



THE INTERSECTION OF REALISM & FANTASY IN THE WORKS R.K. NARAYAN

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Abstract

R.K. Narayan, an iconic figure in Indian English literature, brilliantly weaves the fabric of realism and fantasy across his extensive body of work, reflecting the intricate tapestry of Indian life during the 20th century. His literary journey encompasses thirteen novels, numerous short stories, travelogues, and non-fiction, portraying the cultural, social, and individual intricacies of Indian society against the backdrop of the Indian Freedom Struggle. Narayan's unique narrative technique blends the everyday with the fantastical, creating a delicate balance that mirrors the complexities of real life. Through his creation of Malgudi, a fictional town that embodies the essence of Indian life, Narayan presents a microcosm of India, exploring themes of tradition, morality, and the human condition. His characters, rooted in the middle class, navigate the challenges of life with a realism that resonates with readers, while his incorporation of fantasy adds a layer of depth and intrigue. Narayan's work stands out for its lack of didacticism, focusing instead on the artistry of storytelling and the exploration of universal truths through the lens of ordinary lives.

Keywords: *R.K. Narayan, Malgudi, Indian English literature, Realism and fantasy in literature, Cultural heritage in novels, Middle-class characters, Indian Freedom Struggle, Traditional values and modern life, Artistic storytelling*

Introduction

R. K. Narayan, born as Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami in 1906 and passed away in 2001, was a part of the 20th-century Indian Freedom Struggle. It was at this moment of intense excitement and ferment that the three great luminaries of Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, began writing their stories. A few of their first creations accurately capture the circumstances and issues that defined India and her populace in the early decades of the 1900s. In one way or another, each of them used fiction to express the feelings of their generation. Thirteen novels, five volumes of short stories, many travelogues, a collection of non-fiction works, the English translation of Indian epics, and the memoirs *My Days* were all authored by R. K. Narayan.

From ancient times, India has acquired a rich cultural heritage. Throughout history, civilization has been evolving into more complex forms. With minor adjustments, India has also maintained her long-standing social norms. Festivals, cultural events, religious occasions, conventions of civilization, traditional rituals, and the National Day Celebration Programme are constants in India. They are integral to our society and cannot be separated. Their goal was to bring people together in a sense of belonging, to help them live life to the fullest while fostering mutual understanding and harmony. The imperfections, filth, and wickedness of society have dulled their natural beauty over the years. It is safe to say that R. K. Narayan's novel depicts cultural occurrence, civilization patterns, and traditional values. The authenticity and truthfulness of Narayan's portrayal of modern life, free from criticism, satire, or commentary, is what really sets him apart. So, we can see the good and bad of modern society portrayed in his works. The author eloquently portrays social conventions and realities while being objective and dispassionate. A guy who is aware of his moral obligations is R. K. Narayan. He notes that a man's morals are destroyed by commercial impulse. Narayan is still, in the end, just an artist. He advocates for societal harmony and cohesion. Through the use of realistic characterization, he has effectively deconstructed the societal reasons as an artist. Thus, he does it with the assistance of his fictional creations. Many of the issues plaguing middle-class society, in which Narayan himself has participated, find expression in his writings. His characters and society are both well-balanced.

An author from India, R.K. Narayan follows in the long line of Indian storytellers. A common feature of Indian storytelling is their fantastical elements. R.K. Narayan is a realist, yet his novels also include elements of fantasy. According to what Uma Parameswaran says,

"Narayan portrays both fantasy and realism in eight of his ten novels, but they are not adequately maintained. The



first half often has wonderful, realistically drawn setting, characterisation, and action in between though there is a distinct break and fantasy takes over (Parameswaran)."

