction” in the book *Mr. Sampath*. He was quite at ease while speaking Hindi and might be mistaken for a North Indian by the fur-capped man with the scarf draped over his head. There was no way to tell the difference between the two. He is usually hopeful, cheats on certain occasions, and obliges on others. The narrative of *Mr. Sampath* has been written with a great deal of care and sensitivity, whereas the story of *The Painter of Signs* is about a young man who paints signboards and is a bachelor who takes great pride in his traditional independence. *The Men-Eater of Malgudi* is not about a tiger but rather about a vicious and brutal taxidermist named Vasu. Vasu is a callous monster who has no respect for thanks or duties. The narrative is told from the perspective of Vasu. Taking into consideration the novel's characterisation, it is possible to observe that it is an exceptionally accomplished work.

While Mulk Raj Anand is thought of as a working-class writer, R.K. Narayan is seen as a middle-class author. The protagonists and supporting casts of his books typically hail from the middle class. When it comes to his characters, who often reside and move around in the confined confines of Malgudi, he constantly develops circumstances that are compelling based on his imagination. His recollections of Malgudi never fail to bring to mind works of literature such as “Wessex” by Thomas Hardy, “Yokhapatwpha” by William Faulkner, or “Sarasaparitla” by Patrick White. More than anything else, he is interested in analyzing the personalities of both men and women.

This relates to Narayan's fiction because he accomplishes greatness in character development by knowing and using his strengths. The words of Aristotle, “Character is the soul of tragedy,” ring true in Narayan's writing. Narayan effectively presents a wide range of middle-class Indians, who make up a sizable portion of India's population. It is important to note that the artist responds to society in a certain fashion, as Leo Lowenthal has pointed out:

“Man is born, strives, loves, suffers and dies in any society, but it is the portrayal of how he reacts to these common human experiences that matters. Since they almost in variables have a social nexus. Precisely because literature presents the whole man in depth, the artist tends to justify or defy society rather than be its passive chronicler” (3)

Looking at Narayan's works, one can see that he is interested in many different things all at once. His literature mostly centers on human relationships. His novels are notable for the sincerity and delicacy with which they handle family connections; the family is the vehicle through which his sensibility functions. As an example, he discusses a son and his parents, along with another brother and another brother, in *The Bachelor of Arts*. In *The English Teacher*, he writes about a husband and a wife, as well as a father and a daughter. In *The Financial Expert*, he writes about a father and a son, and in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, he writes about a grandmother and her grandson. (Walsh Aged 71) In both “The Dark Room” and “The Guide,” Narayan discusses the discord that may arise inside a marriage as well as the dissatisfaction that can be brought on by being married.

The use of language is the aspect of Narayan's work that stands out the most at the moment. He writes in a manner that is too straightforward and easy to read, requiring the reader to do no effort whatsoever. The following excerpt reveals his keen observational skills as well as his felicity with words:

“It was April. The summer sun shone like a ruthless lamp – and all the water in the well evaporated and the road dust became bleached and weightless and flew about like flour spraying off the grinding wheels long solitary walk remained a lifelong passion; the world perlocated his every pore. When the monsoon broke out, one could watch dark mountainous clouds mustering, edged with lightning; these would develop awesome pyrotechnics. In June, drizzle and sunshine alternating, leaving gold mohur, flame of the forest, and jacaranda in bloom along the avenues. In July and August, the never-ending downpour, grey leaden skies, and damp air blowing” (My Days)

The term “Narayan” is a symbol of the English language's remarkable versatility and flexibility. He achieves a remarkable level of success by employing words from the Bible, Shakespeare, and the Constitution of the United States. His method of storytelling is rather uncomplicated and appears to be fairly natural. In contrast to Raja Rao, he writes in a straightforward and obvious manner. Even when faced with difficult or nuanced circumstances, he chooses to explain himself in a straightforward and natural manner. The simplicity that he uses in his works has had a significant influence on the minds of readers all around the world, both in the United States and in other countries. The “readability” of a novel is the litmus test for their work. Writing in an accessible style, Narayan's works are beloved by readers for their humor, gentle sarcasm, and easygoing prose. Using mythology as a literary element, Narayan follows in the footsteps of other Indian authors working in English, such as Sudhin Ghose, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao. He bestowed a distinct and protracted legendary framework to *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, one of his most famous works. Here, S. Krishnam makes a comment:

“If Narayan's narrative powers owe something to his familiarity with traditional Indian story-telling, the universal significance he sees in many of the Indian myths gives strength and substance to his plots and characters. Narayan's own exercise of myth making, namely the portrait of Gandhi in **Waiting for the Mahatma**, makes a special appeal to his American audience” (19)

The straightforward writing style of narrations that Narayan employs serves as a reflection of the straightforward, occasionally ambitious, and laid-back manner of life that inhabitants of Malgudi are known for. Observations made by Uma Parameswaran on his manner of performing:

“His prose is clear and correct but lacks poetry. It is the prose of the plains, not the prose of the gushing Ganga of the Himalayas as found in Mulk Raj Anand or Raja Rao. It is the prose of the southern plains in April when the rivers are streamless. Standing still in the torrid blaze of the tropical sun, appreciated by the passerby not so much for what they contain as for what they represent, not much for their meager beauty but the sheer fact that they are there, still surviving under the summer sun. The same metaphor might be applied to Narayan's early work in general. It is appreciated for the sheer fact of its existence at a time and place when the literary cline was dry and barren” (24)

In a nutshell, Narayan writes. Not a single thing more. He has no desire for or intention of being labeled as an idealist or crusader. Per Professor K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's assertions, Narayan is “a master of comedy who is not unaware of the tragedy of the human situation, he is neither an intolerant critic of Indian ways and modes nor their fanatic defender, he is on the whole, content to snap Malgudi life's little ironies, knots of satiric circumstance, and tragic-comedies of mischance and misdirection” (p.4) “He is neither an intolerant critic of Indian ways and modes nor their fanatic defender.” An assertion made by Shashi Tharoor is that “Narayan at his best is a consummate teller of timeless tales, a meticulous recorder of the ironies of human life, and an acute observer of the possibilities of the ordinary.” (19)

Among Indian novels, Narayan stands head and shoulders above the others, and he is certainly one of the country's most gifted authors. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from this. He is, without a doubt, a novelist who writes about everyday people and everyday events.

### Conclusion:

R.K. Narayan's reputation as a recorder of common life and a maestro of subtle simplicity will continue to

live on via his literary contributions that have stood the test of time. His ability to portray the intricacies of human experiences inside the daily fabric of existence strikes a chord with readers not just from different generations but also from other generations. Aspiring authors and readers alike continue to find inspiration in Narayan's prose style, which is defined by its simplicity but depth. This style of writing reaffirms the value of the ordinary in literature and its profound representation of the human condition. Narayan is able to immortalize the beauty and complexity of everyday life via his works, and he encourages readers to discover consolation and wisdom in the simplicity of the commonplace.

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