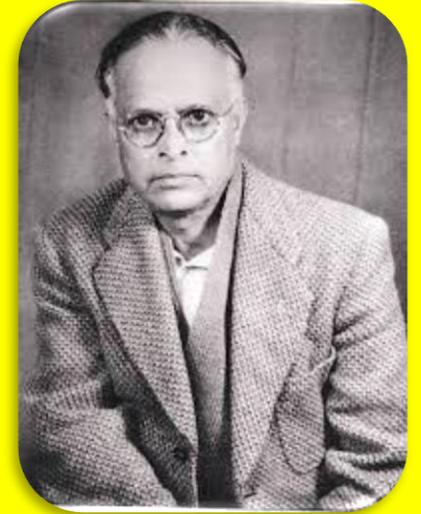


An Astrologer's Day



R. K. Narayan (1906 to 2001) Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer

Narayanaswami was one of the best known novelists among Indian English writers. R.K Narayan created imaginary town Malgudi in typical Indian setting. His Novel “The Guide” won him *The Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1961.

Narayan was introduced to American readers in 1952 by the Michigan State University Press.

These include, ‘Swami and Friends’, ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ (1937),

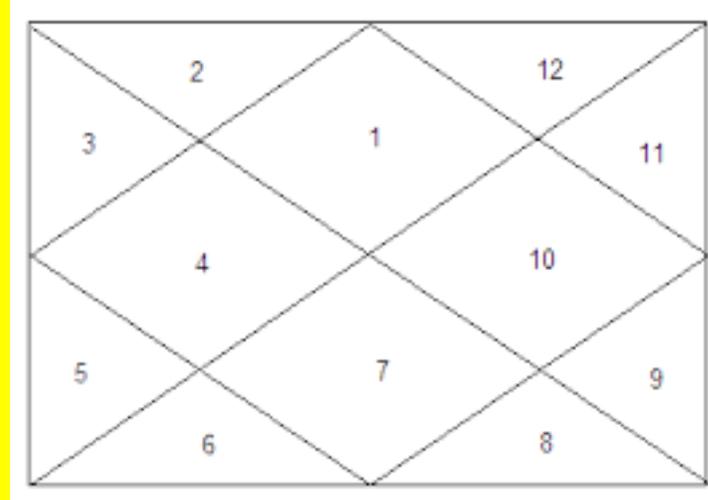
- ❖ ‘The Dark Room’ (1938), ‘An
- ❖ Astrologer’s Day and Other stories’(1947),
- ❖ ‘Mr Sampath ‘(1949),
- ❖ ‘The Financial Expert’ (1954),
- ❖ ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ (1955),
- ❖ ‘The Guide’ (1958), and many other books.

His writing is distinguished by humour and unoffending irony, a unique Indianness and a simplicity which is utterly charming and authentic. Narayan typically portrays the peculiarities of human relationships and the ironies of Indian daily life. His style is graceful, marked by genial humour, elegance and simplicity.

Punctually (नियमितपणे) at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, (उपकरणे) which consisted of a dozen **cowrie** shells, a square piece of cloth with **obscure mystic charts** on it, a notebook, and a bundle of **Palmyra** writing.



Cowrie Shells
कवड्या



Obscure mystic charts
गूढ रहस्ययी तक्ते



Palmyra writing.
पानावरील/हातावरील/ताडपत्री

His forehead was **resplendent** (तेजस्वी) with **sacred ash** (पवित्र राख) and vermilion,(शेंदूर) and his eyes sparkled with a **sharp abnormal Gleam** (अलौकिक तेज) which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a **prophetic light** (भविष्यवेत्ता ची प्रभा) and felt **comforted**.(समाधानी)



The Power of his eyes was considerably **enhanced** by their position placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark **whiskers** (मिशा) which streamed down his cheeks : even a half-wit's (अर्धा-शहाणा) eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a **saffron- coloured** (केशरी रंग) **turban** (फेटा) around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks.



Cosmos



Dahlia Stalks

He sat under the boughs of a spreading **tamarind tree** (चिंचेचे झाड) which **flanked** (बाजूने) a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways. A **surging crowd** (वाढत राहणारी गर्दी) was always moving up and down this narrow road from morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way : medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, and above all, an auctioneer of cheap cloth, who created enough din (गोंधळ) all day to attract the whole town.

