



## UNDERSTANDING INDIAN REALITY THROUGH R.K. NARAYAN'S FICTION

Dasari Praveen

[Dpsp1627@gmail.com](mailto:Dpsp1627@gmail.com)

*(Lecturer in English, Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada-08.)*

### ABSTRACT



Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayana Swami widely regarded as India's greatest writer and India's first fulltime writer in English. His parents were highly principled, had a strong belief in the value of education, and shared a liberal perspective on life that worked against orthodoxy, religious and social beliefs. His interest in English Literature was reinforced by the unlimited access to the library in the school of which his father was the head master. Regular in flows of journals from England kept Narayan abreast of the London literacy scene of the 1920's. He had the habit to read, muse, take long walks, savour nature and started to try hand at writing. In the fiction of R. K. Narayan, one can find the true representation of Contemporary Indian Life, traditions and culture in its vivid and realistic form. The Social realism is extensively and minutely described.

**Keywords:** *Indian Life, Culture, Tradition, Literature.*

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Narayan's novels are the expression of various problems of middle class society in which he has been all involved. The balance between his characters and society is well maintained. One can undoubtedly find the representation of cultural incidence, and traditional values but the uniqueness of Narayan is the real depiction of contemporary society, without any criticism, satire or comments. R. K. Narayan is a man of moral consciousness. He points out that commercial instinct ruins the morals of man. But On the whole, Narayan remains a pure artist. He is for the social integration and order. As an artist he has dissected the social motives successfully with the help of realistic characterization. "In fact, the success of R. K. Narayan lies in attributing universality to his common place characters. The non-heroes finally evolve into heroes. This is done with the artistic impersonality and distinct objectivity. There is no didacticism, no philosophy, no propaganda involved in their creation. They are drawn with extra-ordinary delicacy and tenderness, admirable integrity and intelligence. The novelists does not control and govern them but lets them be free. The viewpoints expressed by them are the logical outcome of their personality. What is remarkable is that Narayan's characters remain committed to the search of true meaning in life"[1]

Narayan's fiction is also at the same time an instance of how a limitation, the thinness of the medium, has been turned to advantage. The result is that the words gain a strange translucence perfectly fitted to express a uniquely Indian sensibility. Narayan's English may repudiate its inheritance-that suggestive ideas, that complex tang - but by so doing it lays claim to greater gain. It's very flatness, bare literal quality, has a strange effect. It focuses the mind sharply on the Indian reality, gives its concreteness. Modesty can pay dividends. Much the same reserved modesty marks his treatment of characters. He has stoutly resisted getting engaged with their insides over-much allowing them to express themselves by their activities and their innate impulse to break out of dreamy automation of habit that the shifting - pressure of poverty, and tradition imposes upon them. They are uniformly viewed, with a quick eye to the comic a ridiculing yet affectionate glance, which lights up even the most common place among them.

Narayan avoids shaping a story merely to present sentimental caricatures of love or joy or of frustration, which is the bane of popular fiction. He has thus saved his art from a weakness, to which, something in our tradition seems to make us vulnerable.

'Narayan's people are ordinary, stupid, vain, and queer-retain in Lawrence's phrase a peculiar 'nuclear innocence'. The characters retain their native of being human, their inherent right to independent existence, all the more so because care is taken to exclude any attempt to judge them, to fit them into idealistic patterning or crusading roles. We become acutely aware of the significance of Narayan's aloofness from the great debates and public issues of our time. Throughout the period of his productivity before and after 1947, all around him Indian intellectuals were caught in the toils of great dilemmas. In a sense, Indians then writing in English were essentially propagandists, even if fighters of causes sustained by an edifying purpose. By the nature of their preoccupation, they seemed to be posting the one problem of the nation, rather than many problems of tile individual. It is amazing how thoroughly and serenely. Narayan's fiction appears to bypass the raging dilemmas and intellectual frustrations of the time. He coolly puts aside that compulsive obsession; it's so like a calm and casual loyalty to one's art.

Narayan remained passively unresponsive, alike to the contemporary movement of thought and feeling, and to the fairly long tradition of the novel of Social Idealism in the country. Whether the earlier tradition of Bankim Chandra, Premchand, the Tagore of *Gora* and later Raja Rao's *Kanthapur*, MulkRaj Anand's *Two leaves and a Bud*, Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and similar fiction'. Even when public themes of similar import enter the scope of interests remain inviolate. Even his *Waiting for the Mahatma*, despite its ostensible theme, very eminent in itself, centers round the old" personal" rather than, Socio Political interest.

"The Secret of R. K. Narayan's great success and high distinction, on the other hand, lies in the complete aesthetic satisfaction he provides to his readers. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' points of view, maintaining complete



objectivity and perfect impartiality"[2]. Common places of both the dichotomy and the affinity between "art" and "life," may well serve as the starting point for Narayan. Art, for instance, is not life but it certainly is Life-like. Again, art does not make for something real, but it is for most part something realistic. Both art and life therefore closely relate to each other, they overlap and run in to each other's territory; but the 'cross over point' between them must never be lost sight of. Furthermore, it may be misleading to say that art reckons with the stories in life, for there is nothing in life which is not storable. The dullest of characters or events and the most repelling of experiences in life can be quite engaging and exciting in art, and hence storable. What then constitute art is not the storable but the storing of life or its varied facets, not the narrative but its narrativization. This is what separates the lump of life's experience from its "realized experience" in art the work a day content form the "achieved content."

This distinguished marker of art of course involves the process of focused exploring, of life's experience, of shifting and organizing them all over again, of expanding and limiting them, and thus transforming and transmuting them. It then acquires a distinct resonance and richness, and a separate identity of its own, and reverberates with maximum meanings. At its best, such an art construct carries an internal consistency and coherence and becomes an organic, abiding structure, reflecting on the Individual, the family, the community, the larger locale and the socio-cultural critique of them all.

One cannot fail to appreciate 'the rainbow magnificence of life' in Narayan's novels. It is the 'miracle of faith' forged by the use of myth that is enacted in his novels. Despite the use of myth, it is the 'credible universe' charged with 'moral imagination' that comes to us in the above unforgettable novels of the 'grand old man of Malgudi.'

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