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A Story-Teller's World by R.K. Narayan, the Malgudi man, who has enchanted the readers with his ironic wit and home-grown imagination, presents forty essays, travel pieces and short stories which highlight the observant nature of the author. The book, which opens with an introduction by Syd Harrex, has been divided into three sections- "The Fiction-Writer", "Short Essays", and "Malgudi Sketches and Stories". The first section consists of seven essays; the first essay sets the tone for the rest of the essays in the first part. *The World of the Story-teller* has a typical Indian setting with Indian village community who has a strong liking and reverence for the aged story teller of the village. Prevalence of Vedas and Puranas in Indian lifestyle has provided the story tellers of Indian origin with a never-ending source for new literary compositions. According to Narayan, the story taken from the scriptures is like the fragrance of a well-shaped flower which enhances the beauty and acceptability of the story in the recent timeframe. In the essay *The Problem of the Indian Writer* Narayan discusses the problems that were faced by Indian writers in the pre-independence period; he proposes certain solutions to that. Narayan suggests that writers should be relieved from the necessity or demands of day-to-day life, like, running a family or paying off bills, etc. Certain sorts of organisations should be brought into action to relieve the writers of these burdens of mundane life. But the feasibility of this solution is questionable. Financial insecurity is the second problem that was faced by the Indian authors, and the solution Narayan suggests here is quite practical; he says that general publishing business should be increased in India, and more and more people should start buying and reading books. He underscores the commercial aspect of publishing and selling books. I must say that if Narayan were alive, he would have been elated to see the booming consumerist market for books in this 21st century. In *English*

in India, Narayan suggests the bulldozing of class difference in the use of English as a language in India. He says that English, which has remained the language of the intelligentsia for a long time, should reach the market place and village areas. Though he is against the mongrelisation of the language, but still he wishes that Indians, irrespective of their class difference should use English in their own ways. Through this wish, Narayan was actually drawing a vision of future India, which has gradually and inevitably come true in the recent years. In this respect it can be said that Narayan was a visionary whose wishful foretelling has come true in the form of modern India. The same thing is discussed in the next essay, *Toasted English*, where Narayan calls for the need of Bharat English with a *swadeshi* stamp on it. The last essay of the first section of the book, *After the Raj*, reflects what Edward Said would like to define as utter orientalism - the stereotyping of the East by the West. Narayan relates a personal experience in Shropshire where he was asked by an old lady, how he could manage to stay in India with all those cobras crawling around. But, unlike Said, Narayan is unable to read into the politics of imperialism; his humanist point of view preaches mutual goodwill between India and Britain so that Indian writers can reach out to more and more British publishers. The reader can sniff out the commercial purpose here.

The second section of the book consists of nineteen short essays. It opens with the celebration of the quintessential Indianness: the importance of crowd in Indian life. While Narayan's humanist point of view resists the misanthrope's hatred for crowd, his ironic wit does not miss the chance to criticise those Indians who blindly become the part of the crowd for its own sake. In the essay *Noise*, the author hankers after the most precious and valuable 'silence' in India which is getting noisier day by day. Narayan's use of examples of noisy schoolchildren, hawkers and neighbours from mundane Indian society gives a humorous flavour to the essay. The essay *The Cat* enchants the readers with its tongue-in-cheek style and intricate details. After T.S. Eliot, Orhan Pamuk and Mark Twain, Narayan seems to be the sole Indian writer who is bowled over by the poise and equanimity of the cat; in the essay, *The Cat*, Narayan finds a poised cat to be his co-audience in Madras Music Academy. The essay, *Cruelty to Children*, which was actually Narayan's maiden speech as a Member of Parliament at the Rajya Sabha in 1989, puts forth some genuine problems faced by Indian children. According to Narayan, the unscientific education system in India which makes the children carry loaded bags, and wear tie and laced shoes and socks even in summers, should be changed. Involvement of children in adult activities like protest marches, parades, etc, should be stopped. Though Narayan was trying to devise remedies for these problems in 1989, the issues raised by him are relevant even today. In *Thumbi's Schooling*, we are introduced to Thumbi, an imaginative and self-possessed toddler who is sent to school at a very early age. The way he gets distracted by the sights and sounds of the surroundings on the way to school reminds us of the character of Eshan Awasthi from *Tare Zameen Par*. We come to know Thumbi better in *Glimpses of Thumbi*. We meet Thumbi again in *Everest Reactions*, where he is a young boy of twelve years. He roams about the neighbourhood and collects interesting news for the elders in the community; this is his favourite time-pass. In this essay Thumbi brings the news that Everest has been conquered. After a fit of disbelief the elders accept the news with partial indifference and happiness. But the discussions that start among the elders after that turn out to be ludicrous; they start to imagine the Everest as a

