

The average indian in r.k.narayan's stories



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

R. K. Narayan, one of the most famous Indo-Anglican writers, author of *Mr. Sampath* and *The Guide*, is famous in the western world more for his novels than for his short stories or for other forms of literature that he has tried. Narayan has written quite a large number of short stories which have been collected and published in six volumes— *Dodu and other Stories*, *Malgudi Days*, *Cyclone and other Stories*, *Lawley Road and other Stories*, *Astrologer's Day and other Stories*, *A Horse and Two Goats*.

It would appear that the critical accounts of R. K. Narayan, the writer, are made only on the basis of his novels. Such an estimate can at best be one-sided. R. K. Narayan's short stories are artistically as eminent as his novels, and in any general estimate of his writings they cannot be ignored. In fact, one might go so far as to say that Narayan is essentially a short story teller and the one element that stands out even in his novels is the story element. These stories belong to the Indian soil and are evocative of its culture. In the main they represent South Indian life and clearly expressing Narayan's view of the world and those who live in it. Simple but captivating plot, sparkling characterization, strict economy of narration and graceful simplicity of language are features of these short stories. They serve as a good foreword to the foreigner who wants to know the Indian way of life.

Narayan perceives the balance of power in human relations in every aspect of man's life - social, political and moral and the perception leads to his own detached observation of the human scene. It is this quality more than any other that distinguishes Narayan from the other writers. Narayan's stories deal with themes of common life and simple people. They are not of topical interest and rarely does Narayan deal with the world-shaking events of the

1930s and 1940s or the political and social upheavals in India during and since independence. What he excels in doing is to select incidents and people that reveal the human comedy. Children in his stories are playful, innocent, intelligent, resourceful and mischievous. They are against conventional discipline and hence often ill-treated by superior parental or educational authority. In 'Dodu', Narayan mildly satirizes the attitude of the elderly people towards the child. Their pockets jingle with the coins, but they refuse to part with a single coin when Dodu asks for one. His 'office' is never approved by his father and he asks him to empty it among the 'refuse' from time to time. Articles which are valuable possession to the child are often considered trash to the adult. The "treasures" collected by Dodu reminds us of Tom Sawyer, and his choicest possessions. In this story, Narayan's main focus is the innocence of childhood.

Margaret Parton in her review of 'Grateful to Life and Death' says, "No better way to understand what Mr. Nehru means by 'the tender humanity of India' than to read one of Mr. Narayan's novels." In Narayan's stories the evidence of "Indianness" is not as noticeable as in Raja Rao's fiction, but it has its own distinctive character. 'Under the Banyan Tree' is a portrait of pastoral life. The story takes us into the old pastoral world of peace and tranquility inhabited by noble, sober, compassionate, helpful, naïve people. The atmosphere of the story is strange and yet beautiful. The charm of the story lies in the isolated nature of the setting. Nothing lasts forever. Thus, Nambi's remarkable ability to tell tales deteriorates slowly but steadily. The villagers' blind faith in Nambi's storytelling ability as a blessing of the Goddess is similar to the 'The White Flower'- a mild satire on superstitions

and blind belief in astrology. The same blind faith in religion is also echoed in 'Nitya'. In Narayan's fiction blessings and good wishes may or may not come true but oaths taken by the characters always materialize. Nitya's parents are adamant on offering Nitya's hair to God, which they had promised when the boy was two years old. This promise of offering Nitya's hair to God in exchange for his life is opposed by Nitya's youthful rebellion. He presents rational arguments on why not to shave his head. The issue of generation gap is also presented in this story, and Narayan skillfully presents numerous conflicts through a single incident.

Fiction has always been a powerful means of man's exploration of the human situation. But Narayan also explores the life of animals through his fiction. Narayan's sympathy is extended even towards the dumb animals, birds. Stories like 'A Parrot Story', 'Chippy' and 'The Blind Dog' introduce birds and animals and impress us on account of the most accurate and vivid descriptions of the behavior of these species. Chippy's struggles for survival in the new locality are no different from that of man's in his day to day life. This brings to the reader's mind the question- is Narayan trying to equate the condition of man to that of a beast? Chippy's rivalry with the Pekingese, or the shorter dog at Swami's home parallel's the average middle class man's struggle at the office, fighting to gain the favours of the boss. In 'Like the Sun', the idealist Sekhar would not tell a lie on the day devoted to the practice of truth, though his vow drives him into a corner. Only if he had chosen to please the headmaster and win his favour, he would have succeeded in placing himself in a better position in his job.

Narayan's complete dependence on a purely artistic approach to literature sets him apart from other Indian writers in English. For instance, Anand's heavy emphasis on the didactic quality of art stands in the way of his attainment as a novelist; for obtrusive propaganda makes his novels suffer from an inability to visualize clearly the objective situations of his characters. Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Ramala Markandaya have dealt quite forcibly with the theme of hunger and the concomitant theme of human degradation in some of their works. Narayan, however, presents social evils without any emotional involvement and with no overt aim to reform or change existing conditions. In 'The Watchman', Narayan presents the social issue of how women are encouraged to get married, rather than pursuing higher education. But this issue is simply treated as a backdrop for the practical Watchman to prevent the girl from committing suicide. The girl in 'The Watchman' considered herself to be a burden. She did not want to live on anybody's charity. She had lost hope on getting a scholarship and someone was coming to have a look at her. She felt she had no home and wanted to plunge herself into a watery grave. Narayan's purpose does not seem to be moral and didactic like that of Aesop's or Tolstoy's. Narayan's Indian-ness is not self-conscious, since he has a native reading public in view, there is no deliberate pursuit of indigenous elements which he might fuse into his literary style. What he genuinely presents is his own experience in the stories. It originates from an experience he has lived through, honestly faced, and expressed in the language which provided the thought-structure of that experience. Narayan skillfully chooses English words which can aptly describe the Indian situation, which does not make his choice of words forcefully implanted in his work. The situations he portrays are of universal

significance. Narayan is not working towards projecting a vision of the typical India, but rather with depicting the joys, problems, follies and foibles, the hopes and aspirations, the sorrows and disappointments of the average man anywhere.