Artistic Synthesis of Realism and Fantasy in R. K. Narayan's Novels

The fantastical elements of Narayan's writings serve a purpose in the short term, but clash with the more realistic characters and settings in the longer narrative. The real and the fantastic are only loosely bound together in both *Swami and Friends* and *The Dark Room*. His books are more of a mechanical mashup of reality and fantasy than an organic combination of the two. Part two's emphasis on reality stands in stark contrast to the latter section's predominance of imagination. What follows is a recounting of Savitri's escape from *The Dark Room*, her return to her family, and her suicide attempt. Such fantasies include, but are not limited to, Krishna's talks with his wife's soul, Chandran's resignation of his life in *The Bachelor of Arts*, and his wanderings as a Sadhu. Nevertheless, H. Vasu is undeniably fascinating in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. He meets a fantastic end at his hands, which reminds us of the old Hindu myth of the Rakshasa who died—after all, in *Dancing*, he did put his palm on his head. *The Waiting for the Mahatma* is a work of fiction that mixes the genuine and uncomplicated love tale of Bharati and Sriram with the fantastical intrusion of Gandhi and Gandhian politics. This haphazard blending of reality and fiction detracts from even two of Narayan's best works, *The Financial Expert* and *The Sweet Vendor*. Narayan has the kind of extraordinary creative ability that is necessary for such dispassionate artistic expression. Thanks to his exceptional creative abilities and insightful imagination, he has shown Indian culture with an unusual degree of objectivity, without attempting to preach a message or express his personal opinions. He writes about life as he experiences it, flaws and all, and he doesn't hold back. Mr. Sampath, Margayya, Ramani, Raju, and everyone else he portrays is completely unbiased. Like all humans, he demonstrates that they are fallible mortals with good intentions who make mistakes.

R. K. Narayan's literary works are based on the imaginary town of Malgudi that exists only in his imagination. Imagine a landscape that is just as dynamic and full of life as a fictional character. A part of Narayan's realistic work, the fictional location is stitched with such a silky thread that it makes a delicate fabric. Like Sir Walter Scott's "Border Countries," Wordsworth's "Lake District," Thomas Hardy's "The Wessex," or Arnold Bennet's "The Five Towns," it is an extraordinary literary location. Narayan built this hamlet based on his own life, his upbringing, and his experiences as a youngster. He encountered the individuals depicted in it on a daily basis. In doing so, he built a community to which any Indian could connect. A potential destination :

"into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us, we know, with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open the door to yet another human existence." (Green Graham)

The city of Malgudi piques R. K. Narayan's passionate interest. Not only does it serve as setting for his books, but it also has a protagonist who appears in most of them. When it comes to reality, Narayan is solid. He gives us an accurate portrayal of Malgudi—the city and its environs as well as the Malgudian people—along with all its quirks, traditions, beliefs, shortcomings, virtues, and vices. Fantastic is the reality that Narayan has. The writer has done an excellent job of describing the human attitudes, which vary according to each person's situation. More than just reporting, R.K. Narayan portrays reality. His reality varies in intensity and weakness depending on where you are.

The fictional creations in R. K. Narayan's books are all works of art in their own right. They don't hail from the upper crust, aren't heroes or heroines, and are instead members of the common middle class. Their deeds are plain to see, yet they're only pawns in the cosmic or natural orchestration. They seem to carry out their responsibilities as an active actor thrust into a spotlight situation in order to restore normality.

"The success of R. K. Narayan lies in attributing universality to his commonplace characters. The non-heroes finally evolve into heroes. It is done with the artistic impersonality and distinct objectivity. Didacticism, philosophy, and propaganda hardly appear in their creation. They are drawn with extraordinary delicacy and tenderness, admirable integrity and intelligence. The novelists do not control and govern them but let 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 for true meaning in life. (Azam, 6)"



When it comes to art, R. K. Narayan is unparalleled. His distinctive brilliance as a writer lies in his lyrical prose, his grasp of human psychology, his realistic approach to character development, his seamless plotting, and, most importantly, his use of stylistic language. Providing readers with aesthetic pleasure is Narayan's only goal in using books as a medium. Simply put, he is a writer who is also an artist. The realism of his settings is almost philosophical. In his stance, Narayan is renowned for his impartiality and distancing himself. He has no interest in advising, preaching, or converting modern culture. He has crafted an eclectic cast of characters that will stay in his readers' hearts for years to come. However, the full aesthetic gratification that R. K. Narayan gives to his readers is the key to his immense success and high distinction. The 'art for art's sake' perspective allows him to depict Indian life with total objectivity and impartiality.

The delightful, fascinating, and humorous books written by R. K. Narayan are a result of the discordant blend of reality and fiction. Without this combination, his books may have been very boring and lifeless. Because of his innovative combination of these two styles, he is really unique among artists. The outward features of Narayan's surroundings are associated with the mental impressions. Therefore, his work is unadulterated and unadorned, reflecting the depth of his thoughts.

Role of Realism and Fantasy in R. K. Narayan's Novels

The realist view is that there is an objective, absolute reality for all things. This theory states that matter, in its role as an object of experience, does in fact exist independently of any one perceiving agent and is hence not reducible to a spirit or universal consciousness. Contrast it with idealism. To clarify, realists have a pragmatic outlook on life and tend to see things as they really are; this world does in fact have a reality.

