

**FOLK LITERATURE AND MODERN INFLUENCES IN
THE WORKS OF R.K. NARAYAN
Namrata Achar**

Poornaprajna College (Autonomous), Udupi.

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ABSTRACT:

Indian folk literature has been molded by many eminent writers who have ensured that these folk narratives are not only cherished but also remain relevant in the modern world. Folk literature in the form of short stories, novels, dramas, myths, legends, ballads, and songs helps us learn and imbibe human values. It has also helped in shaping the Indian consciousness and tradition even today. Indian folk literature is an ocean of wisdom, experiences, and beliefs of people across generations. Folk literature addresses universal human concerns, such as love, injustice, bravery, and survival, while remaining deeply rooted in its cultural context. R.K. Narayan is renowned for capturing the essence of Indian life in his works. This research paper explores the works of R.K. Narayan and how they influence the modern world. His works symbolize a blanket that is woven and blended with modernity, culture, and tradition. His novel 'The Guide' portrays the stories of individuals caught between a society that is deeply rooted in traditional values, superstitious beliefs, and modern values. Malgudi Days also showcases the tension between modernity and tradition. Narayan exposes the intricacies of human nature in his works. His works are a perfect example of how people are influenced and impacted by Western tradition. His stories reflect on the issues of tradition, modernity, and identity that are relatable in India even today.

KEYWORDS:

Folk literature, tradition, family, society, values, modernity.

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R.K. Narayan, a legendary Indian author, was born in Madras in 1906. He holds a special place in Indian English literature that cannot be thought of without him. He is renowned for capturing the essence of Indian life in his works. His novels are tales of a common Indian individual located in and around Malgudi. Narayan's fiction is an exploration of life and human experience. He makes readers reflect on the human condition with a blend of amusement and contemplation by delving into the complexities of existence. His novels are ingrained with the stories of Hindu myths in a social setting that has been constantly changing as a result of the rapid growth of industry, the deconstruction of culture, and education.

R.K. Narayan's novel 'The Guide' clearly exposes the conflicts between traditional and modern values. It is a canvas portraying the Indian society, its customs, traditions, culture, superstitious beliefs, and religious faith. The characters in the novel can be seen even in today's modern society. Raju's mother and uncle represent the old values, whereas Raju and Rosie represent the modern values or modern influence. The way old technology is replaced by new and improved ones, here, the old and orthodox values are abandoned by modern thinking. One thing remains constant, and that is emotions. Emotions were the same in the bygone days as they are now, too. We also witness the conflict between Eastern and the western culture. Narayan proves that one has to go to the West to come back to the East through the

transformation of Rosie to Nalini. The protagonist Raju does not pay heed to the norms of society and is in a live-in relationship with Rosie, who is married to Marco. Though the society and his widowed mother are against him, he stands by Rosie.

R.K. Narayan created the character of Rosie in 1958, but she is the perfect embodiment of a woman even today. Earlier, women were confined within the four walls and were prohibited from doing anything that would liberate them. Rosie comes from a family that belongs to the devadasi clan, where the women are dedicated to the deity and are prohibited from doing mundane chores for men. Rosie makes her own way of living. She rebels and courageously breaks the shackles of the traditional devadasi clan and educates herself by obtaining Masters in Economics. She then marries Marco, a rich bachelor with academic interests. Rosie marries Marco with the belief that she will be respected in society, as he is a man with status. Though married to Marco, an artist like her, there is a lack of understanding between them; they share no common interests, their natures and attitudes too were unlike each other, which leads to a catastrophe in their marriage. She is ready to bear any pain if she has a loving husband and repents for choosing Marco as her husband. Later, she is attracted to Raju. Raju, too, is attracted to Rosie and doesn't like the old traditional way of getting married to one's parents' choice, thereby rejecting his mother's suggestion to get married to Lalitha, a village girl. Today, too, we can see a sea change in the concept of marriage. Women give more importance to their careers and independence, and don't shy away from breaking the shackles of marriage if it is not a fulfilling one, unlike the women of earlier times, who silently suffered most of the time due to the way they were brought up believing that it is the duty of the wife to fulfill all the desires of her husband and in-laws and sacrifice all her dreams. R.K. Narayan also highlights the point that religion has no binding on marriage.

Narayan successfully portrays two different women in his novel 'The Guide'. On one hand, we have Raju's widowed mother,

who symbolizes the old traditional orthodox women who are prohibited from involving themselves in auspicious events. Fearing society, she never goes out alone, while on the other hand, we have Rosie, a modern woman influenced by Western culture. She, unlike Raju's mother, was not afraid of going out alone. He also highlights the conflicts that arise between Raju and his mother because of their differences in attitude, which is influenced by the introduction of education in a conventional society and the existence of a generation gap.

R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* was published in 1943. It is a collection of 32 short stories set in the fictional town of Malgudi. All the characters in these stories, though fictional, resemble the common middle class who struggle between tradition and modernity. Though written in 1943, it is relevant even today as people are influenced by modernity and the advanced technology, at the same time, they grapple with the challenges of preserving the culture and traditions. This is evident with the arrival of the railways in Malgudi, which symbolizes an urban and industrial society. As every innovation has pros and cons, modern influence too has advantages and disadvantages. When people embrace or are influenced by modernity, the old traditional ways are forgotten, and sometimes it also leads them astray.

