

# FANTASY AND REALISM IN THE NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to reveal the 'REALISM' and 'FANTASY' present in R.K. NARAYAN'S novels. In the fiction of R. K. Narayan, there is an accurate representation of contemporary Indian life, traditions and culture in its vivid and realistic form. Social realism is observed minutely. Narayan is a pure storyteller, an artist who portrays reality in its real rare rhythm. Social customs and reality are portrayed vividly with unbiased objectivity and complete detached observation. He apprehends the delicate rhythms of modern Indian life in his well-known novels. He presents realism in the discerning of life- experiences through the characters of his fictional works.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Reality, Fantasy, Live Landscape, Vivid Characters.

R. K. Narayan (Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, 1906-2001) belongs to the age of Indian Freedom Struggle of 20th century. The three bright stars of Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao started writing their fiction, mainly in this period of great ferment and excitement. Some of their early works genuinely reflect the conditions and the problems that characterise the early decades of the twentieth century India and her people. All of them voiced the emotion of their age in their fiction, directly or indirectly. R. K. Narayan wrote Fifteen Novels, Five Volumes of Short-Stories, several Travelogues and Collection of Non-fiction, English Translation of Indian Epics, and the Memoirs *My Days*.

India has inherited a great legacy of her culture from ancient time. Civilisation has been continuously passing through its sophisticated form. India has also kept her age-old prevailing tradition in society with some modification. India is such a country where Festival, cultural events, protocols of civilisation, Religious occasions, National Day Celebration Programme and Traditional Rituals always take place. They are the inseparable parts of our society. They aimed to unite people with the feeling of togetherness, to make people enjoy life very closely with harmonious mutual understanding. Over time, deformities, ugliness and evils of society have spoiled them. In the fiction of R. K. Narayan, one can undoubtedly find the representation of cultural incidence, patterns of civilisation and traditional values. Still, the uniqueness of Narayan is the faithful, real depiction of contemporary society, without any criticism, satire or comments. So in his literature, we can visualise the contemporary society as it was with virtues and vices. Social customs and reality are vividly

described with unbiased objectivity and complete detached observation. R. K. Narayan is a man of moral consciousness. He points out that commercial instinct ruins the morals of a man. On the whole, Narayan remains a pure artist. He is for social integration and order. As an artist, he has dissected the social motives successfully with the help of realistic characterisation. Therefore, he does it with the help of his characters. Narayan's novels are the expression of various problems of middle-class society in which he has been all involved. The balance between his characters and society is well maintained.

R.K. Narayan is an Indian writing novelist in the Indian tradition of storytelling. Fantasy is a typical quality in Indian stories. So, despite his realism, fantasy is also an element in the stories of R.K. Narayan. As Uma Parameswaran points out,

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).

In Narayan's novels, fantasy its aim within the immediate context but becomes incongruous in the larger context, which includes realistic persons and realistic situation. Every novel, *Swami and Friends* and *The Dark Room*, has the two factors of realism and fantasy very loosely threaded together. In his novels, there is not an organic compound of realism and fantasy, but merely a mechanical mixture. In the later part, the fantasy predominates and strikes one as incongruous in the context of the realism of the first part. Savitri's attempted suicide in *The Dark Room*, her miraculous escape, and return to her home and children. The renunciation of Chandran's life in *The Bachelor of Arts*, his wanderings as a Sadhu, Krishna's conversations with the soul of his dead wife, are all examples of such fantasy. However, H. Vasu in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is undoubtedly fantastic, and he meets a fantastic death by his own hands reminding us of the ancient Hindu Myth of the *Rakshasa* who died, as in *Dancing*, he placed his hand on his head. In *The Waiting for the Mahatma*, we have the fantasy of the intrusion of Gandhi and Gandhian politics into the realistic and straightforward love-story of Bharati and Sriram. Even, *The Financial Expert* and *The Sweet Vendor*, two of Narayan's finest novels, are spoiled by this uneven mixture of fantasy and realism. Such artistic detachment needs creative powers of a high order, and Narayan has such power. It is because of his creative power, his imaginative insight, that he has portrayed the life of Indian people with a rare detachment without ever trying to moralise or give his personal views. He accepts life as it comes to him with all its evil and wickedness, and renders it in his novels as he finds it. He depicts with perfect impartiality characters like Mr Sampath, Margayya, Ramani, Raju, etc. He shows that they too are not monsters of wickedness, but erring mortals, who are essentially human beings and such also have much good in them.

Malgudi is a fictional town imaged in the mind of R. K. Narayan, where his literary works take origin. It's like a landscape as alive and active as a personified character. The fictitious region is woven in such a smooth thread that it creates a delicate fabric of inseparable part of Narayan's realistic art. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'Border Countries' of Sir Walter Scott, 'Lake District' of Wordsworth, 'The Wessex' of Thomas

Hardy or 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. It was a town created from Narayan's own experiences, his childhood, and his upbringing. The people in it were people he met every day. He thus created a place which every Indian could relate to. A place, where, you could go "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)

Malgudi is an intense, emotional curiosity of R. K. Narayan. It is not merely the background of his novels, but a leading hero who is present in one way or the other in most of his novels. Narayan is realistic. He presents before us the Malgudi, both the nature Malgudi and the city Malgudi and the Malgudians with all their characteristics, habits, strengths, weakness, evils, faith, and superstitions realistically. The realism of Narayan is fantastic. The human attitudes, individually differing in their environment, have been narrated in a most-realistic manner by the novelist. R.K. Narayan depicts realism, which is something more than reportage. His quality of realism differs from place to place, at places, it is intense and at places feeble.

All the characters in R. K. Narayan's novels are live creation of the artistic presentation. They are not heroes or heroines or of an aristocrat or noble class, but they belong to a familiar lot of middle class. Their actions are apparent, but they are a puppet in the hands of God or Nature. They seem to perform their duties as an active agent who is put up into limelight predicament to create normalcy.

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).

The artistic excellence of R. K. Narayan is incomparable. His easy way of storytelling, his understanding of psychological behaviour of human beings, his realistic approach towards the art of characterisation, his smooth plot making and above all, his use of stylist language makes him the novelist of unique genius. Narayan does not use the medium of novels for any purpose other than giving artistic pleasure to his readers. He is an artist novelist, pure and simple. His backgrounds are realistic, almost philosophical in their realism. Narayan is noted for the objectivity and detachment of his stand. He is free from the desire to preach, to advise and to convert the contemporary society. He has created a wide variety of characters that will continue to delight the heart of his readers for a long time to come. The Secret of R. K. Narayan's great success and high distinction, on the other hand, lies in the complete aesthetic satisfaction he provides to his readers. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' points of view, maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality.

R. K. Narayan's novels are positively enchanting, entertaining and amusing because of the incongruous mixture of realism and fantasy. His novels could have been very dull and monotonous without this mixture. Thus, he is a rare artist because he has mixed these two elements creatively. The impressions of the mind are correlated with the external characteristics of Narayan's environment. Thus, his art is pure and straightforward, conveying the rich ideas of the mind.

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