Imaginary encounters with real-world objects or scenes are the essence of fantasy. This sense allows us to take in an object of fear, which in turn imprints a mental picture of that item on our minds. So, the ability to imagine fantastical things is a kind of imagination. That which is very unlikely to happen in actuality is, hence, what we mean when we talk about fantasy. The creative process of a writer is unrestricted. He completely disregards the rules of reason and the laws of nature. The end effect is both fantastical and ridiculous. "Narayan employs both realism and fantasy in eight of his ten novels, but they are not adequately balanced," says Uma Parmeswarn. Setting, characters, and action in the first half are often top-notch and convincingly depicted. The real world abruptly ends about the midpoint, and the fantastic begins.

The works of Narayan Narayan are the subject of critic Uma Parmeswaram's ongoing definition of fantasy. A author may legitimately and effectively employ fantasy as an auxiliary to humor. While it accomplishes its goal in the novel's local setting, the inclusion of genuine characters and circumstances makes it seem out of place in the broader context. With the exception of *The Dart Room* and *Swami and Friends*, all of the novels have a very shaky connection between reality and fiction. The protagonist, who we'll call "hero" for want of a better word, comes from a middle-class background and acts genuinely, whereas the antagonist is completely fantastic. Narayan just sets the two components next to one other, even if they might be handled with finesse. Isolation occurs only in the hero's life when the evil has an impact. Take Srinivas's life as an example. Sampath guides him into a magnificent adventure, but the impact on his private life is underexplored. Just as Narayan's encounter with Vasu is almost horrific, we only see a fraction of his life where he encounters Vasu's crazy antics. The story gets out of hand even in his greatest work, *The Vendor of Sweets*. Not Jagan's encounter with the artist, but Mali's marvelous story-writing machine is the unbalanced dream here. In this case, fantasy serves as a satirical adjunct, but Narayan eventually misses the narrative points that would have tied the story together. As it is, the majority of his stories diverge into two separate narratives, with the fantastical elements being introduced alongside the more realistic ones until being abandoned entirely.

These two components, reality and fantasy, are mechanically mixed or blended in Narayana's writings. Typically, imagined. One component is realism, yet the predominance of fantastical elements makes them seem out of place. After Savitri's amazing rescue from *The Dark Room*, she returns to her house and children, she had attempted suicide. Chandran has given up on his Bachelor of Arts degree, taking his wife's spirit with him. Here are a few books written by Narayan. The books' depictions of reality are completely at odds with all of this.



In the Indian setting, these fantastical, fantastical situations could seem rather unlikely. Reality, however, is never disregarded. Even fantastical ideas have a foundation in reality. Imagine the Man-Eater of Malgudi, Vasu. He reminds us of the Hindu story of the Rakshasa, who died while dancing and laid his hand on his own head; he surely is a strange figure who dies by his own hand. As he plots to kill the elephant, Malgudi provides yet another brilliant illustration.

His second book, *Waiting for Mahata*, is a romantic comedy about Bharati and Sriram's realistic yet idealistic love affair, in which the author fantasizes of including Gandhi and his political ideas. An more spectacular incident occurs in the book being discussed, and it involves the resurrection of an elderly lady who is believed to be dead on the creation ground. Both *The Financial Expert* and *The Vendor of Sweet* provide more instances of both reality and imagination. Too much emphasis on reality and imagination, according to some reviewers, detracts from the book. The books written by Narayan include several characters and incidents that are both peculiar and ridiculous.

Uma Parmeswara says, "The Guide is the only one of Narayan's novels which comes close to having a perfect unity and a compound of realism and fantasy. In *The Guide*, Narayan uses the literary device of ambiguity to get this compound."

Every one of R. K. Narayan's books begins with an outsider entering the established world of Malgudi and upsetting the normality, or the customary order of life. Because to his wicked schemes, everything gets uprooted. However, our esteemed writer R.K. Narayan is a remarkable individual due to his efforts to restore normality. The disruption of the usual order and its subsequent restoration by the orderly world is the central subject. We are in a transitory moment. Everyone is carefree, gay, and joyful in the last chapter. The rule of nature dismantles all the obstacles that a wicked person has erected. The complex system of checks and balances operating in the cosmos is something that Narayan mulls on. The oral order, however, is the ultimate destination of all superior energies. So the strange and outlandish are no longer kings. A new moral order has emerged and taken its place. All of his works revolve around this central issue. We may talk about this subject in several books.

