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## R.K.NARAYAN, ONE AMONG THE INDIAN BIG THREE

**B. S. SAGAR**

Lecturer, Department of English  
A.M.A.L. College  
Anakapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India



**B. S. SAGAR**

### ABSTRACT

Indian author R.K. Narayan is widely considered to be one of India's greatest English language novelists known for his simple and unpretentious writing style. He is one of the best English writers that India has produced. R.K.Narayan was born in Madras. His father was a provincial Head Master. He was the third of eight surviving children. R.K.Narayan's writing career began with *Swamy and Friends*. He was essentially a story teller whose sensitive portrayals of 20th Century Indian life were set mostly in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. In a literary career spanning more than fifty years, he wrote fourteen novels, five volumes of short-stories. He was often compared to the United States writer William Faulkner, whose novels were also grounded in a compassionate humanism and celebrated the honour and energy of ordinary life. His novels have their peculiar irony- an irony rooted not in skepticism about human motives and actions but in a strong and consistent faith. This is characteristically a Hindu view of the world, which treats life as maya: The Immense illusion of existence

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Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao are considered the Big Three in Indo-Anglian Literature. Their themes and ways are different we can say that, after entering this Trio, Indo-Anglian Fiction has received a recognition and respect in the English speaking world. Indian author R.K. Narayan is widely considered to be one of India's greatest English language novelists known for his simple and unpretentious writing style, often compared to other two Indian writers Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Ayyar Narayanaswami known to all of us as R.K.Narayan, (October 10, 1906 - May 31, 2001). He is one of the best English writers that India has produced. He was born in Madras. His father was a provincial Head Master. He was the third of eight surviving children. Owing to his mother's illness, Narayan lived with his maternal grandmother until he was a teenager. He was an indifferent student. He obtained his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Mysore.

Narayan's works are mainly on middle class people. As the words of Anvar Sadhath

"The most noticeable aspect of R.K.Narayan's novels is, perhaps, his commitment to Hindu ideals. Religious identity in general and caste identity in particular, form an ideological matrix from which Narayan appears to operate his consciousness"<sup>1</sup>.

Here S.Rajalakshmi's views are also same as I said above:

"R.K.Narayan is richly endowed with the gift of seeing common characters from within and revealing them on their own plane. He has keen eye for the common things that lie around us,

choosing them to impart some random truths. Finding pleasure and happiness in simple things, is a recurring feature of existence, which is the hallmark of his writing. The core of his art lies in his singular gift, to present as valuable and beautiful anything that comes his way"<sup>2</sup>.

R.K.Narayan's writing career began with *Swami and Friends*. At first, he could not get the Novel Published. Eventually, the draft was shown to Graham Greene by a mutual friend Purna. Greene liked it so much that he arranged for its publication. Greene was to remain a close friend and admirer of his. After that, he published a continuous stream of novels, all set in Malgudi and each dealing with different characters in that fictional place.

R.K.Narayan was essentially a story teller whose sensitive *portrayals of twentieth century* Indian life were set mostly in the fictional south Indian town Malgudi. In a literary career spanning more than fifty years, he wrote more than fourteen novels, five volumes of short-stories, a number of travelogues and collections of non-fiction, an English translation of Indian Epics, and *The Memoir My days*.

As the words of Rajnish Wattas : "R.K.Narayan is a legendary writer"<sup>3</sup>.

He was often compared to the United States writer William Faulkner, whose novels were also grounded in a compassionate humanism and celebrated The Honour and Energy of ordinary life. Narayan's novels are characterized by Chekhovian simplicity and gentle humor. He told stories of simple folks trying to live their simple lives in a changing world. Characters in his novels were very ordinary down-to-earth. Indians trying to blend tradition with modernization, often resulting in tragi-comic situations.

His novels have their peculiar irony - an irony rooted not in skepticism about human motives and actions but in a strong and consistent faith. This is characteristically a Hindu view of the world, which treats life as maya: The Immense illusion of existence.

