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Mrs. Lakshmi Prasad
PREFACE

“We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open.”

(Jawaharlal Nehru on Children)

Rasikpuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanaswamy (or R K Narayan, as Graham Green in a most happy abbreviating exercise transformed it into) has carved out a niche for himself in the galaxy of novelists. R K Narayan (October 10, 1906 – May 13, 2001) was born in Chennai (erstwhile Madras). His writing career began with Swami and Friends. He won numerous awards and honours for his works, which include the National Prize of the Sahitya Akademy for The Guide in 1968, Padma Bhushan, a most coveted Indian award, for his distinguished service to Literature in 1964. He was elected an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1982 and nominated to Rajya Sabha – the upper house of the Parliament of India in 1989. In addition, The University of Mysore, The Delhi University and The University of Leeds conferred honorary doctorates on him.

He was an accomplished, sensitive and prolific writer. He, until the end, remained a true friend of children with whom he had begun his first dialogue in Swami and Friends.

R K Narayan had produced a sizable body of fictional work. He had written more than a dozen novels in addition to the collection of his short stories. He had conducted his craft of fiction almost for half a century. It is his childlike imagination, with all its whimsicalities of moods, born of innocence and novelty that endeavours him to the generations of readers. Simple and unpretentious, he shunned publicity in life,
and yet a number of doctoral dissertations have come out evaluating the creative work he has produced.

The innocence and innocently revealing manner of Narayan’s exposition of children interested me the most. This research is an attempt to bring out the beauty with which Child Psychology is used in the novels of R K Narayan.

Chapter I is entitled ‘Introduction’. An attempt has been made to bring home the point as to how English language got transplanted in India, how very soon English language not only became popular but was also adopted, Indo-English literary relations got strengthened and as a result Anglo-Indian Literature came into existence. The advent of Anglo-Indian Literature is discussed at length which started with Henry Louis Vivian Derozia till we came to R K Narayan through Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1833-94). It is shown that the Indo-Anglian fiction was experimental up to 1920. S K Ghosh, S M Mitra, Raj Laxmi Devi, Kshetrapal Chakraborty, A Madhaviab, S B Banerjee, Sardar Jogendra Singh, Bal Krishna, Sorabjee Cornelia, T Rama Krishna, K S Venkatramani were the writers who were experimenting to provide recognition to the Anglo-Indian fiction. The period between 1920-1950 was dominated by novels with political and social themes. Further, during 1950-85, the acknowledged Indo-Anglians like R K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamla Markandeya, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Shashthi Bratta, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh, D F Faraka, Nirad C Choudhari and a host of others tried their art of writing with unlimited and unrestricted themes. Thereafter, the richness of his work as cited by eminent writers gave pace to the research.

Chapter II entitled ‘The World of Childhood in the Works of R K Narayan’ focuses on how wonder-filled childhood, especially his first fifteen years spent under the supervision of a distinguished grandmother, anchored in a capacious sociable, enlightened middle class home environment and quality childhood is a link between
childhood and adult life as is vivid in R K Narayan’s writings. From his maternal grandmother, the child Narayan absorbed folk-tales, a fluent narrative tradition, an appreciation of Carnatic Music which had influenced his outlook which is evident from his later novels. The birth of Malgudi and the development of the writer’s vision and voice cannot be separated from the exceptional, wonder-filled growing up in early-twentieth century Madras. An attempt has been made to show that Narayan’s childhood in Chennai provided much capital for creativity and that the adult Narayan never lost contact with this quality of experience and even in old age he kept returning imaginatively and sometimes literally, to the scenes of his childhood which is amply reflected in his novels and short stories.

Chapter III is entitled ‘A Study of Narayan’s Vision on Child Literature.’ R K Narayan himself was a part of a large lively family. The parents were highly principled, had a strong belief in the value of education and shared a liberal perspective on life. He found little interest in the formal curriculum. College life, however, proved absorbing. Here he made new friends who later made an entry into his fiction. What helped him during his difficult times was the small circle of admiring friends and a joint family safety net.

Narayan’s insight into children’s world and his concern for their emotional sensitivity and the way they perceived the world around them is amply seen in his writings. His aversion to rigid education system grew stronger in his later years. His works consistently focused on children and their family. *Swami and Friends* recounts the adventures of a ten year old Swaminathan and his friends Rajam and Mani. *Vendor of Sweets* shows the struggle between the generation gap that exists between parents and children. *Bachelor of Arts* traces Chandran’s college days, his unfortunate love story, his sanyasi life and his finding a way to earn a living. This chapter intends to bring out Narayan’s vision on child literature.
Chapter IV is entitled ‘Social Realism in the Works of R K Narayan.’ This chapter tries to show the realistic approach of R K Narayan and the ease with which his characters are plotted which are immediately recognizable as all his characters are part and parcel of our society. Narayan possessed a wonderful ability to convey a feel of the people and the social context he wrote about. As a storyteller, he was a natural, picking at the bedrock of everyday existence to uncover the barest truths out of bold facts of life. He placed high value on spontaneity and ‘non-deliberateness’ in fiction. He had rare art of ‘Omission’ and out of such knowledge and secret was born Malgudi — India’s best known, best loved fictional town. His realism was famous for his lightness of touch and style that is lucid and undecorated but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises. Narayan’s writings are short, memorable and very crisply plotted. There is a kind of elemental pleasure in reading his stories and watching Narayan pen his world with tragic shopkeepers, pick pockets, beggars, story tellers, anxious college students and people completely involved in each other which comprises the study of this chapter.

Chapter V is entitled ‘R K Narayan’s Childlike attitude towards life.’ R K Narayan’s childlike simplicity in thought and expression was the source of his genius — his English was personal and spontaneous, never mannered or measured, free from all artifice. Hardly a word rings false and his prose seems to emerge directly from the culture he was brought up in. His thoughts were spontaneous, impulsive and mischievous. Like a small child he was charmed by unsophisticated and simple people and their lives. Narayan’s novels are replete with childlike attitude, and innocence, innocence being the watchword for childhood. Almost every character in Narayan’s novel has childlike innocence as the generally shared human trait and this characteristic can be seen in three different categories viz. the children, the grownups passing through the second childhood and the innocent rustics. These attributes contribute the study of this chapter.
Chapter VI is ‘Conclusion’ in which I have tried to sum up my research. Children and simple folks, trying to live their simple lives in a changing world, were the pivot around which his stories revolved. It was seen that his characters were very ordinary, down-to-earth Indians trying to blend tradition with modernization, often resulting in tragic-comic situations. His novels were found to be full of his understanding, fondness and love for children. This research is a humble attempt to bring out his eternal bonding and understanding of ‘Child Psychology in the Novels of R K Narayan’ which is evident through his writing.