



## R.K.NARAYAN AS A NON-FICTIONAL ESSAYIST

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents R. K. Narayan as a prolific writer of personal essays. They are pragmatic with reality, humour and irony. They were written at different periods of his life. The most noteworthy among these essays are 'Next Sunday', 'The Reluctant Guru' and 'A Writer's Nightmare'. The scope for such a composition is unlimited. The mood may be sombre, hilarious or satirical and the theme may be heterogeneous. He tackles subjects such as Coffee, Umbrellas, Teachers, Week papers, foreign trips etc. All reveal the very essence of India.

**Keywords:** Directorate, haphazard, hilarious, irony, monitoring, pungent and reprimanding.

### INTRODUCTION

R. K. Narayan is the grand old man of Indian fiction. Besides fiction, he was also a good Non-fictional essayist. That's why he won the first Indian Sahitya Akademi Award. All his books of fiction and non-fiction are excellent and must read by anybody who can read English. His language is very lucid and transparent. He writes for children and adults. His writerly life spanned seven long and illustrious decades from the 1930s to the 1990s. As our study of paper is restricted to only R. K. Narayan as a non-fictional essayist, it is better to deal with his essays instead of Novels and Short Stories. Almost throughout his career, R. K. Narayan wrote non-

fictional pieces/essays. They were written at various times which indicated his growth of mind as a writer like William Wordsworth. Starting with pieces written as a weekly contribution to the 'Hindu' in the late 1930s, Narayan's interest in the short form led him to comment, over the next few decades, on just about every aspect of the world around him that held his interest. It was the short subjective essay that was Narayan's forte, since it was the perfect platform for building on his gift for keen observation and anecdotal narrative.

**Division of Essays:** R. K. Narayan's essays have been divided into 3 sections. The First group of short essays (Earlier Essays) was written over the earlier stages of Narayan's non-fiction career from 1930s to 1950s. The second group of short essays (Middle Period Essays) was written from 1950s to 1970s. The third stage of short essays (Later Period Essays) was written 1970s to 1990s. All these essays have been brought together under the rubric 'The World of the Writer'.

**The Style and World of the Writer:** R. K. Narayan is a writer of the personal essays in the style of Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, A. G. Gardiner, more recently E. V. Lucas or Robert Lynd. He calls his essay 'Discursive' which means 'Personal'. The personal essay was enjoyable because it had the writer's likes, dislikes and his observations, always with a special flavour of humour, sympathy, aversion, style, charm, even an oddity. In other words, his essay is a pleasure to read as much as it reveals the 'writer's personality'. His essays show writer's 'wide scholarship' and every sentence reflects his humour and irony. So they are 'delightful' as well as 'enchanting' as his novels. He tackles subjects such as Umbrellas, Weddings, Monkeys, South Indian Coffee, Films, the Black Market, Old age, Caste System, Gardening and Vayudoot. The later, longer essays dwell on the 'Cultural Ambiguities' that persist in our nation as seen in his short story "A Horse and Two Goats". The scope of a personal essay composition is unlimited- the mood may be somber, hilarious or satirical and the theme may range from what R. K. Narayan notices from his window, to what he sees in the waste-paper basket, to a world of the Cataclysm. This is the reason why he selects personal essay form while writing non-fictional prose pieces. The book "The Writerly Life" represents the majority of R. K. Narayan's non-fiction. It is a combined volume of his prose books such as "Next Sunday"-Sketches and essays (1960), "Reluctant Guru" (1974) and "A Writer's Nightmare" – Selected Essays (1989).

**Critique of R. K. Narayan's Prose Essays:** Let us study the prose essays of R. K. Narayan, section-wise/group-wise.

**Early Essays:** These essays were written by Narayan during the late 1930s to early 1950s for his weekly column in the Hindu. They are all set in the South India of Narayan's early years and showcase his ability to charm etch the characteristics of the world around him. They provide insights into Narayan's

protagonists- the middle class common man. They are written in a light-vein.

"**Next Sunday**" is the first essay in "Writerly Life". Here, R.K.Narayan says that everyone looks forward to Sunday. It is a day on which there are many things to do. A man plans to do the work of 48 hours that day. He wants to get up late. But he is disturbed and gets up in a disappointed mood. It is not a good way to start the day. The charm of the day is lost at the very start. By the time he begins his work, the Sunday nearly has gone. He begins to notice the things in the house. He had no time to examine those things on other days. He is a hobbyist. He likes to repair things with his own hand. He wants to hang a picture, repair the radio and oil the watch. He sits like a great god in his workshop. But he is unable to do anything because he finds many instruments are missing somewhere in the cupboard. The boys of him who stand near him want to escape from their father's scoldings. Suddenly he sees his children playing in the next house. He finds that his children are not developing on the right times. He punishes them. The man finds that half the Sunday is left. There are only a few more hours left. He remembers his promises. He wants to fulfil them. He gets up after his rest. He thinks that he can take his family out on that day. Then he remembers how he spent the previous Sunday with children, howling with hunger at the bus stand. He says to his children to stay at home that day. He promises to take his family out 'the next Sunday'.

In "**The Crowd**", R.K.Narayan says that he likes Crowd. In a crowd a man can attain great calm- he can forget himself for a few hours. He has seen many crowds when he is in Madras near radio stand at the Marina, Flower Bazaar road, Central Railway Station platform and Parry's corner to Moore market. There he was watched humanity in a dazzling variety and shape of colours, forms, voices, appeals and activities. He likes crowd at a temple festival. The misanthrope hates a crowd, misses the charm of life.

