

R.K. Narayan & His Novels



A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Masters' of Arts in English language and Literature.

Submitted By:
Mohammad Jakaria
ID # 2007-1-93-006
M.A. in English
East West University

Supervisor
Asit Roy Choudhury
Associate Professor
Dept. of English
East West University

Date of Submission: 30th April, 2008



East West University
43, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka-1212.

DECLARATION

I hereby would to like declare and confirm that this research work entitled “R.K. Narayan & His Novels” was undertaken by me in partial fulfillment for M.A. in English degree to be offered by the University of East West (EWU). I also declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation and no part of the material offered in this dissertation has previously been submitted by me for a degree in the present or any other University.

Mohammad Jankaria
(Signature of Researcher)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My foremost thanks go to God for granting me the strength and health to carry out this research. I would like to thank all those whose support and encouragement have made this research possible.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Aist Roy Choudhury, for his stimulating influence and guidance for the perpetration of this thesis, for reshaping my ideas and for unbending support in many ways.

Finally, I take responsibility for all the shortcomings of this paper.

CONTENTS

<u>Name of Statement</u>	<u>Page</u>
Declaration	1
Acknowledgement	2
Table of Contents	3
Abstract	4
Chapter –1: R.K. Naranya's life and works	5-8
Chapter –2: Discussion of R.K. Naranya's novels	9-37
2.1 Indian reality in R.K.Narany's novels	9-22
2.2 Indian customs and conventions depicted in his novels	23-32
2.3 Return to ritual and folklore in his novels	33-37
Chapter –3: Concluding remark	38
Bibliography	39

ABSTRACT

The Primary concern of this study is to have a broader view of R.K. Narayan's novels and his contribution to the South Asian creative writings. It is the need of time to comprehend the dedication and essence behind R.K. Narayan's endeavor to creative writing. It is hoped that his intellectuality and creativity will inspire creativity for the later generation.



Chapter-1
R.K. Narayan's life and works

R.K. Narayan is one of the most artistic of the Indian writers, his sole aim being to give aesthetic satisfaction, and not to use his art as a medium of propaganda or to serve some other social purpose. As is the custom in the South, 'R' in the novelist's name stands for title name of the village to which his family belonged- Rasipuram in the district of Salem, 'K' stands for the name of his father Krishnaswamiyer. The full form of '*Narayan*' is Narayanaswami, though the novelist now never uses this full form. He calls himself simply 'Narayan' and never 'Narainaswami'. Though the family belonged originally to Rasipuram, long before R.K. Narayan's birth, it had shifted to Madras. It was here that Narayan was born in 1906. Soon after his birth, the father got a job as a schoolteacher in Mysore and the family moved there. While other brothers and sisters went to Mysore with their parents, R.K. Narayan himself was left behind with his grandmother. It was only later that he too shifted to Mysore, which has been his home ever since.

The novelist was never a good student He failed both in the High School and Intermediate examinations. He could get his degree only when he was twenty-four years old. These failures at school and college made him shy, reserved and diffident, an introvert and not an extrovert. It is said that once he even tried to commit suicide. His

short story *Iswaran* dwells on a theme that steamed from such mentality. Ever since he has been reserved and modest, rather too modest.

He graduated from Maharaja College, Mysore, in 1930. As his father was a humble schoolteacher and had a large family to support Narayan was called upon to contribute to the family income soon after his graduation. First, he worked for some time as a clerk in the Mysore Secretariat, and, then, as a teacher in a village school. But these professions did not suit him. His ambition, even as early as his school days, had always been to become a writer. So only after a month or so, he gave up his job as a schoolteacher, and decided to devote all his time to writing, As he tells us, he decided not to sell himself but simply to write to novel and live off the joint family system. In those days, it was unthinkable that an Indian could become a successful writer in English. His father also did not like the idea, but Narayan went ahead with great confidence and soon achieved eminent success as a novelist and short story writer.

As a novelist also, Narayan was fast becoming a success. Three of his novels *Swami and Friends* (1935), *Tire Btichelor of Arts* (1937) and *The Dark -Room* (1938) were published in quick succession, enjoyed wide popularity and brought him money as well as fame. His beloved wife died of typhoid in 1939, only five years alter their marriage. Her death was a shattering as well as a rewarding experience for the novelist Passing through *the dark valley of the shadow of death, he emerged a fuller and wiser man*. This found an expression in his novel *The English Teacher*. This found an expression in his novel *The English Teacher*. He gained that inner illumination that increased knowledge

of life and its mystery, which comes only through intense suffering. This personal loss, which he suffered, colours many of his works. For six years after his terrible loss. Narayan did not write any novel. It was a period of deep anguish and introspection. During this period he only edited a journal, *The Indian Thought* and published three volumes of short stories- *Malgudi Days*, 1941, *Dodu and Other Stories*, 1943, and *Cyclone and other Stories*, 1944.

His next novel *The English Teacher* was published in 1945, and since then novels have flowed from his pen in quick succession, at the rate of one book every two years. *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Mr Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for- Mahatma* (1955). *Lowly Road* (1956), *The Guide'* (1958), *Next Sunday*, a collection of sketches and essays (1960), *My Dateless Diary* (1960), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *Goels. Demons and Other Stories* (1965), *The Sweet- Vendor* (1967) and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970). A version of *The Ramayana* based not on Valmiki who wrote in Sanskrit, but on Kamban, the "Tamil poet, and published in 1973, completes the list of his works published up to date. He led a quiet arid uneventful life in his home in Mysore and his autobiography is currently being published.

