

A Virtual Exhibition on Life Journey of  
**Rasipuram Krishnaswami  
Iyer Narayanaswami**

**(R. K. Narayan)**

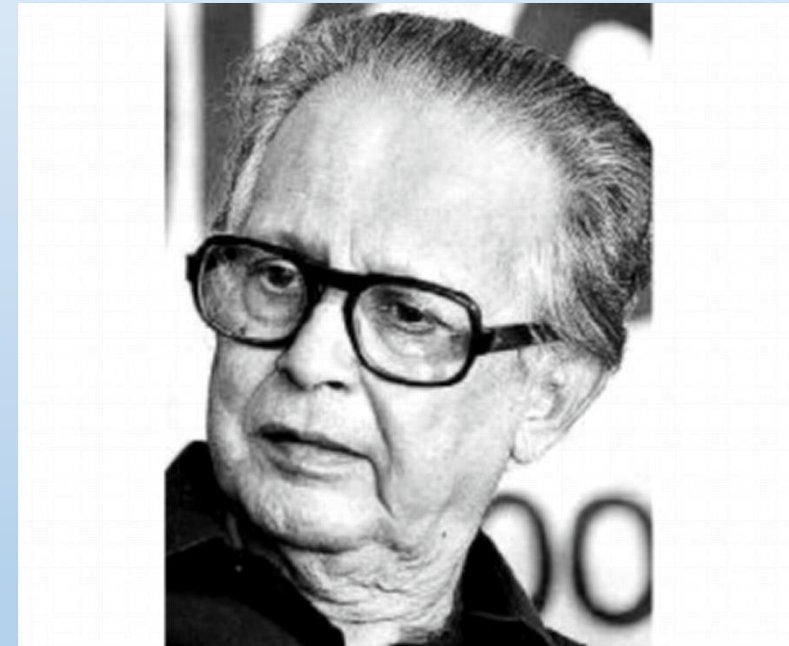




# The Great Indian Writer R.K. Narayan



R. K. Narayan is considered as one of leading figures of early Indian literature in English. He is the one who made India accessible to the people in foreign countries—he gave unfamiliar people a window to peep into Indian culture and sensibilities. His simple and modest writing style is often compared to that of the great American author William Faulkner. Narayan came from a humble south Indian background where he was consistently encouraged to involve himself into literature. Which is why, after finishing his graduation, he decided to stay at home and write. His work involves novels like: 'The Guide', 'The Financial Man', 'Mr. Sampath', 'The Dark Room', 'The English Teacher', 'A Tiger for Malgudi', etc. Although Narayan's contribution to the Indian literature is beyond description and the way he grabbed foreign audience's attention for Indian literature is commendable too but he will always be remembered for the invention of Malgudi, a semi-urban fictional town in southern India where most of his stories were set. Narayan won numerous accolades for his literary work: Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Bhushan, AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature, honorary membership of the American Academy of Arts and Literature, Padma Vibhushan, etc.

