

Impact Factor: 6.017

ISSN: 2278-9529



GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed e-Journal

Vol.15, Issue- 1 January 2026

15 Years of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor: Dr. Madhuri Bite

www.galaxyimrj.com



Indian Culture, Tradition and Identity in the Novels of R K Narayan

Dr. Abhijit Govindrao Joshi

Dept. of English,
Sambhajirao Kendre Mahavidyalaya,
Jalkot Dist. Latur.

Abstract:

Literature in India is written and produced both in Indian and English languages. It has published both in India and world Indian diaspora. The English readers everywhere in the world read the Indian writings produced in English. Through the writings written in the English language, the Indian authors like R K Narayan is able to give expression of Indianism with its nobility, tradition and culture. R K Narayan has profound knowledge of Hindu culture. He retold Ramayan and Mahabharata and number of Indian Myths and legends. In Narayan's writing the elements of indianness such as customs, traditions, beliefs and ideals are part of his knowledge and keenness to observe Indian culture. At the same time, Narayan is always concerned with vision of life. His self-resolved area has a direct bearing on his views of life and concept of life and values. Being a pure artist Narayan does not idealize the country nor does he condemn it. His roots are deeply planted in his own cultural ethos that ensures transcendence of narrow political, social and cultural frontiers and embraces human values. Narayan finds his characters in search of their identity. The search of identity and suffering is the basis of Narayan's novels. Through these searches Narayan offer the awareness of the fine values of life and possibility of life. The present paper seeks to understand Narayan's selected novels and the presentation of Narayan's own vision of life and Indian values and Indian knowledge of life.

Keywords: Indianans, Society, culture, Tradition, identity, Patriarchy.

The nature of Narayan's novels is the variable world of different human experiences. His novels offer us the comprehensive and suggestive picture of contemporary India. Indianness in terms of customs, traditions, image of women in society and search for identity is seen. Narayan evokes an exact atmosphere of India through his writing. It is very interesting to read Narayan's work that is coloured with all kinds of human passions and emotions. Not only this but also the unique of life that is truly Indian. Indian culture, tradition, and identity can be seen in Narayan's work mainly in fictional town of Malgudi which acts as a microcosm of India. The basic theme in R.K. Narayan's novel is the place of man in this universe and his predicaments to which he says the mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, psychological probing and the crisis in the individual's soul with its resolution.

The strength of Narayan lies in the creation of Malgudi, a small town that is the representation of all human being. Most of his characters are belonging to the middle class milieu, facing the difficulties of life. They are common man reflecting sense of Indianess. All *Jagan-The Vendor of Sweets, Margayya-The Financial Expert, Raju-The Guide, Savitri-The Dark Room* working in their own way to achieve maturity in their life. And through it, novelists peep into the social-religious atmosphere of India, its traditional scene and above it vision of live, a need for perfect balance in life. Thus, Malgudi reflects the essential human motives and true picture of our India. It is Narayan's skill that us such beautiful and the real picture of our society. Malgudi and its characters, atmosphere are special thing for study. S.P. Swain maintains-

The underlying situations in the novels of R. K. Narayan is real to all Indians and it is intimately linked to their immediate psyche awareness and social experience.



Narayan is the writer of society. His entire nature and structure of work rests on individual's experiences. His major works such as *The Guide*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The Financial Expert*, *The Dark Room* reflect society, social problems like money, education, individuals desire for attaining something are peculiar perspectives of Indian society. Through it Narayan gives a perfect picture of society and its religious atmosphere. According to William Walsh-

The wonderful richness and variety of his characters and his great skill in the evocation of atmosphere.

Narayan's Malgudi is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and reflects essential Indianness. In Indian society, customs and ways of life shape individuals life. Narayan presents middle class life that reflects Indian tradition, life and attitude. The family atmosphere and position of woman also finds expression in Narayan's novels. Narayan is the detached observer of Indian customs and psyche. William Walsh says-

Narayan shows the duty of the women to translate and refine the principles of orthodoxy and correctness into codes and extinguishers covering the basic drives for food, shelter, sex and company.

Narayan's Malgudi exhibits actual society. It is microcosm of India. So whatever happens here happens all over in India. It is universal society. In this society, Narayan's protagonist shows different stages of life. Knowledge of life through experience seems the pattern of Malgudian attitude towards life. Narayan is the firm believer in Hindu tradition and ideals of life. So in his novels we find the theme of renunciation and birth-rebirth pattern. His Malgudi is alive to such vision of life as suffering, search for identity. At the same time, Malgudi life believes in human relationship of various kinds. In other words, Malgudians are true to life.

Narayan conceives the society, its values with the panoramic pace of changing social sciences, with its colourfulness, eccentricity as well as hypocrisy and escapism on the other hand. In Narayan's novels-

The landscape embodies structural solidity of Indian reality pervaded by the customs and traditions, which controls human identity and its spatio-temporal continuum.

“You know my friend, at some stage in one's life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so that other's may continue in peace.”

One who says – “conquer the taste and you will have to conquered in the profession that fascinates the people itself to taste the flavour i.e. sweet from vendor.”

Being the perspective observer and recorder of India psyche, Narayan shows Indian society that actually exists in Malgudi-

Malgudi, a small town created by Narayan has an imprint of traditional society.

In this, traditional set up we come across clerks, doctors, schools, colleges, tutors, housewives, artists, vendors, film-makers, dancers, beggars, astrologers, untouchables, shopkeepers and all from every field of life. Narayan shows Indian society that actually existed in Malgudi with its surrounding and characters. In this place, Margayya – *The Financial Expert*, begins his bright career, from the front of central co-operative Bank Mortgage, it is the place where *Savitri* announces her resistance from being a victim and it is the place where she tries to draw herself into sarayu, the river and it is the place where Raju, *The Guide*, gets transformation and emerged as a great soul.