An old man of 85, Narayan enjoys good health, and there has been no decay or decline in his creative powers. His *The Guide* received the *Sahitya Akademi* Award for the year 1960. The novel has been filmed, though Narayan himself is not very happy with the film. He was awarded *Padma Shushan* in 1964, University of Leedes conferred on him the honorary D. Litt in 1967, and Delhi University followed suit in 1973. He has

been included in the *Writers and Their work series* published by the *British Council*. He is the only Indian so far to have achieved this distinction. He visited the U.S.A. in 1956, on an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation. Many of his stories and sketches have been broadcast by the B.B.C., a rare distinction. His works have been published both in England and the U.S.A. and in both these countries he has enjoyed wide popularity. In America, he is regarded next only to Faulkner and Graham Greene.



Chapter-2



Discussion of R.K. Narayan's Novels

2.1 Indian Reality In R.K. Narayan's Novels

R.K. Narayan's fictional world appears to be a transcription of the actual world, which we live in. His novels float as gently as lily pads on the surface of Indian life and yet suggest the depths beneath. He has dealt neither in fashionable mode of life or writing nor in themes of eye-catching topicality. In almost all his novels, he chooses matters of ordinary everyday life. A part of the national life, his novels are universal in their appeal. They please the one and the many.

The term realism has two meanings. Firstly, it may mean depiction of things as they really are, or as they appear to be; secondly, it means the art of making the unreal appear as real. A writer may make the Impossible *appear* as probable. To some scholars, realism is the fidelity observed in the transcription of life as it is whereas to some others, it is a plausible interpretation of life. Percy Lubbock defines it as verisimilitude to life because literal transcription is well nigh impossible.

R.K. Narayan does not portray the photographic reality; he rather represents reality, which is artistic. In this he differs from the French realists and naturalists who are interested in the stark and naked realism of life. Narayan depicts a kind of realism, which is something more than reportage; he grabs the Indian mind fully with all its superstitious comprehension of life, its gullibility, its bewildering contradictions and its sarcastic comic irony. How far Narayan is realistic in his manner or his narration can be seen from the harmony which his narration acquires in the blending of theme and the style.

In keeping with the middle class milieu of his novels, Narayan adopts a pedestrian style. His is not the vigorous, sensational and colourful style of Mahoar: Malgonkar. His simple diction mirrors the daily rhythm of life of the middle class people of Malgudi. In this connection Philip Rahv says:

“....All that we can legitimately ask of a novelist in the matter of language is that it be appropriate to the matter in hand. What is said must not stand in a contradictory relation to the way it is said....” (Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction. p.58)

Often pre-occupied with the oddities and eccentricities of individuals, their incompatibilities rather than possibilities of human predicament, his art flourishes as it were, on the use of the commonplace. He deficts our common rhythm of Indian life. The Malgudi of his novels is India in microcosm. Like Hardy's Wessex, Malgudi is a recurrent locale of his novels. It is the symbol of Indian reality. What happens in Malgudi, is in fact what happens to the Indians in general. The

landscape in Narayan, embodies structural solidity Indian reality pervaded by the customs and traditions which control human identity and its spatio-temporal continuum. He delineates the ambivalence and the incongruities of life. His novels are an intricate alliance of the serious and the comic, tuned to a series of realistic experiences and encounters. They reflect the typical India. They give a lively and realistic rendering of the interaction of character and an Indian situation. The characters dwell in the reality of our existence and the events narrated are like the occurrences of real life. His people take after people we meet in real life. Their world is a replica of the actual and the real. Narayan frequently draws on ancient Indian, religious themes, like renunciation, incarnation, ahimsa, and the law of karma. To him, the Indian myth is a reality. So also to all of us. He invariably resorts to an ancient myth or legend to give vent to his vision of modern life. In *Mr. Sampath* there is an allusion to the burning of Kama by Lord Shiva. *The Guide* is based on the traditional Hindu belief that Gods can be propitiated and rains can be brought about through fasting and prayer. Vasu, the protagonist of *The Man-eater of Malgudi* is modelled on Bhasmasura. In his novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the theme of the oneness of the soul of all living beings – tiger and man alike, has been stressed. Myth in the Narayan figures as the ultimate vision of Indian reality. Professor William Walsh holds: “The religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Narayan’s grip of reality...” (R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation, pp.166-67). But the central mythical idea of the works never mars or bedims the realism of the novels. Narayan is an avowed realist. Basically tales of Indian life, his novels portray individuals who are deeply rooted in the Indian social order. Indian reality in his novels is reflected in the perpetual clash between tradition and modernity. The

novelist's spatio-temporal consciousness makes his works more real and genuinely artistic. "Malgudi", observes Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, "is the microcosm of traditional Indian Society". (The Swan and the Eagle.p-136) What happens in Malgudi, happens all over India with regional nuances and shifts. The underlying situation in the novels of Narayan is real to all Indians and it is intimately linked to their immediate psychic awareness and social experience. They are not confined to local political and social issues but are concerned with the changing socio-political and socio-cultural influences affecting the daily life of an Indian. Cynthiavanden Driesen holds: "Malgudi reflects a quality a quality of the larger world." (The Achievement of R.K. Narayan. p.61). Narayan's personages are human types and their problems are universal problems. What is true of Malgudi is true of India. Though a fictional creation, Malgudi breathes the aroma of Indian life.

It is quite evident from *Swami and Friends* that *there* is hardly any 'ragging' in our schools, and the dreadful tyrants are not senior boys as in Tom Brown's school days or David's experience at Salem House but teachers and headmasters. Ebenezer's denunciations of Krishna are a common feature in Missionary schools in our country. The chapter on Broken Panes describing a strike in the school on the occasion of the Non-cooperation Movement has a historical as well as an intrinsic interest. In fact what happened in India several years ago is recounted realistically. The varied experience of Swami, the protagonist and his friends Mani and Rajan at Albert Mission School, have been realistically rendered. The final chapter of the novel linings a lump to the throat but scenes in the school are replete with rollicking

humour entirely natural and convincing, delineating a lively picture of Indian schools.

Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* reads in a college, which is like many other colleges up and down the country. In this novel, Narayan portrays the whole set up of administration with a touch of sarcastic humour. Aziz the Principal's peon won't let Chandran into the Principal's presence. But on Chandran's promising to give the peon an old coat he has, all obstructions vanish and Chandran is let in. The circumstances in which Chandran meets Malati on the sands of Sarayu and falls instantly in love with her are the stuff of which our common life is replete. Such an accident could happen to anyone at anytime and it does happen. The slavish adherence to the ancient dogmas and doctrines prevailing even to this day has been vividly described. The most striking of these traditional practices is the consultation of horoscopes. Chandran, cannot marry Malati because the horoscopes do not tally. Is it not an aspect of Indian reality? It seems as if everything was pre-ordained for an Indian. Through the mental flux of Chandran, Narayan portrays the hackneyed caste system that has generated the crisis of conscience and values, leading to social compartmentalization and alienation, and Individuation of the self. Chandran feels that a marriage would not be tolerated even among sub-sects of the same caste. "If India was to attain salvation, these water tight divisions must go – community, caste, sects, sub-sects, and still further division. He felt very indignant." (Narayan. *The Bachelor of Arts*. Indian Thought publication. p.38). The novel presents a first-hand account of Indian life from within. *The Dark Room* a Tragedy of domestic life and disharmony, attempts a new technique, dexterously real and exquisite, with all the paraphernalia of trivial and familiar confrontations. A common feature of The Indian soil. Like his earlier

novels, here too, Narayan sets down fragments of life as he actually sees it. Bullying husbands like Ramani, and patient wives like Savitri are the stuff with which he weaves the web of his story. Savitri is not patient like the numerous puranic women not because the husband is the lord and the master and it is a sin to flout him but simply because she has no right of exercising her choice in any matter. Prof. P.S. Sundaram maintains: "The bully who will bring guests into the house without notice and expect them to be fed is hardly thought of as a bully by anyone. It is the Indian tradition to honour the guest as God, to share whatever one has with the stranger". (R.K. Narayan, Indian writers series. Arnold-Heinemann. p.43). The nagging and bullying to which Savitri got used to be akin to the hapless plight of many of the Indian housewives of the lower middle-class family. Freedom is certainly a fine concept for women when one is reminded of the "Women's Lib." but persons like Savitri can do only one thing with it — commit suicide. Here is the sort of thing that happens in thousands of households in Dist country: a few Savitris hang, burn or drown themselves. The great majority dare not do it. It is only suggested of course that every Indian is a tyrant and every Indian wife is obliged to put up with tyranny. Mari and Poni, take pity on Savitri and give her shelter. But whereas women of the lower classes like Poni can at a pinch shift for themselves by doing manual work, the Brahmin girl of the middle classes is completely desperate save as a housewife. *The Dark Room* depicts a story, which is the sort of thing that takes place in every society where the old double standards are still valid and the women are economically so desperate that they just have to endure what they detest and scorn.



Narayan's novels mirror the real India through living and breathing characters and not through cascades, of Sanskrit slokas as in Raja Rao's *Serpent and the Rope*. His is the India where the frustrated and the forlorn give up themselves to Sanyasa like Krishnan, in *The English Teacher*. Susheela, his wife who gives foremost importance to her family and her domestic obligation, is the symbol of a devoted Hindu wife. Krishnan's satirical comment on Indian education is a veritable echo of the contemporary Indian reality: "This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbages." (Narayan. *The English Teacher*. Indian thought publication.p.38).

Margayya, the hero of *The Financial Expert* begins as a petty moneylender doing business under a banyan tree right in front of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank in Malgudi. He is typically representative of our money-lending class who amass money by hook or by crook. "If the purpose of the Cooperative Movement was the promotion of thrift and the elimination of middlemen, these two were the objects that were defeated here under this banyan tree." (Narayan. *The Financial Expert*. Indian thought publications.p.2). And this is what Indian life is, where people like Margayya obstruct government strategies and steps for progress for selfish interests. But persons like Anil Doss and Balu come on Margayya's way; shatter all his prospects and then Margayya like any frustrated Indian consults the astrologer. The astrologer advises Puja and Margayya go through the rituals of the Puja for good luck and for the propitiation of the adverse stars and Planets. This is how men prosper on Indian soil. Pujas and recitation of mantras and stokes becomes their magic wand for luck and prosperity. An aspect of

Indian mysticism Indeed. The relationship between Margayya and his brother highlights the bonds of kinship in an Indian family. Margayya's assault on Dr. Pal takes the form of "shoe-beating", a typical Indian mode of assaulting. Would a European commit such a nuisance? No.

Waiting for the Mahatma Is more suggestive in its portrayal of Indian Reality. It is *Kanthapura* distorted. The religious aspect Indian reality is mirrored in the doings of Granny, who being a pious Hindu, refuses to touch the canvas chair, made out of the skin of dead animals. Even now there are many crones in India who like Granny, are piously orthodox and traditionally modern.

