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## FACETS OF PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF R. K. NARAYAN



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### **Abstract**

R. K. Narayan, an Anglo-Indian writer handled various literary genres. He is popular for his contribution in short stories and novels. Most of his works peep into the psychological aspects of the human beings. He tries to unfold the philosophy of both the children and the adults as they take and make believe. This paper attempts to elaborate Narayan's fancy in the presentation of his characters both in short stories and novels. Narayan's most of the stories wonder between two worlds, each presented humorously against the other. There is contrasting depiction of the world of children and adults from the fanciful atmosphere to the factual world of elders.

**Keywords :** Humour, short stories, R. K. Narayan, children, adults

## Research Paper

Narayan's stories like '*The Performing Child*', '*Unbreakable Doll*', '*Hungry Child*', '*Leela's Friend*', '*Uncle*', '*Dodu*', '*The Regal*' explore the make believe world of children which seems to be contrast to matter-of-fact world of adults. The children in the stories of Narayan, Margaret Berry says, are capricious, mischievous, and lovable always breaking the predictions of the adults. Kutti, the little girl in '*The Performing Child*' wishes to live in the fanciful world of dreams, enjoys the dream of doll and beautiful engine, and becomes sad when her mother wakes her up. On the contrary, her parents longs for her performance in film but the girl develops a sort of fear for the film people and disappears. According to Narayan, 'the child prefers to be alone....his state is what philosophers have comprehended....the joy of awareness, the thrill of existence for its own sake, not for the sake of rewards'.

In '*Unbreakable Doll*', the child's world is again ridiculous and keeps no concern with the world of adults. The conversation between Leela and her mother depicts the two worlds of different phenomenon and principles. Leela wants to give the doll a bath to refresh it but her mother takes it as destruction of doll which is practical but to the very next moment Leela presents demo of doll's bath and makes her ready for bed and shatters mother's world into pieces. The contrast again is seen in the reaction of both Leela and her father when the doll is dropped and crushed into pieces. Father accepts the truth and laments over the loss but Leela grows mischievous and says that the doll pinched her arm and left her. Even she says that doll must have taken their suitcase and will return it.

'*Hungry Child*' illustrates how the capricious nature of a child cracks the assumptions of the adults. Gopu does not get disturbed even if he gets lost in a fair. He is seen sitting on a bench 'vigorously swinging his legs and amusing himself by twisting and bending and noisily rocking the bench...'. Even he was afraid that he might be handed over and lose access to all that store of chocolate and bubble-gum. Even if he is lost, Gopu never misses any chance of doing mischief: he toppled flower pots, tore off posters...splashed up water from fountains on passing children... picked up pebbles and aimed them light bulbs. And the end of the story Gopu is seen wriggling away from Raman to join his parents whom he spots on a quiet spot at the exhibition.

In '*Dodu*' and '*The Regal*' a child's imaginary world is presented in contrast to the world of adults who do not keep concern with children's feelings and bring disillusionment. According to Narayan, children prefer to be treated as normal living creatures, as fellow citizens on earth, subject to the same impulses good and bad, as adults and expect the same amount of

toleration that they see practiced among adults.... Dodu is frustrated child striving for self-dependence, as he has no illusions about the generosity of his elders. He invests the one rupee his uncle gives him and starts a mini post office on the veranda of his house, his customers being the elders of the house, but he gets no encouragement from them. Dr Iyengar understands his feelings and encourages him. In *'The Regal'* too he gets completely disillusioned about the generosity of elders when they refuse to lend their compounds for his cricket club. Though they manage to get a place, they are driven away by the master of the house. Thus these stories show that the 'greatest nuisance in life for the child is the adult who seems to live in a world all his own'.

In *Leela's Friend* Leela is represented as innocent of all the intricacies of the world of adults. Her parents are perplexed at the loss of her gold chain but Leela is calm and favours Sidda's company who is a suspected thief. She requests policeman to leave Sidda free as she wants to play with him for to play is more valuable for her than the golden chain. *'Uncle'* again presents a contrast between the world of innocence and that of reality. These stories are psychological exploration of the tender minds of the children.

R K Narayan holds traditional views about women. He explores the ideal womanhood that finds in myths. His perceptions of women's life and feelings are sensitive and move out of conventional grooves. The same is specially found in *'The Dark Room'*, *'The Guide'* and *'The Painter of Signs'*. Narayan's tradition is Vedic. Due to the degradation of culture, customs underwent change and the status of women suffered a lot. The new customs offered men superiority and men women their servile partner slave and appendix. But Narayan refused this domination of male which is against the law of nature. He believes in the tradition of Vedic times where women were equal partners of men. He draws from a storehouse of myths and legends from Indian literature as his background and he did experiments in terms of subtle creative configurations. The demands of creativity brought a change in the historical perspective. He alludes to many myths occasionally mirroring certain ideals enshrined in the symbolism of myth. At times, he is not only neutral to the myths, he portrays their futility in contemporary life situations, as we see in the case of Savitri in *'The Dark Room'*.

Savitri symbolizes the Indian wife whose capacity for endurance is proverbial. Ramani, her husband, is a tyrant, Savitri tolerates everything with silent resignation till his affair with Shanta Bai shocks her beyond grief. When Ramani refuses to be dictated by her in his affairs and treats her with utter indifferences and disgust, she realizes the futility of her existence and walks out of house. She attempts suicide but later return to home because she could not find

comfort even outside home. At the same time, Ramani keeps on eulogizing the traditional ideals. Meenakshi Mukharjee equated Savitri with Sita in Ramayana who is a submissive sufferer.

The portrayal of women in *'The Guide'* goes beyond a statement of the contradiction of the tradition. The heroine Rosie, denotes an unconventional modern non-Hindu girl and we wonder what she is doing with traditional values. Raju too is struck by her unusual name. She is the daughter of a Devdasi woman married to God and therefore she cannot marry a man. Rosie's mother wants her daughter to have a better future and therefore she educates her. But in the later stages she has to accept the proposal of Marco, a man isolated from society living with his own lonely pursuits. Again she becomes isolated because Marco takes her for granted and so has to revert herself to dance. She cannot understand his reverence for sculptured figures on walls and caves while she is herself a living representation of the sculptured figures which she embodies in her dance.

In the conservative and conventional milieu of Malgudi comes Daisy, a very contradiction of the traditional Sita and Savitri ideal. The very name Daisy is non-denominational and Raman in *'The Painter of Signs'* is tempted to ask: 'Daisy who? There is no surname no any other indication of her caste and background. She is educated, single and independent and lives all alone, something unthinkable in the Malgudian context where women do not step outside four walls of house, unescorted. She looks down upon the conventional roles allotted to Indian women of wife, mother and sister.

All the women like Rosie, Daisy and Shanta Bai disregard the marital bond and have their own style of living. They dismiss custom as unnecessary and worthless. In these characters the myths of the past seem to peep in but at a close look the reader suddenly wakes up to find that there is a designed departure from the representation of myths. Thus, Narayan portrays his characters from different perspectives and they seem to be the representatives of all the times.

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