

**The Prevailing Socio-cultural Scene in R.K. Narayan's fiction**

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**Abstract**

The Present research paper is the modest attempt to explore the concept of the prevailing socio-cultural scene through the novels of R.K. Narayan, the doyen of Indo Anglican novelists, is the brightest star in the firmament of Indo-Anglican fiction writers. His fiction attempts to comprehend, though in low key, the clash of deep-rooted values of Indian-culture and ethnicity with those of the modern west. His fiction reflects through the portrayal of the average and the ordinary lower middle class people in South India, symbolizing the whole of the country, the slow corrosion of Indian traditions caught in the crucible of change. He has portrayed Indian culture and tradition by reflecting a true social image of India. He has tried to capture the pulse of the Indian sensibility amidst the cross-roads of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic influence around us.

**Keywords:** Indian Culture, Myths Society, Life, traditions, social-milieu, customs

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In this research article, an attempt is made to show how Narayan reflex Indian Society, culture, traditions, customs, thought, characters and other prevailing social scene in his writings and characters.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Narayan was born and brought up in an orthodox family of a headmaster in the heart of conservative South India, spoke Tamil at home, Kenned in the streets, learnt English, by and large, from imperfect Indian teachers of English; he didn't even go to a convent or public school; and had hardly traveled beyond Madras, for a good many years. Besides, Narayan's early training of his life, under the orthodox supervision of his grandmother, gave him little scope to have an independent line of thinking. Under such circumstances, it was very unlikely that Narayan could mix freely with people other than his caste-brethren.

Narayan's marriage solemnized in 1935, proved very successful and happy. But, it was a short, as it was blissful. Rajam, his wife, died of typhoid in 1939, leaving him and their two year old daughter to took after. Rajam's death came to Narayan as a shock, not even remotely

anticipated, at the time. It was an experience that shook Narayan completely, both emotionally and physically and transformed his philosophical and spiritual outlook, altogether. As Narayan himself said: From early childhood, Narayan, because of his family and social background, was in touch with Hindu philosophy, religion and culture, and their influence, both consciously and unconsciously, on his mind. It was profound and indelible.

Narayan's early novels are a sociological study of people's manners and mentality in pre-independence days. "Swami and Friends" (1935) highlights the existing manners, as well as the impact of National Movement on common folk. "The Bachelor of Arts" (1937), is a probe into day to day incidents, in a typical Hindu household in South India and also many an odd traditional norm of society. "The Dark Room" (1938), demonstrates the particular Indian attitude to family life and exposes the predicament of common housewives. The heroine Savitri typifies all suffering housewives of our society, who are exploited by all means in their life.

"The English Teacher", (1945) tells us the tragic love story of the divine separation of two souls, with an ulterior motif of satirizing the fault, in existing education system, which makes us (nothing but) morons, cultural morons, and at best efficient clerks for all official business and administrative positions.

The middle novels are Narayan's exploration, into the manners and behavior of people in post-independence era. The novels highlight people's new desire for wealth. "Mr. Sampath" (1949), is a story of a cunning rogue, who without any corresponding ability, wants to earn

enormous wealth in a very short period. “The Financial Expert” (1952), is an exact account of rural usury and urban deceit and is as well a controlled probing into the motives of money making. Both Sam path and Margays represent the modern man, who aspires to touch the sky in a single jump but, ultimately comes back to the same old ground. “Waiting for the Mahatma” (1953), presents the socio-economic conditions at the time of the National Movement. Moreover it highlights the impact of Mahatma Gandhi on different strata of society. “The Guide” (1958), his most talked about novel, is appreciated for depicting the ironies of modern life.

Narayan’s metaphysical spirit is reflected in his later novels, mostly based on Indian myths. We see that the religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Narayan’s grip of reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feelings and experiences. What one can say about Narayan, without fear of contradiction is that he embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism, perfectly. “The Man Eater of Malgudi” (1961), is based on the Hindu mythological legend of Bhasmasura. “The Vendor of Sweets” (1967), is based on the Hindu concepts of cyclical existence and four stages of human life. However, it simultaneously highlights the confrontation of traditional and modern ways of Indian society. “The Printer of Signs” (1967), exploits with adroitness the story of ancient king Santhanu, mentioned in “The Mahabharata”.