In *The Guide*, the vicissitudes of Raju's fortunes provide an excellent opportunity to the novelist to satirise the nouveau riche of post war independent India. The story of a sinner like Raju, an impresario becoming a saint, is a story that has the magnanimity and grandeur of the Indian scene and is a tragedy wholly of it. The novels of Narayan have a unique Indian rural setting like this —"an ancient temple, surrounded by hills, the river Sarayu flowing in front of it, whose very name, if not the river carried its obvious implications for a reader of the Ramayana, even as the name of the village—Mangala— has its rich overtones and evocative power." (Narasimhaiah.p.137). Raju, who malingers to be a mahatma and goes on fast to bring rain to the drought- stricken, wasteland is peculiarly Indian. India too, has many 'Sadhus' and 'Dharmatmas', practising hypocrisy and fraud in the name of religion and at length meeting their tragic doom, like Raju. The continued absence of rain evokes fantastic speculations from the villagers. One villager wants to know

if the rains fall because the movement of the aeroplanes ruffles the clouds while the other seeks to know if the atom bombs are responsible for drying up the clouds. This reveals a humorous and hinky aspect of Indian reality—the remarkable co-existence of science and superstition; prescience and nescience; mythology and weather forecasts. Allusions to *The Bhagavad Gita* and Indian legends in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, spawn out a peculiar Indian setting.

The conductor of Mempi Bus Transport Corporation Limited has been presented in a humorously fascinating manner. He lectures to the passengers every now and then as though he was a headmaster dealing with school-children: “I am not stopping for more than five minutes; if any one is left behind, he will be left behind, that is all I warn you all, don’t blame me later.” (Narayan. *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Indian thought publications. p.48) And In reality, he stays hell an hour at each tea-shop, “The seat of honour has to be reserved for the “Circle”, the Police inspector who will not pay for his Seat and if the "seat of honour" is not Immediately vacated when he approaches, he will impound the entire bus with oil its passengers at The next stop fur overcrowding. With the “Circle” inside, the bus will crawl at twenty miles an hour.” (Sudaram. p.104) Such instances of flexibility in duty and nepotism prevail even in the present bureaucratically dogged social set-up. When a complaint is sent to the Sanitary Inspector of Malgudi to make arrangements for removing the dead animals from the terrace, all that he does is to send a printed form to say that the matter is receiving attention. The Chairman of the Municipality has a sweet-man with a top store housing an elementary school—a rickety terrace, which would come down any day, but has been certified safe, because a

is the Chairman's building. What did the lives of hundred school children and six or eight teachers matter? Narayan exposes the stark reality of India with an undertone of sarcasm and banter. He humorously satirizes such a faulty system that is eating into the vitals of our society. The patriotic spirit of the then Indians against the despotic and draconian rule of the Britishers is revealed through Jagan, in *The Vendor of Sweets*. Unlike Jagdish in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, he is a genuine Gandhite, who had his skull cracked while trying to pull down the Union Jack from the flag-post in the Collector's bungalow and consequently spent some years in gaol. This is true for almost all the revolutionaries of the time. A True Gandhite, Jagan uses only "non-violent footwear," chappals made out of animals tanning a natural death and not butchered for the purpose. A faddist and believer in the profound wisdom of our ancients, the margosa is to him all ambrosial plant its leaves and fruit always to be preferred to aspirin. Twigs of trees made ideal toothbrushes, not bristles made out of pig's tails. Beef eating to him is a sin. It is the five deadly sins according to our Shastras. Though the joint family is breaking up all over India, the sense of kinship is strong in a Narayan novel. In *The Financial Expert*, Margayya and his brother, though for most of the time not on speaking terms, are yet next-door neighbours, sharing a well, and in moments of special joy or sorrow simply cannot do without each other.

Ved Mehta maintains: "R.K. Narayan, manages by a miracle of perception and choice of detail to convey the Indian without a single false feeling or gesture." (Saturday Review. p-29). Writing under the impact of the growing industrialism and technology, the gross materialism of the age could not shut his eyes to the socio-economic realities of the Indian

Society. Narayan is a writer whose sympathies and ideals do not isolate him from his socio-historical moorings.

Prof. William Walsh observes: “Narayan's fastidious art, blending exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety, is without precedent In literature in English.... it is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian Setting” (p.169).

The image of India, which Narayan projects in his novels, has a universality of vision. *The Times Literary Supplement* comments: “What is true of Malgudi is true in the whole world.” (Nandy. *At the Edge of Psychology*. p.58). “Malgudi is an image of India and a metaphor of everywhere else”, (*A Manifold Voice*. Chatto and Wiendus. p.22) observes, Prof. William Walsh. But this is not all. Cynthia Vanden Driesen goes still further to affirm: “Despite the Indian colouring of Narayan's novels ... we become aware of universal human nature.” (p.57).

Despite all the universal acclaim : “Narayan does not dwell upon the garish and the bizarre features on which Naipaul and Nirad C. Chaudhury seem to thrive.” (Phillip. *Perceiving Indian thought the works of Nirad Chaudhuri, R.K. Narayan and Ved Mehta*. Sterling. p.97).

He depicts Indian reality in all its simplicity and not in its metaphysical ambiguity, as does Raja Rao. His fictional rendering of India reality is richly human as that of Dickens but

Society. Narayan is a writer whose sympathies and ideals do not isolate him from his socio-historical moorings.

Prof. William Walsh observes: “Narayan's fastidious art, blending exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety, is without precedent In literature in English... it is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian Setting” (p.169).

The image of India, which Narayan projects in his novels, has a universality of vision. *The Times Literary Supplement* comments: “What is true of Malgudi is true in the whole world.” (Nandy. *At the Edge of Psychology*. p.58). “Malgudi is an image of India and a metaphor of everywhere else”, (A *Manifold Voice*. Chatto and Wiendus. p.22) observes, Prof. William Walsh. But this is not all. Cynthia Vanden Driesen goes still further to affirm: “Despite the Indian colouring of Narayan's novels ... we become aware of universal human nature.” (p.57).

Despite all the universal acclaim : “Narayan does not dwell upon the garish and the bizarre features on which Naipaul and Nirad C. Chaudhury seem to thrive.” (Phillip. *Perceiving Indian thought the works of Nirad Chaudhuri, R.K. Narayan and Ved Mehta*. Sterling. p.97).

