



Autobiographical Features In The Works Of R K Narayan

Dr. Sunitha Anilkumar¹, Ms. P Femina²

¹Assistant professor, Department of English, Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai- 30.

²Ph. D Research Scholar, Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai- 30.

Corresponding Author- Dr. Sunitha Anilkumar

Email- feminaanand@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates R.K. Narayan's autobiographical features. It examines his early life, creative works, and how his personal experiences affected his writing. It also examines the interplay between his personal life and his fiction, the themes of his work, and the cultural and social elements that influenced his writing. It reflects on the legacy of his efforts, both in India and beyond the world. This study illuminates how autobiography shapes a writer's work by examining Narayan's life.

Keywords: Memoir, culture, life, personal life, childhood

R K Narayan is known for his vivid depictions of Indian life. His autobiographical books, short tales, and articles offer a unique look into his life and southern Indian culture. This project will examine how R K Narayan's autobiographical works reflect his life and Indian culture. It will analyze the manner in which Narayan uses autobiographical elements to develop his characters, present his stories, and convey his ideas and feelings about life in India.

R K Narayan, the renowned Indian author, is most famous for his short stories and novels. He was India's most influential 20th-century writer. *My Days*, Narayan's 1974 memoir, details his life, works, and influences. The famous Indian novelist wrote autobiographical essays. The writings reveal Narayan's life, childhood, and views on Indian culture and society. The essays span a period of nearly 80 years, from his birth in 1906 to his death in 2001, providing readers with an in-depth look into the life and times of one of India's most celebrated authors.

On October 10, 1906, Madras birthed R.K. Narayan. Rasipuram is his village, Krishnaswami is his father, and Narayan is his name. Before R.K. Narayan was born, the family moved to Madras from Rasipuram, their ancestral village. His father, after the birth of R.K. Narayan, got a job as a school teacher in Mysore. He remained with his grand-mother in Madras for some time while the rest of family shifted to Mysore. His

earliest recollections are of his grand-mother's house where he was brought up in the care of his maternal uncle who was his constant companion.

My Days is a collection of memoirs written by R K Narayan. Narayan describes his childhood and writing career in these memoirs. His memoirs vividly describe the people and circumstances that shaped him. Narayan praises his family, friends, and mentors for his achievement. He recounts many events that shaped his writing style and themes. Narayan's memoirs reveal India's culture and society during the time.

Narayan discusses how social and political changes affected his life and career. He also discusses his authorship challenges. Narayan recounts his struggles, supporters, and sacrifices to achieve his goals. Narayan's memoirs illuminate his themes. He speaks of his ideas on life, love, death and the importance of human relationships. Narayan's stories generally center on the hardships of the common man and his perspectives on these struggles are reflected in his memoirs.

R.K.Narayan's *My Days*, published in 1974 is an autobiography with a difference. An autobiography usually depicts a person's life realistically. Narayan's autobiography, like his novels, gives an intimate sense of a place—Malgudi in the novels, Mysore in *My Days*—but it is not parochial or closed. Narayan's book depicts life in the Indian

middle class, where people are neither wealthy nor impoverished. Above it, Narayan appears like the hero of one of his novels—sensitive, ardent, modest, and wry about himself, with a hidden resolute will.

As in the books, the memoir begins with the town and the talents and issues of many types of work that intrigue Narayan, then the family and Narayan himself, another Narayan hero. The author as a hero combines inherited tradition with positive individual talent. Narayan's works are easily tagged as "comedies of sadness", his autobiography, in the opinion of Krishna Pachegaonkar, "is both infused with a pure and unadulterated sorrow and yet lit with the glimmer of mockery of both self and others" (63). (63).

R.K. Narayan, in his autobiography *My Days*, opens with a humorous narrative of his childhood memories and life with his grandmother and his bachelor maternal uncle who made his income on printing and edited a local magazine. Narayan's early life speaks of a little boy with his grand-mother, uncle and his pets for company. He would sit half buried in sand piled in a corner of garden creating castles and mountain ranges and becoming weary of it would sit on doorsteps watching traffic for the full day. He vividly recalls his grandmother and garden. He distinctly remembered his photographer uncle who snapped his photographs against flowers in the company of his pals. Narayan as a child was enthralled anytime he saw an old man in khaki suit and blue turban lighting street lamps. He never imagined that dark night could be illuminated. "I had countless inquiries welling up within me, all sorts of things I wished to know about that man—his name, where he came from, if he slept wearing the ladder, what he ate, and so forth, but before I could articulate them properly, I had to be going forward with my questions unuttered." (8)