Let me illustrate this by looking at the last pages of Narayan's best novel, *The Guide* (1965) We find Raju, the chief protagonist at the end of a lifetime of insincerity and pain. As a professional guide to Malgudi, he invented whole new historical pasts for bored tourists ; he seduced a married woman, drifted away from his old mother and friends. His last few months have been spent as a holy man on the banks of river ; a role imposed on him by reverential village folk. But the river dries up after a drought and his devotees start looking to him to intercede with the gods Raju resentfully starts a fast, but furtively eats whatever little food he has saved. Then abruptly, out of a moment of self-digest, comes his resolution ; for the first time in his life, he will do some thing with complete sincerity, and he will do it for others.

He stops eating. News of his efforts goes around ; devotees and sight seers, gathering at the riverside, create a religious occasion out of the fast. On the early morning of the eleventh day of fasting, a small crowd watches him quietly as he attempts to pray standing on the river bed and then staggers and dies, mumbling the enigmatic last words of the novel, "It's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs "Characteristically, Narayan does not make it clear whether Raju's penance does actually lead to rain. He also doesn't make much of Raju's decision, The moment of his redemption. What R.K.Narayan achieves here, is a remarkable understanding of a Universal truth. It is - The words are of the English writer Wiliam Gerhardie, on Chekhov, but so appropriate for Narayan.

"That sense of the temporary nature of our existence on this earth at all events . . . Through which human beings, scenery and even the very shallowness of things, are transfigured with a sense of disquieting importance. It is a sense of temporary position in a temporary existence that, in the face of the unknown, we dare not over value. It is as if his people hastened to express their worthless individualities, since that is all they have, and were aghast that they should have so little in them to express ; since the expression of it is all there is".

He is the Grand Old Man of Indian English fiction, and *The Guide* is undoubtedly his greatest work to date. It was the first work by an Indian English writer to win the Sahitya Akademi Award. He has published numerous novels, five collections of short stories (*A Horse and Two Goats*, *An Astrologer's Day*, *Lawley Road*, *Malgudi Days*, and *The Grandmother's Tale*), two travel books (*My Dateless Diary* and *The*

Emerald Route), four collections of essays (Next Sunday, Reluctant Guru, A Writer's Nightmare, and A Story-Teller's World), a memoir (My Days), and some translations of Indian epics and myths The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, and (Gods, Demons and Others). In 1980, R. K. Narayan was awarded the A.C. Benson award by the Royal Society of Literature and was made an Honorary Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. R. K. Narayan's published works are: Swami and friends, Bachelor of Arts, The Dark Room, The English Teacher, An Astrologer's Day and other stories, Waiting for the Mahatma, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, My Dateless Diary: An American Journey, The Vendor of Sweets, Malgudi Days, A Tiger for Malgudi and many others.

Narayan has been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature multiple times but has not yet won the honor. His popular works include The English Teacher, The Financial Expert and Waiting for the Mahatma. Narayan died of heart problems in a Madras hospital on May 13, 2001 at the age of 94.

And yet if Narayan's standing was consistently described in the most vigorous terms, assessments of his writing were less robust. His work was called "charming," "simple," "gentle," "harmless," "lightly funny," and "benign"—applause so placid that it was unlikely to wake anyone dozing in the audience. V. S. Naipaul, in a tribute to Narayan in *Time*, recalled having been "immediately enchanted" by Narayan's early work, but he seemed perplexed that Narayan, a writer of realist fiction, "was not interested in Indian politics or Indian problems"—that he did not see the India that Naipaul had dubbed "a wounded civilization." Though Naipaul claimed, charitably, "I do not hold this against him," there was a lingering suggestion that it could be held against Narayan's art. "A more clear-sighted man would not have been able to filter out or make harmless the distress of India, as Narayan does in Malgudi."

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