holiday resort with the potential to revolutionize the cold-storage industry by quarrying down all the ice from the Everest. Narayan's sharp wit and detailed description give the readers a fun-filled reading. *The Election Game* is an innocent take on children's view on voting during the post-independence era. The election game with all its slogans and paraphernalia attracts the attention of the children who want to peep into the adults' world. This attraction gets magnified when the adults return with the blue little dot on their fingers. In the essay, little Kamala vows to get her vote soon; she wishes to get that little dot to be placed in between her eyebrows. Narayan's use of minute details and exact representations give the readers a homely feel. His lucid style multiplies the fun which the readers feel while going through his essays and stories. In *Family Doctor*, Narayan celebrates the intimate relation an Indian used to have with his family doctor. The essay, *Restaurants*, highlights the condition of the Indian restaurants which seem to run successfully through the layers of mutual semiotics between those who visit hotels and those who run them. After struggling through the busy crowd, an office goer manages a seat in the restaurant and disarmingly munches through the unhygienic snacks; but he feels relieved after leaving the restaurant. While going through this essay the reader can almost visualize the busy city life with its cluttered sights and sounds. Similarly, essays like *Our Dress*, *On Films*, *The Election Game*, etc, present before us a colourful confluence of Indian sights, sounds and aroma.

The third section of the book, which is sub-titled as Malgudi Sketches and Stories, consists of fifteen short stories. The beginning of the first story *Over a Mountain Range* stirs up certain associations in the mind; it resembles the first part of the essay *India Again* by E.M.Forster and the poem, *Bus* by Arun Kolatkar. This is a story about a journey by bus, and, Narayan has successfully added the typical Indian flavour to it with reference to the regional mythologies of King Rukmangadha and Janamejaya. The author also refers to the ancient Mohammedan, Bababuden, who was believed to introduce coffee into India. The second narrative reveals before us the peaceful Sringeri, a place surrounded with green forests, hilltops and river Tunga. Sringeri was made famous by Sankaracharya, the upholder of the *advaita* philosophy. The humanist approach of Narayan prevails throughout *Sringeri* which celebrates the mantra of hospitality and co-existence. The next two sketches, *Kaidala* and *Devarya Durga*, introduce the readers to the mythological relevance of Kaidala village and the 4,000 feet summit of Devarya Durga. *Mysore City* brings forth the historical importance of Mysore, and bemoans its lost glory. In *The Indian Theatre*, Narayan gives a realistic description of the way theatre is performed in rural India. It can be related to the Rasa theory which advocates the sole importance of the actor, accompanied by minimum or no props. However, the importance of the *sutradhara*(story teller) and *vidushaka*(clown) relates the Indian theatrical performance to that of the West. In *The Cold Fruit*, Narayan celebrates the Tamil poetess, Avvaiyar, who was taught a lesson of docility by a young urchin who saved her from being arrogant. R.K. Narayan is a gifted story-teller who has woven the gossamer of facts and fiction in these sketches and stories.

The Mirror (An Ancient Tale) tells the story of a happy village couple who lost their peace of mind after getting the glimpse of their own reflections on the mirror. The story can be best explained by the Freudian concept of Uncanny. Narayan has not missed a single

aspect of the Indian life in this collection of essays and stories. In *A Breach of Promise*, the readers are introduced to Sankar who visits the temple of Goddess Chamundi with his friends after passing the Lower Secondary Examination. He recalls that last year he made a promise to the Goddess that he would end his life if he didn't come out with flying colours in the Lower Secondary Exam; he flunked the exam last year, but has presently managed to score the pass marks. The breach of promise unsettles his mind and he decides to end his life by jumping off the cliff, but he is saved by the pull of flesh. Instead he promises the Goddess that he would visit her temple every Friday. This simple story smells of innocence and reflects the God-fearing nature of Indians. *The Magic Beard* and *Around a Temple* restore the faith in magic and religion. But *The Magic Cure* shows how superstitious souls can be cheated by imposters. In *Musical Commerce* and *Around a Temple*, Narayan introduces the Talkative Man who narrates both the stories. The concluding story of the book, *The Image*, is based on traditional accounts of the life of the famous sculptor, Jakanachari, who built the Belur, Halebid and other Hoysala temples in the 12th century A.D. This story has full resemblance with *Kaidala* which has been mentioned earlier. There is only one major difference: in *Kaidala*, Jakanachari chops off his own arm as promised, but in *The Image*, he is not allowed to do so. *Kaidala* provides the basis of the fictional expansion of the legend in *The Image* where Narayan makes the imaginative use of dialogues between the estranged father and the son. The philosophical assumptions of metaphysical continuity, mutual acceptance and coexistence seem to pervade Narayan's *A Story-Teller's World*. The difference between fact and fiction gets blurred in his works, as we find in the Introduction to *The Financial Expert*, and, the readers are shifted to a make-believe world which enchants and engages their senses and faculties in a world of simplicity and synaesthesia. Narayan's strokes of pen breathe life into the fictional world of Malgudi and give the readers fresh insights into the immortal world of fiction.