Narayan's autobiography *My Days* is a rich, vibrant account of his childhood. It shows Narayan's early life, influences, and writing. It's full with the writer's memories. Narayan recalls singing patriotic songs in the first nationalist protest against the Rowlatt Act. His uncle thought it was a diabolical scheme to deceive young innocents: "He regarded all rulers, government and administrative apparatus as satanic and found no sense in wanting a change of rulers." (15)

My Days resembles a Narayan novel after a few pages, according to serious readers. It shows how intimate his fiction is. The English Teacher's life is ingrained. *My Days*, *The English Teacher* is mostly autobiographical, R.K. Narayan says. Krishna, the novel's English teacher in Malgudi, calls his wife Susila and his child Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to care for, and the emotional changes, are based on my wife (Rajam), which should hint that the novel may not be completely fiction. (150,151)

In 1945, six years after his wife's death, the book was published. Hema's little daughter helped Narayan recover from his wife's death. She bound him. Susila, like Rajam, was from Coimbatore and had typhoid. They died in a few months, leaving their daughter and husband alone. Narayan lost his wife after five years, proving the astrologer right. He never married to fill this awful hole. His daughter sought his love. He became sociable from caring for a motherless child. Hema never let Narayan go. The result is *The English Teacher* and the gift of voluminous other works of the author for the society.

In *The English Teacher*, Krishnan emulated Narayan. Despite marrying in an arranged marriage and spending a few years without his wife and daughter, he loves her as much as Narayan. His hero, like Narayan, taught English at Albert Mission College. Shakespeare, Carlyle, Milton, etc. Krishnan's students loved him as a teacher. Albert Mission College principal Mr. Brown's farewell speech proves this.

Krishnan was regular and punctual in his work even after his wife's death. He spent time with them as a loving husband and father. He prepared the sick room, maintained the temperature chart, pampered Susila to take medicine, and spent time with her. But, when liberated from these duties, he resumed his father's function. Read, played, and took Leela out. He cleaned, fed, etc. Krishnan was now both father and mother to his child. Same for Narayan. Once Susila collapsed one evening, he had to meet Leela's needs. Krishnan, like Narayan, never married again after this terrible experience. Susila like Rajam died out of typhoid after she had spent a holiday at her parents' place at Coimbatore.

After his wife died, Krishnan said, "I'm an imbecile, incapable of doing anything

or answering any questions.” (96) For his child, the same man handled problems rationally and intelligently. Narayan's writings, especially this instance, convey intense grief and anguish. The author's thoughts allow Rajam to replace Susila. Like Hema, Leela also made his father come out of his mother's thoughts, and lead his life.

Krishnan, like Narayan, lived for Leela after his wife died. The father's concern, the child's affection, and their trivial conversation made readers think it was Narayan's real life. Leela asked her father silly questions. Keeping Krishnan engaged with her work forces the readers envision Narayan in place of Krishnan. Narayan must have undergone similar pain and faced such situations in his real life. Leela once demanded that his father read him stories at odd hours. He advises cleansing before touching books since Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning, would be upset. “Why?” she asks. And her father adds, “You can read a lot of stories alone without my aid. Oh! What then? (103) His critics saw autobiography in the intensity of feeling and correctness of intellect. The lawyer incident deserves note. In Narayan's memoir, a lawyer in his street peeped over his gate and said, “Sorry, mister. I have also suffered the same fate. You must and will get over it.” He had remarried four times but was a widower again. (153,154) In *The English Teacher*, Narayan uses a stranger, an old woman, who sees the motherless kid Leela from the bus and says, “A man must marry within fifteen days of losing his wife.” He'll be wrecked otherwise. My husband married every three weeks. 14 joyful kids. Why? *The English Teacher's* old lady conveys the lawyer's original idea. Narayan wanted to answer the lawyer in person but couldn't. Like his novel character Krishnan. The protagonist, by profession an English teacher had the creative skill of writing poems and even aspired to get them published. Krishnan in *The English Teacher* writes like Narayan. He considered writing a poem on his wife's situation while the mercury in the thermometer stayed at the maximum level.

Krishnan solves this by following his author. As in real life, Narayan makes his hero submit to art in this most difficult situation. Krishnan could express his feelings and prepare for future challenges through the poetry. The poem shows his anguish,

affection, and care. He wrote a candid poem for his wife instead of a novel like Narayan.