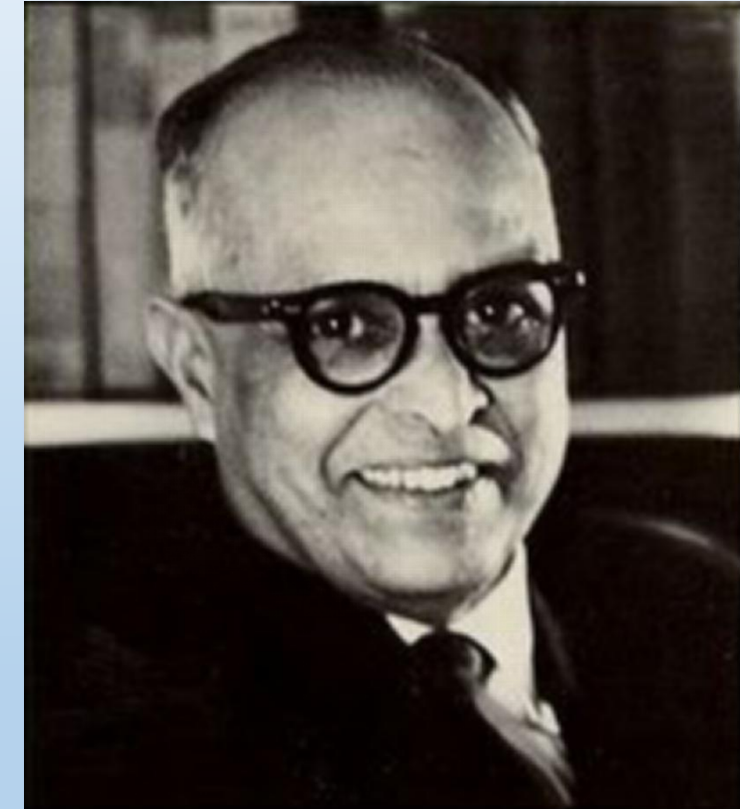




# Introduction of R.K. Narayan



- **Born - Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami 10 October 1906 Madras (now Chennai), Madras Presidency, British India**
- **Died - 13 May 2001 (aged 94) Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**
- **Occupation - Writer**
- **Nationality - Indian**
- **Alma mater - Maharaja's College, Mysore**
- **Genre - Fiction, mythology and non-fiction**
- **Notable awards - Padma Vibhushan, Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, Benson Medal**
- **Spouse - Rajam (m. 1934; died 1939)**
- **Children - 1, Hema Narayan**
- **Relatives - R. K. Laxman (brother)**
- **Member of Parliament Rajya Sabha In office 12 May 1986 – 11 May 1992**
- **Major compositions - Swamy and Friends, The English Teacher ( 1945 ), Waiting for the Mahatma ( 1955 ), The Guide ( 1958 ), The Man Eater of Malgudi ( 1961 ), The Vendor of Sweets ( 1967 ), and A Tiger for Malgudi, Lolly Road ( 1956 ), A Horse and Goats and Other Stories ( 1970 ) and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories ( 1985 ).**





# R.K. Narayan Childhood & Early Life



- R. K. Narayan was born in Chennai, Indian in 1906 in a working class south Indian family. His father was a school headmaster and because his father had to be frequently transferred for his job, Narayan spent most of his childhood in the loving care of his grandmother, Parvati.
- It was his grandmother who taught him arithmetic, mythology and Sanskrit. He also attended many different schools in Chennai like, Lutheran Mission School, Christian College High School, etc. He was interested in English literature since he was very young.
- His reading habit further developed when he moved to Mysore with his family and there his father's school library offered him gems of writing from authors like Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Wodehouse, etc.
- In 1926, he passed the university examination and joined Maharaja College of Mysore. After completing his graduation, Narayan took a job as a school teacher in a local school. Soon after, he realized that he could only be happy in writing fiction, which is why he decided to stay at home and write.



# R.K.Narayan Education



His grandmother gave him the nickname of Kunjappa, A name that stuck to him in family circles. She taught him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music, and Sanskrit. Narayan studied at a succession of schools in Madras, including the Lutheran Mission School in Purasawalkam, C.R.C. High School, and the Christian College High School. Narayan was an avid reader, and his early literary diet included Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Thomas Hardy. When he was twelve years old, Narayan participated in a pro-independence march, for which he was reprimanded by his uncle; the family was apolitical and considered all governments wicked.

Narayan moved to Mysore to live with his family when his father was transferred to the Maharajah's College High School. The well-stocked library at the school, as well as his father's own, fed his reading habit, and he started writing as well. After completing high school, Narayan failed the university entrance examination and spent a year at home reading and writing; he subsequently passed the examination in 1926 and joined Maharaja College of Mysore. It took Narayan four years to obtain his bachelor's degree, a year longer than usual. After being persuaded by a friend that taking a master's degree (M.A.) would kill his interest in literature, he briefly held a job as a school teacher; however, he quit in protest when the headmaster of the school asked him to substitute for the physical training master. The experience made Narayan realize that the only career for him was in writing, and he decided to stay at home and write novels



# R.K. Narayan Career



- While vacationing at his sister's house in Coimbatore, in 1933, Narayan met and fell in love with Rajam, a 15-year-old girl who lived nearby. Despite many astrological and financial obstacles, Narayan managed to gain permission from the girl's father and married her.
- Narayan's decision of staying at home and writing was supported in every way by his family and in 1930, he wrote his first novel called 'Swami and Friends' which was rejected by a lot of publishers. But this book was important in the sense that it was with this that he created the fictional town of Malgudi.
- After getting married in 1933, Narayan became a reporter for a newspaper called 'The Justice' and in the meantime, he sent the manuscript of 'Swami and Friends' to his friend at Oxford who in turn showed it to Graham Greene. Greene got the book published.
- His second novel, 'The Bachelors of Arts', was published in 1937,. It was based on his experiences at college. This book was again published by Graham Greene who by now started counseling Narayan on how to write and what to write about to target the English speaking audience.
- In 1938, Narayan wrote his third novel called 'The Dark Room' dealt with the subject of emotional abuse within a marriage and it was warmly received, both by readers and critics. The same year his father expired and he had to accept regular commission by the government.



