

R. K. NARAYAN



Born October 10 1906, Madras, India

Died May 13 2001, Madras, India

Biography R K Narayan (1906-2001) was a Tamil Brahmin born in Madras to a school-master father. He was one of eight children, whose brothers included a famous satirical cartoonist and film editor. The family moved to Mysore when he was a teenager and that became the fictionalised Malgudi, where most of his novels are set and for which he is widely praised. His Malgudi has been compared to Faulkner's fictional setting in the rural southern US for its attention to detail, its plausibility and its atmospheric effect on the stories. Like other memorable fictional settings, it is both true to experience and manipulated for effect.

At age 27, he married a 15-year-old girl and became a journalist in Madras, where he met and observed a wide spectrum of people that fed into his fiction. Two years later, his first novel (*Swami and Friends*) was published, but only for the unlikely and timely support of Graham Greene. Narayan had finished the novel years before and had it rejected by Indian publishers; a friend suggested he send it to a friend in Oxford. That friend happened to know Greene and showed him the manuscript. Greene was impressed and recommended it for publication, while also making suggestions for revision, including shortening the author's name from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami to the more-digestible R K Narayan.

From that point on, Narayan dominated the field of Indian English-language fiction during the middle decades of the 20th century. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he was never a political writer, and his fiction is often criticised for its apolitical stance and neglect of colonialism. However, he was too keen an observer of human nature to be indifferent to injustice. Most of his novels, in fact, explore some kind of social problem, though not the spectacular ones favoured by many of his contemporaries. Unlike most successful Indian authors, Narayan is not known for any single novel. He didn't write a masterpiece (which probably explains why, though shortlisted several times, he never received the Nobel Prize). Instead, all his books were equally brilliant, especially in the evocation of their fictional setting, the town of Malgudi.

Achievements

- Literary award from the SahityaAkademi India, 1958
- Award from Filmfare for best screenplay of the film adaptation of 'The Guide,' 1961
- Padma Bhushan award from Indian government, 1964
- AC Benson Medal, Royal Society of Literature (London), 1980
- Honorary member, American Academy of Arts, 1982

- Named to serve in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of Indian parliament), 1985
- Honorary doctorates from University of Leeds, Mysore University, Delhi University
- Padma Vibhushan award from Indian government, 2000

Works

Novels

- Swami and Friends (1935, Hamish Hamilton)
- The Bachelor of Arts (1937, Thomas Nelson)
- The Dark Room (1938, Eyre)
- The English Teacher (1945, Eyre)
- Mr. Sampath (1948, Eyre)
- The Financial Expert (1952, Methuen)
- Waiting for the Mahatma (1955, Methuen)
- The Guide (1958, Methuen)
- The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961, Viking)
- The Vendor of Sweets (1967, The Bodley Head)
- The Painter of Signs (1977, Heinemann)
- A Tiger for Malgudi (1983, Heinemann)
- Talkative Man (1986, Heinemann)
- The World of Nagaraj (1990, Heinemann)
- Grandmother's Tale (1992, Indian Thought Publications)

Non-fiction

- Next Sunday (1960, Indian Thought Publications)
- My Dateless Diary (1960, Indian Thought Publications)
- My Days (1974, Viking)
- Reluctant Guru (1974, Orient Paperbacks)
- The Emerald Route (1980, Indian Thought Publications)
- A Writer's Nightmare (1988, Penguin Books)
- A Story-Teller's World (1989, Penguin Books)
- The Writerly Life (2002, Penguin Books India)
- Mysore (1944, second edition, Indian Thought Publications)

Mythology

- Gods, Demons and Others (1964, Viking)
- The Ramayana (1973, Chatto&Windus)
- The Mahabharata (1978, Heinemann)

Short story collections

- Malgudi Days (1942, Indian Thought Publications)
- An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories (1947, Indian Thought Publications)
- Lawley Road and Other Stories (1956, Indian Thought Publications)
- A Horse and Two Goats (1970)
- Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985)
- The Grandmother's Tale and Selected Stories (1994, Viking)