The English Teacher's second section is equally autobiographical. Ragunath Rao and the farmer helped Narayan and his protagonist communicate with their wives psychically. Krishnan's novel recounts the author's Raghunath experience. Narayan's hero represents his life: regular Wednesday visits, sitting fingers crossed for a word from his wife, storing the filled scripts of psychic communion for life, and even self-attempting psychic communion.

The Bachelor of Arts, another R.K.Narayan story, covers Chandran's education, infatuation, realization, and marriage. Narayan, another Narayan hero, shares Chandran's experiences. In *My Days*, his autobiographical writing makes him a hero. Not just Narayan. Defoe, Richardson, and Joyce are also in the game, trying to stay creative but not disclose their opinions. The choice of people, situations, the ideas and feelings are of the author.

The Bachelor of Arts, the second novel in the sequence, is most influenced by Narayan, save for *The English Teacher*, the fourth. Chandran's experiences in Albert college—trying to stick to the exam preparation time-table, being part of non-academic matters, passing comments on teachers and principal at his naughty mood, playing pranks with friends, attending classes sincerely, and obeying teachers—seem to be based on the author's life in Maharaja's college, Mysore. These evocative events lead readers to conclude that Chandran is the novel's actual Narayan.

Ramu, his “inseparable companion,” smokes and watches late-night movies. His memoir *My Days* mentions Ramachandra Rao, who studied with him in his final year. Like the hero, he may miss him after graduation. Chandran and Ramu, the protagonist's friend and neighbor, went to college, attended lectures, then returned home to get ready for the movie.

Narayan writes, “Chandran was none of your business—like automatons who go to a theatre, sit there, and come home. It was aesthetic and required preparation.” (13) They chewed betel leaves, smoked cigarettes, and drank midnight coffee together. Chandran adds, “Ramu's company was very essential to him. His presence completed things.” (13) Ramachandra for Narayan. Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts* fell in love

with Malathi, who visited Sarayu with her younger sister virtually daily, like Narayan of 1933. It recalls Narayan's experiences in Coimbatore, where he lived with his elder sister.

One loved playing with her sister by the river bank, while the other drew water from the tap. "One day, I observed a girl drawing water from the street-tap and immediately fell in love with her," the memoir continues, echoing Chandran. He states, "No one can describe the attraction between two human beings" (117). It occurs." (54) Chandran and Narayan's horoscopes hampered their relationship.

Ganapathi Sastrigal, the novel's matchmaker, used horoscopes "to discern whether two persons paired together will have health, happiness, harmony, and long life" (78). The bride and groom's parents thought the same. Narayan made the stars favorable (for now) and convinced the girl's father to marry. Chandran and his father worked with Srourthigal to "well match" their horoscopes. D.W.Krishna Iyer, the girl's father, doubted. He says, "As I have great faith in horoscopy, and since I have heard from experience that the marriage of couples ill-matched in the stars often leads to misfortune and even tragedy," I must choose a husband elsewhere. (86) Sundaram describes Chandran's "deepest anguish" after hearing these remarks. Chandran left Malgudi for the ochre robes after this occurrence. Narayan's love ended in marriage.

Kailas, Chandran's quirky hotel roommate in Madras, offered Chandran, a non-drinker, beer because he thought it was alcohol-free. He could even drink gin after whisky from five until eight-thirty. In his book, the author compared Kailas to his younger uncle, who also loved alcohol. He then became a phony tiger that hissed and stalked the hotel corridor behind every passerby until sleep took control. Kailas created similar situations for the protagonist in the pub, on the street, and near his temporary destination.

Seenu, Chandran's younger brother, is one of Narayan's brothers with the same name and traits. In *My Days*, Narayan says, "Seenu, one year junior in our class, always obliging, would readily undertake..." (79) his duties. *The Bachelor of Arts'* Mohan, Chandran's friend, represents Narayan's artistic career. The author and The Daily

Messenger reporter Mohan worked for Justice and Indian Thought of Madras. Both reporters were posting court cases, road accidents, suicides, and murders.

Sundaram writes, When Chandran gets the agency for The Daily Messenger and plans his four-pronged attack on the public to boost its sales — Information, Illumination, Appeal, and Force — it is difficult not to conclude that some such process must have been set in motion by Narayan himself when he embarked on his journalistic venture Indian Thought.(27) Chandran returns from exile and searches for his "inseparable companion" Ramu but gets no response. He then recalls how they studied for four years, became friends, and planned events. A group photo was stored in the storeroom after a few years.

