BIBILIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

i. Novels


**ii. Others**


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**II. SECONDARY SOURCES**

**i. Books**


ii. Journals


iii. Interviews


iv. Electronic Publications


MALGUDI'S CREATOR

R.K. NARAYAN
1906 - 2001
TRIBUTE TO R.K. NARAYAN

The Man Behind the Writer

R.K. Narayan was born as Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami on October 10, 1906 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, where he spent the first 15 years of his life. He later moved to Mysore in Karnataka, and got enrolled in the Maharaja’s Collegiate High School. Narayan’s father, R.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, was the headmaster of the school.

Though Narayan’s grades in high school and college were not exceptionally high, he was inclined towards regional Indian as well as English literature. He got admission in the University after two failed attempts, having failed the first time in English. He failed in the B.A. examination too, but this time in History. However, his literary pursuits were in a budding stage then. He talks about these days in his earliest novels, Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts. In his autobiography, My Days, Narayan is candid about his initial writing style, and says the works were, “totally unclassifiable - neither poetry nor prose nor fiction.” Though his short stories found favorable audience in family and friends, they were all sent back with rejection slips by the publishers.
Despite the rejections, Narayan decided to take up writing as a full-time career. This was something uncommon in India those days and not surprisingly, Narayan's family had many reservations about his decision. He began writing his first novel, Swami and Friends, in September 1930, soon after he got his B.A. degree.

Cupid struck the author in July 1933, while he was visiting his sister at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu. It was perhaps "love at first sight" for Narayan, who saw Rajam drawing water from the street tap. The writer recalls the scene in The Bachelor of Arts. The 15-year-old girl, slim, demure and taller than Narayan by a couple of inches, became his bride on July 1, 1934. By marrying Rajam, Narayan defied two strong traditions prevalent in India those days. First, he married by his own choice instead of his parents'. Second, and more significant, was his decision to disregard astrological calculations and go ahead with the marriage even though horoscopes of the two did not match.

Narayan and Rajam had their only child, daughter Hemavati, in March 1936. However, their domestic happiness did not last long, and he lost his wife to typhoid on June 6, 1939. Her death shattered Narayan. It took him six years to emerge from the gloom, and the period brought a turning point in his personal and literary life. The tumultuous years, which Narayan describes in his autobiographical novel, The English Teacher, instilled in him a newfound
strength to see humor in adversity. His mentor Graham Greene mentioned it in the 1978 introduction his The Bachelor of Arts when he said, “something had permanently changed in Narayan…” and that “the Writer’s personal tragedy has been our gain.” Narayan refused all suggestions for remarriage and decided to bring up his little daughter on his own.

The courage to face tradegy, which Narayan acquired after his wife’s death, came to test again in April 1994 when his daughter died of cancer. But Narayan came to terms with it and sought solace in the company of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

R.K.Narayan, the renowned Indian Writer in English, passed away on May 13 this year (2001). Now, Narayan continues to live on in this world – in the form of his books, and his eyes, which he donated to the eye bank at Sankara Netralaya, Chennai.

Courtesy

‘Indian Culture’ with Pallavi Srivastava

Weekly online
HOMAGE

"Narayan was a protean figure who could justly have claimed a substantial part of the credit for creating a world wide readership for contemporary Indian Writing. That he never made such claims is a tribute to his many extraordinary qualities as a human being. His death is an incalculable loss, not just for India, but for readers everywhere." (Ghosh 58)

“I like to think of R.K. Narayan, rather extravagantly, as a mountaineer who challenged Mt. Everest without a base camp”. (Rao.56)

“A Living writer”, noted R.K. Narayan, unlike a dead writer who’ll stay conveniently still while you’re analysing him, “is like a live lobster on your plate.” But even in death, Narayan remains a live lobster: Just when you think you have pinned him down, he jumps up at you in yet another avatar.” (Reddy 59)