It is the place full of caves that attracts western-oriented people like Marco. It is the place full of customs, traditions and religions. Here, people lives in a state of famine, without education, under low wedges. Here is the problem of marriage, child education, draught, famine, poverty. Most of characters in Narayan's novels are common man, basically middle class-

They are traditional and superstitious. They believe that everything in this universe is pre-ordained and that no amount of human efforts can ease the situation, they are helpless creatures tossed this way and that by caprice of fortune.

Narayan, thus demonstrates the contemporary India with its social and religious dimensions in the very life of Malgudi. Malgudi is central so far as Narayan's social and religious views are concerned. Narayan shows contemporary India haunted by illiteracy, materialism, greediness, hypocrisy not only this but sadhus, fakhirs, professors, teachers all are contributed to the social atmosphere with its changeable variations.

... the most valuable element in Narayan's novels for modern western man, caught up in the frenzied rush of acquisitive society, is his rejection of mere materialism, his insistence on the supreme importance of human relationship and the spiritual values which underlie them.

Thus, Narayan reveals social human beings with their heart and mind, an understanding of the serious issues of life. These characters of Narayan struggle towards maturity within the accepted religious beliefs. They are tradition bound but real, common. They are never drawn on a heroic scale, rather they are unheroic heroes. They do not control the events, control them. Thus, in the case of Narayan's characters character is destiny as well as destiny is characters.

Narayan's all protagonists are compelled by the forces of circumstances to lead life. They are not pure saints or villains but they are common man, rustic and good and significant. In Narayan's novel we are not confronted with the quest of individual for identity but also a nation upheaval, uncertain of the ways of life, questioning the value of many western, attitudes. Narayan's people seem to be a transcription of real world. His novel floats gently on the surface of Indian life and yet suggests the depth beneath it. Narayan has dealt neither in fashionable modes of fiction writing not in themes of topicality. He chooses the matters from everyday life, situations from common individual man's life, situations from common individual man's life, so they please us most.

Narayan's most memorable characters are *Raju*, *Margayya*, *Jagan* all are ordinary man caught in the web of Illusions-money, success, love and happiness, each one of them working out in their own way. These protagonists are individuals as well as universal in their human aspirations, follies, foibles and ultimate resolutions. And through it Narayan reveals human insights. Mr.Sinha maintains-

R.K. Narayan is keenly aware of the fundamental irremediable incongruities which life and world are confronting with us.

Margayya's life is true to social reality. Margayya, who begins his career in front of Central Co-operative Bank, Mortgage, with his trunk containing his dairy, a bottle of ink, a pen and few blank applications, sat under banyan tree and piled his business. He filled in the forms of his customers and advised them as to the ways and means of getting money from the bank and in lending it to other customers on interest. But he was forced to drop his activities by secretary of bank. In his adventure of money finally he comes to his original place.



Margayya's pursuit shows the futility of man's forays into unaccustomed paths of quick gain and easy prosperity and necessity of turning back to the same position where he began. Narayan reveals that the essential circularity of human beings embodies the worthwhile wisdom that a man gains in his life and it appears on Hindu philosophy of time with belief that the world does not progress but changes. And material gains appearing very fascinating. So men is advised to be content with what he has and to strive for self-improvement and self-knowledge.

Narayan accepts the reality of life, nowhere in his views are real. His realization and attitude of society helped him to form a balanced life and situations. His characters are drawn from his imaginary society, Malgudi. In his work, he brings out the paradoxes of life appearance and reality, free will and determinism, individual and society, virtue and vice, reason and passion, beauty and ugliness hope and despair, tears and smiles. These paradoxes are beautifully interwoven as Anand says-

Narayan interprets the moods of his character. He determines the pattern without overt intervention.

Jagan, the disciple of Gandhi, whose cousin admires his simplicity and asks him "I can't understand why you go working and earning, taking all this trouble."

Jagan's respond provides his ideas of life. Jagan's double-dealing in money described by Narayan as-

"In his small note book he entered only that came in after 6' O clock out of small jug. This cash was in an independent category; he viewed it as free cash, whatever that might mean, a sort of immaculate conception, self generated arising out of itself and entitled to survive without reference to any tax, it was converted into crisp currency at the earliest moment tied into a bundle and put away."

Thus, Narayan shows his characters that are no free from worldly views. In the words of Amur-

The man who preaches conquer the taste is a make of sweets. Jagan simplifies his life by giving up salt, sugar and rice but goes on accumulating wealth and quotes a Tamil verse which says ‘money is an evil’...

Through, the character of Jagan, Narayan shows his characters that are not free from worldly views, are common social members believing in Gita’s philosophy, yet engages in getting money. Though Jagan pretends himself to be free from wordly affairs yet it is only his pretension. Jagan represents the common Malgudians with their greedy attitude, hypocrisy and crookedness. Jagan in his pursuit of wealth and too much love for son loses gripe over his son. Finally reveals that *money is evil*.

Works Cited:

Narayan, R.K. *The Vendor of Sweets*. Mysore I.T.P., 1971.

Narayan, R.K. *The Financial Expert*. Mysore I.T.P., 1970.

Narayan, R.K. *The Guide*. Mysore I.T.P., 1978.

Sinha K.N. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi : Heritage Publications, 1979.

Swain, S.P. “The Novels of R.K. Narayan and Indian Reality”. *New Insights in to the Novels of R.K. Narayan*, edited by Bhatnagar, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi , 2002.

Walsh, William. *R.K. Narayan – A Critical Appreciation*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1983.