In *My Days*, Narayan discusses school photos. Narayan can name two teachers and students in a school photo. Like his hero, he spent eight years "reading, playing and suffering our teachers together..... where are my fellow Olympians at this moment?" (46) Narayan's first novel, *Swami and Friends*, about the hero's maturation via adolescent audiences, is autobiographical. *My Days* significantly resembles these Narayan book events. Narayan was sent to his granny in Madras so his young mother could care for the other children, as was typical in those days.

Narayan loves peacocks, monkeys, green parrots, and hairy puppies. He gained enormous materials when walking with his uncle in Madras, feeding his imagination and educating his feelings. Narayan's life in Madras and desire for school are all too familiar in *My Days and Swami and Friends*. Narayan's very engaging autobiography reveals his concentration, allergy to abstract arithmetic, annoyance with intrusive grownups, and desperate attempt to manage the adult world's immovable angularities. Narayan's image of his father as a severe headmaster, like the *Swami and Friends'* headmaster, also stands out.

Srinivas' career resembles Narayan's in *Mr. Sampath: The Painter of Malgudi*. Narayan edited a journal like Srinivas. The Banner of Mr.Sampath was more successful and less confusing than Narayan's Indian Philosophy. In *My Days*, Narayan writes, "I'll do the printing side but you must give the paper..." (173) The novel's *Sampath* is based on a multitalented person. Both excelled at

theater and printing. The author had a similar experience with the crazy Indian film industry when they made a commercial version of his favorite novel *The Guide* (The Burning of Kama).

In his memoir, the novelist notes that Narayan, the real-life Sampath, was a busy cinema star and press worker. Srinivas represents the author's experiences running Indian Thinking, while Sampath follows him with his film business experience. This resembles V.S.Naipaul's autobiographical works. Narayan's life "firmly into a professional pattern: books, agents, contracts..." (209) in his novel *The Guide*. While career-advising Rosie, Raju faced comparable problems to his author.

This highly acclaimed novel mentions Narayan's many letters to known and unknown persons, his days-long journeys, and his delight of the situation rather than complaints. A 1956 drought in Mysore dried up all the rivers and tanks, revealing an ancient submerged temple and desiccated crocodiles. In his autobiography, Narayan writes, "At this time I had been thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood. A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story." (188) The novel was about this. Narayan's masterpiece, *The Guide*, is autobiographical. John Updike, writing about Narayan's memoir, calls a creative writer's autobiography "superfluous" since "in rearrangement and disguise" it contains many elements from his life.

Swami and Friends, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The English Teacher*, *Mr Sampath*, *The Guide*, *Breach of Promise*, *The White Flower*, and *The Seventh House* were written at different times in his life and expose his secret. R.K.Laxman, Narayan's cartoonist brother, is Dodu of *Dodu and Other Tales* (1943). His writing contains autobiographical elements, sometimes in excess and sometimes selectively.

John Updike deemed the memoir "one of Narayan's most quietly and meticulously written books" and presented numerous poignant scenes from his sixty-seven-year life. Narayan penned *My Days* at that age. Narayan can only name two teachers and kids in a school photo. *My Days*, with its wide creative scope, attracts discerning readers who not only rate it highly but also find classic Narayan between the covers. *My Days* begins with Ammani, his maternal

grandmother, in Madras. The monkey, peacock, and uncle (the Madras Christian College student) spouting Shakespeare were remarkable childhood companions. Narayan remembers *Swami and Friends*.

Chandran's passing phase in *The Bachelor of Arts* is falling in love and achieving everything. Krishnan, who played Narayan in *The English Teacher*, felt his wife's death's anguish. *Mr. Sampath* and *The Bachelor of Arts* are based on the memoir's journalistic section. In *Mr. Sampath*, Srinivas, like the author, recounts Narayan's failures and successes as Indian Thought's editor. As Graham Greene predicted, Narayan's life became that of a professional writer and, eventually, a successful one.

But, readers from New York to Moscow followed Narayan. Only success succeeds. He is accepted into the elite fiction writer circle, and his reputation is unmatched and unstilted. In the second half of his autobiography, Narayan mentions books, agents, contacts, and letter-writing. *The Guide* thinks about travel a lot. *My Days* is an intimate autobiography. It carefully depicts Narayan's personal life and writing preferences. Its autobiography resembles Narayan's literary characters more than John Updike could imagine.

R.K. Narayan is a great example of an author whose life's events inspired his writing. His writing style blended his own life with India, his cherished birthplace. His wit and ability to connect readers to his characters made him a literary favorite. His autobiographical features made his writing stand out. R.K. Narayan's writing will influence Indian and international readers for decades.

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