The stories in *Malgudi* reflect the tension in relationships that develops because of money. Relationships between husband and wife, friends, employee and employer, master and servant, man and himself, and many more are presented in these stories. People have given full control of their lives to money. Money makes a man falter while making decisions for himself and his family. Money makes a man weak in the knees. In the story 'Forty-Five a Month', Venkat Rao, an office clerk, promises to take his daughter to the cinema, but he fails to keep his promise because of his office duty. He feels guilty for not spending quality time with his wife and daughter. He starts hating himself and blaming himself for the life his wife and daughter are leading. He considers his daughter's life dull and

colorless. He is made to work in his office till seven or eight in the evening, and by the time he reaches home, his daughter is asleep. His boss doesn't spare him on Sundays, either. Fed up and upset with the imbalance between his professional life and personal life, Venkat decides to quit his job. He feels the need to spend time with his family and not work as a slave at his office for rupees forty-five. But the same Venkat who had made a firm decision with his strong willpower is forced to change his decision when he learns from his boss about the increase of rupees five as an increment in his salary. R.K. Narayan lucidly shows us how money changes everything. Though Venkat feels bad for his wife and daughter, the moment he gets an increment, he chooses money over family. Here, Narayan clearly expresses the fact that money plays an important role in everyone's lives. This is a universal truth that no one can deny.

Even today, we can see how people are ready to do anything for money. Money makes a man go mad. He can kill his own father, mother, or sibling for property. Money has the evil power of paralyzing the mind and making it unfit to differentiate between right and wrong. In the case of Venkat, he chooses money for the sake of his family. He sacrifices his personal life with the belief that he will be able to give his family a better and happier life if he earns more. He compares money to happiness, which people in modern society also do.

Kannan, a lazy coconut seller in the story 'Wife's Holiday', is left alone at home by his wife and son. Taking advantage of the situation, he is tempted to break his son's piggy bank after checking his wife's trunk. His conscience stops him for a second, but the evil in him tells him that he and his son are the same. He gambles and loses not only the money, which is tangible, but also the trust and faith of his family, which is an intangible quality. In 'The Martyr's Corner', we are introduced to Rama, who runs a makeshift snack corner and earns his livelihood, but a major twist in his life creates complete disorder and ultimately forces him to lower his moral

standards. He is forced to change the spot due to a riot and a political issue. As a result, there is a decrease in

the number of his customers subsequently due to many reasons, one being the unhygienic place, which is situated behind a gutter, on the roadside. Despite being warned by a health officer, he continues to run his shop. He also bribes the traffic constable and other menials from the health department to avoid any raid on his shop. Bribing is not something new. Till today, our society is not free from the clutches of this evil. Bribery takes place in all fields. We witness it in the education sector, where students bribe to pass or get admission to a reputed school or college. Candidates bribe for a good job, politicians bribe for their seat, people bribe to get houses, and sportsmen bribe to get selected in teams. The list doesn't end here. It's a never-ending evil, a monster that has engulfed our society.

Money is responsible for turning people into immoral human beings. In 'Out of Business', we have a couple, Rama Rao and his wife, who are living a comfortable life in a bungalow. But fate changes Rama Rao's fortune, and he is forced to live in a small house when he loses his job. His wife, as a true traditional wife of the olden days, supports her husband in times of difficulty. She sends away the servant and the cook, and also changes their children's school and sends them to a school where education is free. She saves money prudently and runs her household. Rama Rao quarrels with his wife over money. She refuses to give him money as he spends it on crossword puzzles. He uses the money that can fetch them food for a week. Later, Rama Rao realizes his mistake and promises never to spend money on crossword puzzles. Here, R.K. Narayan depicts how women are more sensible and wiser in times of adversity, while men fall prey to vices, gambling, and meaningless addictions. Modern society is no different from R.K. Narayan's world of fiction. Men tend to indulge in gambling and other illegal activities to earn money.

Human values are destroyed and die when money starts controlling human minds. Money often brings with it status, a false sense of attitude, disrespect, jealousy, envy, unruly behavior, and all negative qualities. In ‘Gateman’s Gift’, a retired gateman, Govind Singh, receives a registered letter from his former Company. His reaction after getting the letter is one of fear and anxiety, and it almost drives him to madness, as he is never given any importance due to his position as a gateman. The General Manager never notices him, doesn’t know his name, though Govind always wishes him with a salute. If the General Manager had a good bond with Govind, he would be saved from all the anxiety and confusion. If only people kept their status aside and mingled with people around them, irrespective of their financial status and positions, a lot of misunderstandings would end. In the fast-paced world of today, people are tirelessly working like machines to secure their children’s future. They are leading such a mechanical and stressful life that they don’t even know who their neighbors are, and even if they do, they don’t have the time to say a simple hello or hi to them.

R.K. Narayan’s stories portray money as a strong and undefeatable predator whose claws grip people and poison them with its venom, making people insane, greedy, jealous, and violent. The novels and stories that R.K. Narayan wrote in his time are a reflection of what transpires in our urban and modern society even today. We can say that Narayan predicted the future in his works. Though we are a modern society that is highly educated and brilliant at handling and managing complex technology, we are far behind when it comes to morality and human values, which are the treasures of our tradition and culture. Marriage, which is considered a sacred union of two people and their families, has now become a joke. Marriages are now a show where families flaunt their money. People have forgotten to lead real lives and are living reel lives. Money can be earned in any way without even having to sweat it out.

R.K Narayan, in his works, highlights both positive and negative impacts of modernization. The characters in his stories are

replicas of people living in modern society today. Con men exist even today. Compared to the world of R.K. Narayan, the world now has multiplied its ways of dealing with each other. Today, educated and learned people are fooled easily by being tempted with money. All the cybercrimes and frauds committed by hackers prove that we are living in a modern world, but with a lack of morality and no concern for each other. People betrayed, cheated, and fooled others in the past, too, but now the extent to which these crimes or frauds are committed has multiplied. Narayan's works are a perfect example of how people are influenced and impacted by Western tradition. His stories reflect on the issues of tradition, modernity, and identity that are relatable in India even today. It would not be wrong to say that R.K. Narayan's works are a clear indicator for people to reflect on their actions and ponder where we are heading.

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