He depicts Indian reality in all its simplicity and not in its metaphysical ambiguity, as does Raja Rao. His fictional rendering of India reality is richly human as that of Dickens but

never caricatured. Narayan's novels are a curious blending of the exotic and the commonplace. The extreme simplicity and ingenuousness with which he has portrayed the Indian scene restrict the appeal of his novels both for the native and the alien. V.S. Naipaul maintains: "He operates from deep within his society. The India of Narayan's novels is not the India the visitor sees." (Mahood. *The Colonial Encounter*. Rowman and Littlefield. p.94).

Anthony Thwaite, offers a similar observation: "Unlike E.M. Forster's India (Narayan's) is seen from inside." ("The Painter of Signs", in *Times Literary Supplement*. p.6-7). His use of English as a medium of expression to delineate the social reality appears dim and inadequate and it is a literary pitfall. Had he expressed it through his vernacular,

reality. Akhileshwar Jha maintains that it is an "inadequate means of apprehending social reality." (*Intellectuals at the Cross-Roads : the Indian Situation*. Vikas. p.81).

From *The Dark Room* (1938) to *Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), one clearly perceives the steady encroachment of modernity into our traditional tempo of life. One becomes aware of a profoundly tradition-bound society giving in to the flux of a modern Western way of life. His novels echo the socio-cultural influences on Indian life. Ramani, the protagonist of *The Dark Room*, works for the Engladia Insurance Company and enjoys tennis at the club; Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* seriously considers higher education in England while Mali, in *The Sweet Vendor* considers the United States as the only apt place for higher studies. His characters do enjoy a night out at "The Palace," where film featuring Dietrich, Garbo and Laurel and Hardy are regularly



screened. Thus the features of modernity are part of the Indian reality as delineated in the novels of R.K. Narayan. This reality to some critics is the “everyday reality” of an Indian scene. Narayan's is the traditional Indian way of perceiving reality. For him, reality is a unity where there is no intrinsic and fundamental schism between its constituent parts. Accordingly he finds a semblance of unity between the consciousness of a tiger and a man's consciousness in his novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi*. His vision of Indian reality is a harmonious blending of the old and the new, the impulsive and the wary, the rational and the irrational. India, in his novels, becomes the arena of the traditional rhythm of life and the intrusion of modernity into it. Margayya in *The Financial Expert* is temptingly vexed by the thought of purchasing a Western automobile. Dr. Pal induces Margayya to accept the semi-pornographic *Bed Life* for publication. Mali, the son of *The Sweet Vendor*, frantically longs for America and has the hope of writing western fiction. Shanta Bai, the adulterous heroine of *The Dark Room*, complains to Ramani : “A wretched Indian film ! I'd give my life to see a Garbo or a Dietrich.” (Narayan. *The Dark Room*. Macmillan. p.90).

Narayan seems to suggest the disintegrating effect of the West on Indian sensibility and the distortion of traditional social values. He fails to portray the simmering discontent, squalor and poverty of the Indians, as does Mulk Raj Anand. What about the socio-political and socio-political and socio-psychic aspects of Indian reality? Save for *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Dark Room*, one doesn't find allusions to any of these aspects of Indian reality. The novelist is humorously obsessed with the socio-comic aspect of Indian reality, which

accounts for the immense readability of his novels. It is not that he deliberately drags in what is typically Indian – these things are there in the story. Allusions to Indian habits and customs are functional and not informative. It would be wrong to infer that Narayan depicts Indian reality *in toto*. He is chiefly concerned with the ethos of the then India and not the modern India as we see it now. His is the Hindu India. Rarely had he portrayed any Muslim or Christian character in his novels. However, he has made these characters neither specifically medieval nor ancient but typically Indian. In his book, *Indian Novel in English*, Prof. R.S. Singh calls Narayan “a writer of surface realities.” Narayan’s depiction of Indian reality is not profound. He does not make a liberal and felicitous use of local and regional dialects, as does Anand. Hence, the note of realism is thin and foamy. Nevertheless may be a delectably ironical depiction of Indian reality. In fine, they are the comedies of Indianness.

2.2 Indian customs and conventions depicted in his novels

Indian writing in English is the expression of Indianism in the English language to impress on the foreigners of Indian's nobility, tradition and culture. Now it has become a part of the literatures of India in the same way as Sanskrit literature and other literatures of Indian languages.

The 'Trinity' in Indian music is Sadguru Tyagaraja Swami, Swami Sastry and Muthuswamy Dikshitar. Likewise in Indian English the 'Trinity' is Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan.

Narayan is content, like Jane Austen, with his 'little bit of ivory.' And unlike Mulk Raj Anand, he likes to be a detached observer. The imaginary township of Malgudi seems him to pack his material ready, safely and cleverly and promote an air of detachment.

Narayan, with his keen observation of the various faiths and beliefs of Indians along with the customs and conventions that prevail in India, has presented them all through his novels and short stories with a meticulous regard for verisimilitude. The Sadhus, sannyasis, and common men we have been observing in our daily life, are found in his novels.

Narayan's novels seldom portray the present situation he only eludes to it. In this regard his style resembles that of Geoffrey Chaucer. Both Chaucer and Narayan, never touch the world wars and gloomy periods and others tragedies in their novels. They

mingle tragedy with comedy like William Shakespeare.

Narayan mostly portrayed his characters as innocent men who suffered a lot in the hands of tricked people. His novels bring us tears through laughter. It is like sunshine in a shower. The result is a rainbow of emotions.

Narayan is a traditionalist and his novels are the mirrors of the Hindu customs and traditions adhered to by the overwhelming majority of Indians. He vests most of the characters in his writings in a traditional garb. Some of them are discussed here.