# R.K. Narayan Career



- In 1939, his wife's unfortunate demise left Narayan depressed and disgruntled. But he continued to write and came out with his fourth book called 'The English Teacher' which was more autobiographical than any of his prior novels.
- After this, Narayan authored books like, 'Mr. Sampath' (1949), 'The Financial Expert' (1951) and 'Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)', etc.
- He wrote 'The Guide' in 1956 while he was touring United States. It earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award.
- In 1961, he wrote his next novel called 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi'. After finishing this book, he travelled to the United States and Australia. He also gave lectures on Indian literature in Sydney and Melbourne. With his growing success, he also started writing columns for The Hindu and The Atlantic.
- His first mythological work 'Gods, Demons and Others', a collection of short stories was published in 1964. His book was illustrated by his younger brother R. K. Laxman, who was a famous cartoonist.



# R.K. Narayan Career



- In 1967, he came up with his next novel titled 'The Vendor of Sweets'. Later, that year Narayan travelled to England, where he received the first of his honorary doctorates from the University of Leeds.
- Within next few years he started translating Kamba Ramayanam to English—a promise he made to his dying uncle once.
- Narayan was asked by the government of Karnataka to write a book to promote tourism which he republished in 1980 with the title of 'The Emerald Route'. In the same year he was named as the honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
- In 1980, Narayan was chosen as the member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament and throughout his 6 years term he focused on the education system and how little children suffer in it.
- During the 1980s Narayan wrote prolifically. His works during this period include: 'Malgudi Days' (1982), 'Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories', 'A Tiger for Malgudi' (1983), 'Talkative Man' (1986) and 'A Writer's Nightmare' (1987).
- In 1990s, his published works include: 'The World of Nagaraj (1990)', 'Grandmother's Tale (1992)', 'The Grandmother's Tale and Other Stories (1994)', etc.





# First Love, First Publication



In his memoir, Narayan recalls wandering the streets of Mysore one day when Malgudi, the setting of most of his fiction, just seemed to “hurl” into his mind, along with a vision of a character called Swaminathan. He thus began his first Malgudi novel, *Swami and Friends*, completing it two years later in 1932.

In publishing short pieces in the *Indian Review* and *Punch*, Narayan satisfied his dream of writing and seeing his name in print. Also during this time, he fell in love. He had spotted fifteen-year-old Rajam Iyer as she was waiting for water at a local street tap. He persuaded his father to send a proposal of marriage to her father. He married Rajam on July 1, 1934. Around this time, he also became the Mysore reporter of a newspaper called the *Justice*.

## Famous works -

- *The English Teacher* ( 1945 )
- *Waiting for the Mahatma* ( 1955 )
- *The Guide* ( 1958 )
- *The Man Eater of Malgudi* ( 1961 )
- *The Vendor of Sweets* ( 1967 )
- *A Tiger for Malgudi* ( 1983 )



# MALGUDI DAYS



Malgudi is a fictional, semi-urban town in southern India, conjured by Narayan. He created the town in September 1930, on Vijayadashami, an auspicious day to start new efforts and thus chosen for him by his grandmother. As he mentioned in a later interview to his biographers Susan and N. Ram, in his mind, he first saw a railway station, and slowly the name Malgudi came to him. The town was created with an impeccable historical record, dating to the Ramayana days when it was noted that Lord Rama passed through; it was also said that the Buddha visited the town during his travels. While Narayan never provided strict physical constraints for the town, he allowed it to form the shape with events in the various stories, becoming a reference point for the future. Dr. James M. Fennelly, a scholar of Narayan's works, created a map of Malgudi based on the fictional descriptors of the town from the many books and stories.

Narayan knew that for an Indian writing English fiction, Swami and Friends would not find a publisher in his country, and publishers in England were not responding. Sometime in 1934 he contacted his friend Krishna Raghavendra Putra, who soon persuaded the famous English novelist Graham Greene, who was already attempting to get some of Narayan's short stories published in English magazines, to look at Swami and Friends. Greene was so impressed that he recommended the book. It appeared in October 1935, and Malgudi was launched. Though sales were weak, public and critical response was positive. The year 1935 also saw the passage of another Government of India Act that moved the country one step closer to true independence.