In the essay "**Coffee**", the author describes the story of Coffee and the way it came to India. Bababuden, a Muslim saint came from Mocha, bringing with him a handful of seeds and settled himself on the slope of a mountain range in Kadur district, Mysore state. This range was later named after him, and anyone can see his tomb when they make a short trip from Chikmangalur. Later he describes the process of Coffee- making which everyone does but he gives many precautions for making tasty Coffee.

Thus R. K. Narayan's early essays cover a range of subjects which are common such as 'Restaurants', 'Gardening without Tears', 'Of Trains and Travellers' etc.

**Middle Period Essays:** R. K. Narayan wrote these essays for 'The Hindu' and other periodicals. They were written when he was at the peak of his career. These pieces represent various aspects of Narayan's engagement with Post-Independence India. One such essay is "Reluctant Guru". In 1969, Narayan was visiting professor at the University of Missouri, Kansas University. When he stepped into his very first class, R. K. Narayan found himself confronted with a very of elderly ladies, each brandishing a copy of 'The Guide' in her hand. This essay is an autobiographical essay. Here the Reluctant Guru is the author himself. He is exposed to the naiveté of American campus crowds. On tour as a D.V.P (Distinguished Visiting Professor), Narayan meets in shock but amused silence, a throng of people who think that India is only the land of snake charmers, Yoga, Mysticism, Philosophy, Fakirs and Black Magic. He professes to them on everything that is demanded of the land of Kama-Sutra. What comes out in this refreshing essay is the blinkered view the west has of the Eastern sub-continent, especially India. Humour is there and what sets the mood of the reader is the matchless symphony and humour, which unfolds the fact of India. The Bharat brand of English, the defence of the usual late corners in India, the world of culture mongers, a plea for a ministry of worry, brings out the best of R. K. Narayan's pungent and sparkling humour and his capacity to launch in any situation.

The other essays are matchless in their capacity to keep one in fits of laughter at their best and in the status of amused indignation at their not so-best states. Indian audiences would adore seeing this deluded view of the west as it evaluates the land of Maharajas. It becomes especially funny because the Indians too foster some prejudices and mind sets against or for the Americans and in the counter beliefs, are able to laugh at themselves. And even as Narayan probes the American system for its blinded vision, he also exposes us to the system of education and administration that would put any among us to shame. In the guise of his trademark humour, R. K. Narayan manages to give a comparative study of different cultures and the interaction between them. Anybody who claims to be a Narayan fan would be unfair to think of him as just a fiction writer. His prose essays are ideal to read because of funny,

warm-hearted, satirical and yet serious aspects of those essays.

'*The Newspaper Habit*' is a funny essay about the reading habits of a newspaper. The man-in-a-hurry glances at the headings and summary and puts away the paper for a thorough study later in the day but he misses the sports column. The boy, who borrows the paper, detaches the sports page.

In the other essay "*The Lost Umbrella*", R. K. Narayan describes how he often forgets his umbrella at shops, for which he filed a detailed complaint with the police. R. K. Narayan says that an umbrella is a highly-prized possession to anyone. It should be carried carefully without leaving it at any point of the journey.

**Later Essays:** The Later Essays are longer than the other two. R. K. Narayan wrote on the topics that were significant to him. One such essay is '*A Writer's Nightmare*' (1988). This essay sums up a critical observation on censorship of writings and writers by the government parameters. It reveals R. K. Narayan's keen observation on the situation of writing in India. The essay is also a virtue of simplicity, precision, clarity and readability. Here, Narayan uses the minimum of words to achieve his purpose, and vocabulary has a modest usage. It is a sweet 'anecdote of dream' like qualities.

Through a dream like quality, Narayan observes the nightmare of a writer where he is pathetically subjugated and minimized by narrow restrictions of governmental dictation. In the world of 'Xandu', the kingdom of fantasy, the author dreams of an appointment of an officer called- 'Controller of Stories'. The controller of stories has the functionality of monitoring, regulating and reprimanding the bad stories altogether.

Writing a story is no more a child's game. It is a bureaucratic haphazard. Filling up the form, sending up a synopsis of it in quadruplicate to the chief story Bureau for further sanctions become a regulation. There should be final authorization certificate after the consideration of diversified aspects of story writing. The central story Bureau is a facilitating body which will consist of four directorates. Each of the directorates will consider the plot, character, atmosphere and climax separately. They could also provide utilization and improvement directives. The writer failing in such parameters must be punished.

The purpose of such measurements is enhancing the 'writing skill and the content of the story'. Finally what the government says is an object misery that if the procedures fail in achieving its goals, they should take the writing for themselves. At this stage, the dream shatters.

Narayan's observation is pivotal to that criticism of government censorship and parliamentary debates. Through bunter and situational laughter, he criticizes the tendency of curving of spontaneity of a writer by the governmental mechanism. 'Writing- be' it a story or any other literary piece must be a will of the author's powerful ambition through subjectivity or objectivity. A government should not regulate writers notably, Narayan's comic is very clear as he has hinted the hoax of parliamentary procedure through a questionnaire. "**The Writer's Nightmare**" is typically Narayan's social critique.

The other essays are on the topics like 'Love', 'Noble Prize Winners', 'English in India' and 'The Problem of the Indian Writer'. This group of essays includes a significant essay, "Misguided Guide", expressing Narayan's displeasure with the film 'Guide', based on his book, "The Guide"

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#### CONCLUSION

Thus, all personal essays of R. K. Narayan are authentic descriptions of his life. They are drenched with wit, humour and with irony here and there.

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