In 'The Financial Expert' Narayan has portrayed the character of Margayya as a greedy Indian who brought his own ruin with his greed. Margayya was a moneylender and he located his office beneath a banyan tree in the compound of a cooperative bank. The bank authorities drove him away from that place. He lost his earnings and suffered a lot and thereupon consulted the Hanuman temple priest.

Here Narayan has brought Margayya into a miserable condition. If Margayya wanted to consult, there were many other financiers in the town. But he was made to consult only the priest of a temple. For priests are believed to be well versed with scriptures dealing with the cause and effect of the sufferings of human life, Margayya hoped that the priest would be able to suggest a remedy for his own sufferings.

And when the priest offered some milk to Margayya, the latter pushed aside the tumbler with his left hand. The priest warned Margayya not to refuse milk when offered,

as milk is considered to be Goddess Lakshmi Devi. According to the priest she would punish those who insulted her.

The priest advised Margayya to perform Lakshmi Puja with ghee made from cow's milk for lighting the lamps before Goddess Lakshmi, and red lotus for performing puja. These are traditional rituals. Cow's ghee is considered sacred and red lotus symbolises knowledge.

Narayan seems to say that God alone gives us peace of mind when a man is surrounded by worldly troubles.

In 'The Vendor of Sweets' Jagan is a real devotee and he often says, 'Conquer the taste; you will have conquered the self. He read *Bhagavadgita* whenever he felt worried. Most Indians have faith in God and they read scriptures like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* etc., daily. A daily study of these scriptures is said to drive away Arishad Vargas, which degrade man and deprive him of his divine qualities and help him to become an sthitapragna. Narayan seems to say that Jagan attained this state of sthitapragna. This is evident from the calm attitude of Jagan when he came to know of his beloved son's arrest.

Margayya and Jagan resemble each other. Margayya has only one son Balu. Jagan's only son is Mali. For several years after marriage these two were not blessed with children.



Margayya prayed for a son and took a vow to give his weight in silver rupees to the Lord of Tirupati, if a male child is born. After the birth of Balu, Margayya and his wife wore saffron-dyed clothes and carried their son in their arms and begged for alms. He fulfilled his vow by visiting the Lord of Tirupati Hills and deposited the money he had received as alms in the temple Hindu.

It is a custom in India that barren couples vow to God to perform pujas or give some money if they are blessed with children. There are many devotees visiting Tirupati and fulfilling their vows to Lord Venkateswara.

Jagan in 'The Vendor of Sweets' went to Badri hills with his parents and wife seeking the blessing of Santhana Krishna. According to his faith, he had Mali within a year after his pilgrimage. Even now many barren couples present a silver idol of Lord Krishna in the shape of a crawling child to the priest and the priest blesses them to have a child like Sri Krishna.

Raju's mother In *The Guide* is portrayed as a traditional woman and she sings seine hymns on God after lighting a lamp in front of God's portraits *every* day and she goes to temple every evening to worship God. This is a custom and the lighting of a lamp is treated as Gyana-Jyothi that destroys the ignorance of one and gives enlightenment. His Holiness Sri Kanchi Paramacharya observed that the purpose of prayer is to find relief from the heartaches of life by communicating

with the one who will give ear to what is said and who alone can heal them. This is why people visit temples. Raju's mother in *The Guide* believes that if there was one good man it would rain for his sake and the entire world would benefit. From his childhood Raja had been listening to her words and in the end he sacrificed his life for the sake of the people who wanted rain. This reminds us of the story of sage Rishyasringa.

In the short story 'A snake in the Grass' an old beggar woman cries for alms at the gate of a house. They tell her not to disturb them as they are engaged in a snake hunt. On hearing it the beggar-woman becomes happy and says that the people of the house are fortunate. According to her, it is God Subramanya Swamy who has come to visit them. She advises them, not to kill the snake. The mother of the house immediately agrees with the statement and says that she had forgotten all about her promised Abhishekam and this is a reminder to her.

In *The Financial Expert* Margayya secures a small-framed picture of Goddess Saraswathi Devi who is the Goddess of Learning and installs the portrait on his son's table and advises him to pray every morning before beginning his study. It is a popular belief that Saraswathi Devi is the Goddess of Learning. Those who want education and knowledge should worship her. According to our scriptures husband and wife must vanish into the forest at some stage to attain knowledge leaving worldly affairs to the younger generation. This is called Vanaprasthasrama being the least of the least of the Four Asramas. The other three being Brahmacharya, Grihastha and Sannyasa.

In *The Financial Expert* the temple priest, after scrutinising the horoscopes of Margayya, says that the Saturn is moving in his horoscope. He also advises Margayya to go mid pray to the planetary deities installed in the temple and to circumambulate three times. It is believed that the Saturn Is the most powerful entity in Lie world and if Ire pleases a man can became a ruler; otherwise he drowns him in the ocean of misery.

Narayan, has mentioned this in the novel. This might explain why the novels of Narayan fascinate the Western reader who has become Weary of novels containing murderous plots and scandalous intrigues, the tales of Harman have in no pejorative sense, a charming, and child like simplicity. Narayan gave much Importance in tie religious rituals in his novels. As per Hindu Sastras from cradle to grave there are several ceremonies associated with every walk of life.

The first mid foremost ceremony performed by Indians is *Namakarnam* to the newborn child. In *Vendor, of Sweets* this ceremony is described elaborately.

Next comes Aksharabhyasam. This is school-going ceremony. People regard Vijayadasami as an auspicious day for sending children to school. In *The Financial Expert* Margayya performs this school going ceremony with pomp and glory.