# Responses To Literature



- **Narayan books often feature Hindu cultural practices. Using your library and the Internet, research the modern Hindu practices in India and write a paper summarizing your findings.**
- **Narayan lived and wrote during a time of great change in India, as control of the government passed gradually from the British to the Indians themselves. To find out more about Britain's long involvement in India, read *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (2000), a historical work by Lawrence James.**
- **Chronologically, Narayan's fiction takes up the major events of Indian history. Read one of his novels, then research and write a paper describing the historical context of the action in the novel.**



# COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE



- **The Infernal Machine (1936), a play by Jean Cocteau. In this play, the playwright turns the classic story of Oedipus into a tragic-comedy by using irony where there originally was none.**
- **“A Rose for Emily” (1930), a short story by William Faulkner. In this short story, Emily Grierson is alienated from her immediate society and is isolated in her aging, eccentric, and “spinster” years.**
- **Snow (2005), a novel by Orhan Pamuk. In this work, a clash of ideals is witnessed by a poet in exile as he comes to terms with his alienation from poetry and God.**
- **A View from the Bridge (1955), a play by Arthur Miller. Italian American longshoreman Eddie Carbone suffers the profound betrayals and conflicts of family and friends in this play.**



# Works In Critical Context



Peers as well as successors have been quick to acknowledge Narayan's contribution to Indian writing in English. In an essay written at Narayan's death, for instance, the distinguished Indian poet Dom Moraes called Narayan "by far the best writer of English fiction that his country has ever produced." Typical of the praise heaped on the novels and their writer are comments such as those made about *The Financial Expert* and *The Guide*.

**The Financial Expert (1952)** *The Financial Expert* shows Narayan's powerful handling of the central theme of the vanity of human wishes and his deft manipulation of plot. The portrait of the central character, Margayya, reveals a man who is deeply flawed but also capable of retaining the reader's sympathy. The novel is memorable, too, for the portraits of Dr. Pal, the archetypal confidence man; Meenakshi, Margayya's long-suffering wife; and Balu, his prodigal son.

Margayya's rise and fall take place against a backdrop of a world full of poverty, corruption, bureaucracy, and the opportunism displayed by cynical businessmen and officials in wartime India. Narayan manages to be serious and comic throughout the novel; he also alternates details of everyday life in Malgudi with moments where readers view the workings of Margayya's mind. The critic William Walsh writes that the novel "has an intricate and silken organization, a scheme of composition holding everything together in a vibrant and balanced union."



# Works In Critical Context



**The Guide (1958)** The Guide is usually considered Narayan's most accomplished novel. In this work, a former convict named Raju is mistaken for a holy man upon his arrival in Malgudi. Implored by the villagers to avert a famine, Raju is unable to convince them that he is a fraud. Deciding to embrace the role the townspeople have thrust upon him, Raju dies during a prolonged fast and is revered as a saint.

In a 1958 issue of the New Yorker, critic Anthony West praised The Guide as “the best of R. K. Narayan's enchanting novels about the South Indian town of Malgudi and its people.... It is a profound statement of Indian realities.” The Malgudi novels as a whole are most often highly regarded. Critics often compare Narayan's creation of Malgudi to William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and most agree with Charles R. Larson's assessment: “While Faulkner's vision remains essentially grotesque, Narayan's has been predominantly comic, reflecting with humor the struggle of the individual to find peace within the framework of public life.”

In *My Days: A Memoir* (1974), the novelist says that his grandmother was a major influence on his life and his storytelling. His maternal uncle, who published a literary journal in Tamil, also played a part in the growth of the novelist's mind in his early years. Narayan is most noted for his creation of Malgudi, a fictitious village set in southern India that most critics consider a composite of his birthplace of Madras and his adult residence of Mysore. These narratives derive from India's oral and literary traditions.



# Awards and honours



Narayan won numerous awards during the course of his literary career. His first major award was in 1958, the Sahitya Akademi Award for *The Guide*. When the book was made into a film, he received the Filmfare Award for the best story. In 1964, he received the Padma Bhushan during the Republic Day honours. In 1980, he was awarded the AC Benson Medal by the (British) Royal Society of Literature, of which he was an honorary member. In 1982 he was elected an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature multiple times, but never won the honour.

Recognition also came in the form of honorary doctorates conferred by the University of Leeds (1967), Delhi University (1973) and the University of Mysore (1976). Toward the end of his career, Narayan was nominated to the upper house of the Indian Parliament for a six-year term starting in 1989, for his contributions to Indian literature.[69] A year before his death, in 2001, he was awarded India's second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan, honorary membership of American Academy of Arts and Literature, AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature.