Our first course is the Bachelor of Art. The hero's inability to marry his beloved has left him in a state of desperation. In his last ditch effort to save himself, he gives up on society and lives as a nomadic Sadhu. But when he returns on his own, he discovers that the girl his parents picked out for him is stunning. After some time has passed, they tie the knot, and the "Bachelor of Arts" obtains a job as a newspaper agent. Along with his wife, he enjoys a life that is rich and full of contentment.

Swami and his companions have a blissful existence in the other book, *Swami and Friends*. However, Swami's tardiness to the vital cricket match momentarily strains their connection. Rajan is profoundly troubled; he is Swami's other companion. It has hurt him. Anguish, heartbreak, and pain are all present. But the story's climax is brought about by Narayan's art. Swami says goodbye to Rajan and heads to the train station. Unfortunately, the enormous throng at the station prevented the two buddies from meeting up. From the moving train, Swami and Rajan are able to shake hands, which restores order even if Swami cannot speak to Rajan.

Despite occasional disturbances, his novels include enigmatic individuals and a return to normality brought about by ultimate forces. As an example, Margayya's return to his son's residence in *The Financial Expert* establishes normality. All of Margayya's illicit riches has vanished. The financier who has amassed vast wealth by deceiving the public is he. However, he ends himself destitute after losing everything. Even though he lives far from him, his kid Balu is doing well in life. The tragedies that the boy has experienced have a profound impact on him. Margayya had planted a kiss on his granddaughter and son's bride. So now everything is back to normal, and they're back at the ancestral house.

The book by Narayan concludes with the sequence order-disorder-order in *The Guide*. The apologies and alarms, the suspense and thrill, the regrets and recrimination, have all ended. To Raju's surprise, he learns that "neither Marco nor I had place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along."

The disruption of the usual social order is central to the issue, to summarize. The powers of law and order are at odds with one another. Yet, R. K. Narayan is an authentic artist. Some unknown powers bring him reconciliation. As a



result, his universe is not dominated by anything strange, bizarre, or bad. Love, beauty, tranquility, harmony, and rebirth are the final outcomes. Life should go on as normal notwithstanding the momentary anomalies. This is the message that R. K. Narayan conveys to the world. Rather of Pandemonium or Satan, Order should be used.

Narayan places an emphasis on household life and family in his literature. Therefore, the term "domestic" plays a crucial role in illustrating the concept. Conflicts within families are often brought up as a means of mending fences. When we put our differences aside and work together, we can handle this extraordinary issue. Now that the crisis is passed, normality may resume its impact. Even if children's quirks, fancies, and caprices throw off the balance of things from time to time, Narayan believes that his protagonists should ultimately have a happy and successful existence. "His affection for the family is the constant, which keeps the other constant of his as an average person, alive; it places the tragedy of his other self in a light which merges the disaster of the expert with that of the man."

"I would rather honor Narayan's ambiguity and art by conjecturing that this risk, which was thrust upon Raju without his knowledge or consent, ultimately pays off; that he pulls himself together and graciously grants his followers' modest requests, and that the government authorizes glucosetire injections to revitalize his blood stream, all the while his halo shines even brighter than before in the eyes of the urbanites and ruralites who love mythology and sensation."

The wonderfully strange blend of reality and fiction in R. K. Narayan's books makes them incredibly captivating, interesting, and humorous. His books would have been much less interesting if he hadn't included this combination. He has skillfully combined these two characteristics, making him an artist in his own right. There is a correlation between Narayan's outward surroundings and his mental perceptions. Because of this, his work is unadulterated and straightforward in its expression of profound mental concepts.

Conclusion

R.K. Narayan's literary legacy is defined by his masterful integration of realism and fantasy, which not only enriches the narrative texture of his novels but also offers a profound commentary on the human experience. Through the fictional yet familiar world of Malgudi, Narayan captures the vibrancy of Indian life, weaving a narrative that is both deeply rooted in Indian culture and universally appealing. His characters, often caught between the demands of society and the pursuit of personal happiness, reflect the universal struggle for meaning and identity. Narayan's storytelling transcends mere entertainment, inviting readers to ponder the complexities of life and the myriad ways in which the ordinary becomes extraordinary. His contribution to Indian English literature is invaluable, providing insight into the human spirit's resilience and the enduring power of imagination. Narayan's work remains a testament to the enduring appeal of storytelling that bridges the gap between the real and the imagined, offering readers a window into the soul of India.

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