In "*The Guide* Narayan mentions ha traditional teacher pupil relationship. After

Raju's studies in the Pyol-school, his master escorted him and two other boys to the Board school for admission and blessed them. Such is the teacher-pupil relationship. C.D. Narasimhaiah has drawn attention to it.

Likewise *Gerowdecianas* that the actual events in the novels are meaningless in themselves and only some focus on philosophical themes. He says that there is an almost featureless and impenetrable unit to Narayan's works, which make it difficult for the Western reader to become absorbed in particular details and circumstances. To some extent he is right.

Another Important custom mentioned in Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Swears* is the tonsure ceremony. Jagan's cousin says that he went to Tirupati Hills for a 'Tonsure Ceremony' with the Judge's family. Even grown-ups and women offer their hair to Lord Venkateswar. This is called *Saranagathi*, taking refuge in God. Tonsure is a symbolic act of total surrender to God.

In *The Dark Room* Narayan has described the Navaratri Festival. This is an Indian Tradition and in so many places especially in Mysore this festival is celebrated with much pomp and glory.

David C. Gordon has offered a valuable analysis of Narayan's attitude towards tradition. Realising the material if not the spiritual inferiority of his culture, he seeks to modernise and in the process of adapting he realised that, willy-nilly, he will, or

must adopt certain of its values also. He rationalises this acculturation by seeking antecedents for those modern values in his own past, usually during its *Golden Age* before decline set in. But modernisation is, nevertheless, traumatic for him because he feels that these rationalisations are not completely real; his confidence in his own heritage is shaken and he fears that he is losing his cultural rootings and is being drawn into the cultural orbit of the West. This is a fact and Narayan, being a traditionalist, fears that our tradition and culture might vanish after some time. Western culture is already widespread in the cities.

In *The Bachelor of Arts* the view of Chandran's mother on marriage is that it is always a matter of fate: you can marry only the person who you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When time comes let her be the ugliest girl, she will look alright to the destined eye... ugliness and beauty are all as it strikes one's eye. Every one has their own vision. This view is inconsonance with the popular belief that marriages are made in heaven. Narayan, through Chandran's mother, reveals the universal truth on marriage.

In 'Indo-Anglian' Literaristic 1800-1970 : A Survey' H.H. Williams observes that 'no two writers could differ more than Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan whereas Anand is an angry protestor, a satirist and revolutionary author of the tragic, or near-tragic, 'Coolie and Untouchable', Narayan is essentially a humorous writer, interested in the lower middle classes of South India, in a world relatively free from the terrible privations and agonies, political conflicts and economic depression of Anand's India. It is hard

indeed to believe that Narayan is writing about the same country. Yet, in spite of their rick fantasy and comic caricature, Narayan's novels are a faithful reflection of an India as real as Anand's or Raja Rao's. The angle of vision determines the content and the atmosphere. Narayan sees South India as a fundamentally conservative Hindu Society changing under the impact of the Western industrialism and modern ideas. Conservative India is seen with humour and some satire as a mixture of traditional holiness, with the comfort-loving sterility of the bourgeoisie. Modern India is seen as an inevitable, but inescapable phenomenon compounded of extreme political activism, permissive notions, the breakdown of the transitional joint family system. The secret of Narayan is his ability to keep these views in a perfect balance. It makes him a sub-title writer, concealing irony beneath a blandly simple; exterior as a plain storyteller.

While writing a novel in his ninetieth year, Narayan has remarked that as writers grow older their novels get shorter. It is like the Indian goldsmith at the end of the day sweeping the dust carefully to retrieve the gold particles that can be found in the dust.

Recollection becomes painful for most people, 'To forget the past and live in the present, Narayan concludes 'relishing the quality of every moment as it comes, and letting it also pass, without regret, realizing the inevitability of the eternal flux is the practical way to exist in peace.'

Narayan knows that man is no puppet in the hands of God. No one knows when the life of a man changes or when miracles occur. Through the creation of an imaginary town,

'Malgudi', he endeared himself to the readers. His Malgudi resembles Sir Thomas Moore's Utopia, but unlike it, is noted in realism.

In 'India: R.K. Narayan and Tradition' Bruce has written that Narayan's novels usually treat of those stranded between tradition and modernity. He does not write of peasants or urban workers, rather he shows the townsman who still thinks in older ways, but inhabits the modern world.

Narayan delights the reader with his writing. He never suggests any moral through his characters. But one can discern some implied moral in his writing. Man's fall can be seen in his novels.

Through God's grace they say, a poor man may become rich and an illiterate one may become a scholar. Narayan's writings seem to illustrate this philosophy time and again. Narayan's view of life in his own words, 'life is not normally either an Elysium or a vale of tears'. And he means it.



2.3 Return to ritual and folklore in his novels

R.K. Narayan, a novelist of international repute and recipient of many awards and recognition, is also the best-loved Indian writer in English in his own country. Of course his remarkable gift of story telling, the special locational flavour of his stories, the extraordinary assortment of odd, eccentric, yet charming characters, the author's own charming genial humour and highly enjoyable sparkling wit – all contribute to this popularity. However, the element that perhaps operates most effectively behind Narayan's wide appeal is his rootedness in Indian myths and lores.

Though not a religious man in the orthodox sense, R.K. Narayan as a writer has his roots in the Indian mythology. S. Krishnan has traced tads back to his childhood memory of oral narration, — "undoubtedly absorbed from his grandmother and other old relative". R.K. Narayan has also profound knowledge of Hindu culture, as may be expected from an author so down-to-earth and firmly rooted in the soil. He has retold *The Ramayana* (1972) and *The Mahabharata* (1978) as well as a number of myths and legends. Earlier in his career Narayan had written *Gods, Demons and Others* (1964), which culls myrthological stories from Indian epics and *puranas*. Even before that, in 1961, he wrote *The Maneater of Malgudi*, - a slim novel that reworks (though with placid humour) an ancient theme from Indian mythology extreme arrogance and pride proves to be self-annihilating at the end. This also echoes the proverbial wisdom: *Sarbam atyanta garhitam* (all excesses ore bad). It is the story of a taxidermist whose arrogance and violence

disturb the calm of Malgudi for a time; but finally peace is restored through his mysterious death, which is later found out to have been caused by himself in a moment of inadvertence.