# Legacy



**Narayan's greatest achievement was making India accessible to the outside world through his literature. He is regarded as one of the three leading English language Indian fiction writers, along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. He gave his readers something to look forward to with Malgudi and its residents and is considered to be one of the best novelists India has ever produced. He brought small-town India to his audience in a manner that was both believable and experiential. Malgudi was not just a fictional town in India, but one teeming with characters, each with their own idiosyncrasies and attitudes, making the situation as familiar to the reader as if it were their own backyard. In 2014, Google commemorated Narayan's 108th birthday by featuring a doodle showing him behind a copy of Malgudi Days.**

**In mid-2016, Narayan's former home in Mysore was converted to a museum in his honour. The original structure was built in 1952. The house and surrounding land was acquired by real estate contractors to raze down and build an apartment complex in its stead but citizens groups and the Mysore City Corporation stepped in to repurchase the building and land and then restore it, subsequently converting it to a museum. The museum admission is free of charge and it is open between 10.00 am and 5.00 pm except on Tuesdays.**

**On 8 November 2019, his book Swami and Friends was ranked at BBC's Novels That Shaped Our World**





# Conclusion of R.K. Narayan



**He won numerous awards and adulation during his lifetime. These include the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958, the Padma Bhushan in 1964, the AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature in 1980, besides the Padma Vibhushan in 2000. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1989. This great storyteller passed away on May 13, 2001, at the age of 94. Narayan played an exceptional role in making India accessible to the outside world through literature.**

**Narayan's Bachelor of Arts traces the transition in the lives of rebellious youth to be mature adults. The Dark Room highlights the predominant issue in a patriarchal Indian society that is domestic discords. It portrays the role of a man and a woman in a marriage as being oppressor and oppressed. Moreover, his other novels manifest his discontent over the irrational Hindu ritual of matchmaking. His other notable works include The Financial Expert, The Guide, Malgudi Days and Gods, Demons and Others. Narayan received prestigious accolades including the Sahitya Akademi Award and AC Benson Medal. He died in 2001, at the age of 94, in Chennai.**

**He was very fond of the publisher of The Hindu, N. Ram, and used to spend all his time, towards the end of his life, conversing with him over coffee.**

**Narayan is regarded as one of the three leading English language Indian fiction writers, along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand.**



# Bibliography



## 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 (1973, 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 (2001, Penguin Books India)**
- **Mysore (1944, second edition, Indian Thought Publications)**



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## Mythology

- **Gods, Demons and Others (1964, Viking)**
- **The Ramayana (1972, 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)**



# Adaptations



**Narayan's book *The Guide* was adapted into the Hindi film *Guide*, directed by Vijay Anand. An English-language version was also released. Narayan was not happy with the way the film was made and its deviation from the book; he wrote a column in *Life* magazine, "The Misguided Guide," criticising the film. The book was also adapted to a Broadway play by Harvey Breit and Patricia Rinehart, and was staged at Hudson Theatre in 1968 with Zia Mohyeddin playing the lead role and a music score by Ravi Shankar.**

**Mr. Sampath was made into a Hindi film of the same name with Padmini and Motilal and produced by Gemini Studios. Another novel, *The Financial Expert*, was made into the Kannada film *Banker Margayya*. *Swami and Friends*, *The Vendor of Sweets* and some of Narayan's short stories were adapted by actor-director Shankar Nag into the television series *Malgudi Days*. Narayan was happy with the adaptations and complimented the producers for sticking to the storyline in the books.**



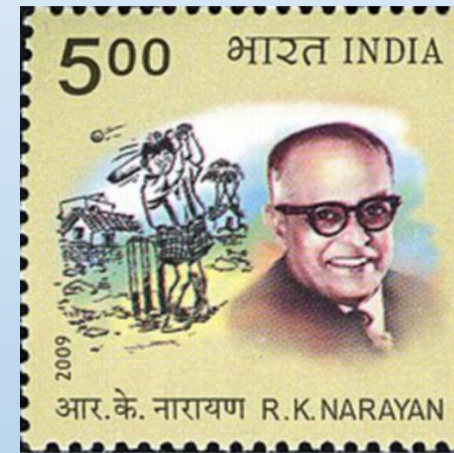
# Some Glimpse of R.K. Narayan



**R. K. Narayan with his wife Rajam, c. 1935**



**Lyle Blair of Michigan State University Press (Narayan's U.S. publisher), Narayan and Anthony West of The New Yorker**



**Narayan on a 2009 stamp of India**



**R. K. Narayan Museum, Mysore**



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