“A Tiger for Malgudi” (1983), is chiefly an exploration of philosophical Indian myths and metaphysical parables of Hindu religion. Narayan is Critical of Caste System in India society. He makes us see that if Grace fears to come to India or Chandran to marry his sweetheart Malti, cast

or class barriers happens to be the reason. Our Society is ridden with caste and class feelings and sense, when Jagans claims, “We do not belief in caste. these days” or Raju says, There is not caste or class today”, we know pretty well, how untrue they are. Narayan condemns caste class division in almost every novel unavailingly yet “The Bachelor of arts” he falls to maintain his detachment and says “If India was to attempt salvation these, water-tight divisions must go community, caste, sects, sub sects and all further divisions. He further more dislikes the system of child marriage and appreciates such “rational and modern, people who abhorred the custom of rushing a young child into marriage

Religion is a major concern in the novel. Narayan probes into the sanctity of the terms, such as, sambas, sadhu, yogi or swami, indicating more or less the same entity. The religious sense of Indian myth is part of Narayan’s grip of reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feelings and experiences. Narayan embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism and therefore, in almost all his novels, Hindu custom and rituals are found vividly presented. For example, Raman’s aunt goes to a pilgrimage, with the motive shared by almost all religious spirited old men and women, belonging to Hindu religion. For every old person, the most auspicious end to his or her life is at Kashi and to be finally dissolved in the Ganga there. Narayan presents the religious ambition of every Hindu old man and woman, in the words of Raman’s aunt:

**“A darshan of Badrinath, and if possible, to Amarnath, where lingam is shaped in ice. I wouldn’t care what happened to me or to the world, after I**

**have seen the holy places and dipped in to the Ganga from its birth-place all along its course, until I end my pilgrimage in Benaras. After this I shall want nothing more in life”.**

Narayan is a minute observer of society and its corruption. The mixing of water into the milk by milkmen is a headache for everybody, in society. Raman’s aunt watches carefully, when the milkman mulches the cow, so that he may not add water into milk. Raman realizes it after her departure for pilgrimage:

**“The milkman comes with the cow at four-thirty in the morning. Someone must watch him, otherwise, he will add water. Raman now realised that, if the curd and milk had been pure and creamy, it was only because she stood up beside”.**

Narayan lived a comparatively settled and uncomplicated life, so most of his ideological assumptions had not been tested and the contradictions therein had not been revealed to him by some totally unexpected and extraordinarily frantic experience, active cultural interaction or by any conscious and deliberate intellectual exercise. He had well established views, about the nature of the world and thought of reality, while, expressing them..

Narayan touches the problems of the caste and Karma theory. He shows in “Waiting for the Mahatma”, how a large section of the Indian population has been kept totally segregated from the mainstream of life. Marriages, between people of two different castes are rarely held.

And since, Narayan has firm faith in Karma and rebirth, many of his characters, including the pious Natraj, and even Srinivas and Jagan come to believe that theirs is an existence, within a series of existence in past and future, with spiritual and moral dividends — the result of accumulated actions leading to our present predicament and future prospects. That is why, Narayan's characters accept their sufferings, with a sense of raved resignation, much to the enjoyment of the high caste, and supporters of *status quo* in social life.

Narayan's social vision is the vision of a man, visualising a conflict, between the old and the new generation, with gradual disappearance of old social values. However, individual efforts miserably fall short to change the collective force of the society rather he has to accept life as it is. Majority of the people around him, are dipped in superstitions. Western influence has changed much of its panorama, but there is no substantial change in Narayan's outlook. The Hindu rites and rituals that have been dominating the social scene, for ages, still hold the reins. However, Narayan is not unaware of the trend of the modern man, being scientific and rational.

Narayan always express dissatisfactions with the education system, prevalent in the country, which has failed to make all round development of man's personality, so as to enable him to face the realities of life. Narayan himself writes about contemporary education system:

Unfortunately, the scientific temperament, one requires to develop through education, is surprisingly lacking in Indian educationists. They have failed to take up the task of liberating the illiterate masses, from prejudices and superstitions. Their pre-occupation with their professional works and their staying away from social responsibility has created the present situation.

However, it is a pity that the traditional pulls are as deep-rooted in our educated people, even today the scientific temperament, so essential for bringing about a social change, still appears a remote possibility.

One thus arrives at the conclusion that Narayan is an unidentified social reformer, who is keenly aware of various absurdities and eccentricities of society and suggests, ironically the ways for their removal. All his novels take the simple sad comedy to the mythical nature and later parables are born in the smithy of social awareness. His fiction in its totality is an extensive metaphor on man, as the centre of society is Narayan has given a beautiful presentation of India. The suffering of Villagers, their ignorance, illiteracy, superstitions and spiritualism is the root cause of sufferings in India.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, his fiction has attracted and magnetized considerable critical-cum-crucial attention both in India and abroad, His literature is a treasure for posterity with gifts of rich Indian culture and traditions. The essence of his fiction writing lies in the ironic interplay between the traditional Indian values and transcendent reality. The personal and socio-cultural-cum-ethnic conflicts carry the moving beauty and unimpeded nobility of everyday life are in other words, his novels mirror the microcosmic India caught up in the convention, traditions and social-cultural-cum-ethnic changes.

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