It is interesting to note how the author uses the myth of demon, though apparently in a light vein, to tell an almost unbelievable story with the perfect ease of an oral narrator facing high eager believing listeners. He can do so because here he works on the reader's (Indian) prior knowledge of, and sharing in, the mythology he invokes. Moreover here the novelist draws upon the paradigm of a mythic ritual – the fall of a demon being synchronized with the celebration of a divine marriage. True, that Narayan's consistent use of a mild ironic tone of narration helps him to distance his narrator from this 'fantasy' world and keep him in touch with the 'realistic'. But beneath this surface reality the author constantly evokes and harnesses another world of "inner reality," to use a phrase of Soyinka; it is a world made up of deities, demons, beasts, lores, myths, rituals, and its own systems of myth and literature in Africa Wole Soyinka dismisses the idea of 'fantasy' which he holds to be an individuals experience; instead he stresses the concept of a collective inner world and a "primal reality".

"The nature of an inner world in a cohesive society is the essentialisation of a rational world-view, one that is elicited from the reality of social and natural experience and from the integrated reality of racial myths into a living morality." (Soyinka. p.34).

It is to this, "Cohesive archetypal motifs of a primal inner world"

(Soyinka.p.34) that R.K. Narayan turns for artistic inspiration and thematic-narrational devices in *The Moneater of Malgudi*.

In spite of his immense popularity, or perhaps because of it, R.K. Narayan is often praised / dismissed as a “storyteller,” albeit an excellent one. Krishnan echoes but the general notion when he claims: “First and last he is a storyteller”. *Narayan's* unassuming style,— the overtly realistic mode of a genial narrator and the simple charm of his narration flavoured as it is by fine humour, has often proved misleading; precisely because of the charm which tends to fascinate readers of varied intellectual levels, and divert critical attention from his quasi-parodic yet serious handling of Indian myths. The author’s own avowals from time may also have added to the misconception. For example:

“I'd be quite happy if no more is claimed from me than being just a storyteller. Only the story matters, that is all. If readers, read more significance into my stories than was meant originally, then that's the reader's understanding of things.” (Krishnan. p.1032).

One should, however, take note of the claim with which this unassuming declaration is clinched:

But if a story is in nine completely with the truth of life, truth as I perceive it, then it will be automatically significant.

“Truth of life”, usually a cliché phrase, is qualified by the clause “as I perceive it.” This subjective element makes a world of difference between R.K.’s “truth” and the empirical truth of the so-called realistic school that dominated Anglo-European fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The “truth” that RKN perceives could have been branded ‘fantastic’ by that other objective standard; because this perception accommodates another reality, the mythical or “primal reality.” – Soyinka’s “hinterland of transition”. His consciousness is stretched to embrace this mythical reality, which is different and ‘other’ than the empirical reality and may not be subjected to the latter’s condition of plausibility or verisimilitude. What is remarkable is the perfect ease with which he bridges the two-worlds/ realities. It is an excellent and sometimes hilarious re-enacting of age-old Indian myths in the modern Indian context that accounts for the special flavour of much of RKN’s writing including *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (subsequently to be mentioned as *MOM*). Parody also plays an intrinsic role in this ‘re-creation’ in *MOM*, and the novel demands that the reader should also have a degree of awareness so that s/he can catch the parodic overtone. The narration continually switches between the serious and the parodic as RKN goes on inter-stitching myths with fine humour, irony, hilarious laughter, fun and comicality, a practice that can be compared with Robert Kroetsch’s parodic use of myths.

R.K. Narayan is the genial, smiling face of postcolonialism. Without exhibiting the anger, resentment, or assertive self-consciousness of cultural

nationalism, he is still a representative postcolonial writer in another way. He boldly exploits and exhausts the indigenous elements. Though he writes very good English and is perfectly at ease with his medium, his basic Indianness is manifest at every turn through his use of themes, vocabulary, proverbs, personae, place and last but not least, use of myths which imparts an additional dimension to his novel.



Chapter-3

Concluding remark

R.K. Narayan is not at all a fashionable writer. His themes are not particularly contemporary or provocative. Sex is not prominent, and politics – except for the ‘Quit India’ campaign in his *Waiting for the Mahatma* – hardly figures at all. Nor is he a ‘folk’ writer. His language does not work with the peasant vigour, which we are apt to find so attractive in, say, the West Indians. Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone, but always an evolved and conscious medium. His English in its structure and address is a moderate, traditional instrument, but one abstracted from the context in which it was generated – the history, the social condition, the weather, the racial memory – and moved totally different conditions, brutal heat and hovering vultures, flocks of brilliant, glistening parrots, jackals rippling over the rubbish dumps, and utter shining clarity of light and the deadly grey of an appalling poverty. It is free of the palpable suggestiveness running through every phrase of our own English. What it has instead is a strange degree of translucence. Unaffected by the powerful, positive quality of a language which as we use can never be completely subordinated to our private purpose, R.K. Narayan’s language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility.

Bibliography:

Narayan, Krishnaswami, Rasipuram. *The Guide*. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1971.

Narayan, Krishnaswami, Rasipuram. *The Man-enter of Malgudi*. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 2000.

Alam, Fakrul. *Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English*. Dhaka: Writers. ink, 2007.