Next to him in **vociferousness** (आरोळ्या) came a vendor of fried groundnut, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it “Bombay Ice Cream” one day and on the next “Delhi Almond,” and on the third “Raja’s Delicacy,” and so on and so forth , and people flocked to him. A considerable portion of this crowd **dallied** (रेंगाळणे) before the astrologer too.



The astrologer transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the **enchantment** (जादू/किमया) of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gaslights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps, and one or two, like the astrologer, managed without lights of their own. It was a **bewildering** (गोंधळून टाकणारा) crisscross of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least **intended** (हेतू) to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone : that was more a matter of study, practice, and **shrewd** (चतूर/धूर्त) guesswork. All the same, it was as much an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the **wages** (मजुरी) he carried home at the end of a day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his **forefathers** (पूर्वज) - namely, **tilling the land**, (जमिनीची मशागत करणे) living, marrying, and ripening in his cornfield and **ancestral** (वारसाहक्काने मिळालेले) home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between. (शरीर व मनाने खूप दूर होणे)

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money, and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three *pies* per question, never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, "In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts," nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned "Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative who is not well **disposed** (कल असणे) towards you?" Or he gave an analysis of character: "Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an **impetuous** (उतावीळ) nature and a rough exterior." This **endeared** (आवडणारे) him to their hearts immediately, for even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding (कठोर/उग्र) exterior.

The nuts vendor blew out his flare and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cowrie shells and **paraphernalia** (इतर साहित्य) and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out (विझवणे). He looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and said: “You look so careworn(चिंताग्रस्त). It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me.” The other grumbled some reply **vaguely** (अस्पष्टपणे). The astrologer pressed his invitation; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying: “You call yourself an astrologer?” The astrologer felt challenged and said, **tilting** (तिरके करणे) the other’s palm towards the green shaft of light: “Yours is a nature...” “Oh, stop that, ” the other said. “Tell me something worthwhile...” Our friend felt **piqued**(स्वाभिमान दुखावणे). I charge only three *pies* per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money...” At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an *anna*, and flung it out to him, saying “I have some questions to ask. If I prove you are **bluffing**, (फसवणे) you must return that *anna* to me with interest.”

“If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees?”

“No.”

“Or will you give me eight *annas*?”

“All right, provided you give me twice as much if you are wrong,” said the stranger. This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a *cheroot*. The astrologer caught a **glimpse** (झलक) of his face by the matchlight. There was a pause as cars hooted on the road, *jutka* drivers swore at their horses, and the **babble** (गोंगाट) of the crowd agitated the semidarkness of the park. The other sat down, sucking his *cheroot*, puffing out, sat there **ruthlessly**(निर्दयपणे). The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. “Here, take your *anna* back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today”... He made preparations to bundle up. The other held his wrist and said “You can’t get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing.” The astrologer shivered in his grip and his voice shook and became faint. “Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow.” The other thrust his palm in his face and said: “Challenge is challenge. Go on.” The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up: “There is a woman...”



jutka drivers

“Stop,” said the other. “I don’t want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not? Answer this and go. Otherwise I will not let you go till you **disgorge** (नाईलाजाने परत देवून टाकणे) all your coins.” The astrologer muttered a few **incantations** (मंत्र) and replied: “All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing? Otherwise I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like.” After a good deal of **haggling**, (घासाघीस करणे) the other agreed. The astrologer said: “You were left for dead. Am I right?” “Ah, tell me more.” “A knife has passed through you once?” said the astrologer. “Good fellow!” He bared his chest to show the **scar** (जखमेची खुण). “What else?” “And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead.” “I should have been dead if some **passer-by** had not chanced to **peep** (डोकावणे) into the well,” exclaimed the other, **overwhelmed** (भारावून जाणे) by enthusiasm. “When shall I get at him?” he asked, **clenching his fist** (मूठ घट्ट पकडणे). “In the next world,” answered the astrologer. “He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him.” The other **groaned** (हळहळणे) on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded :

“Guru Nayak-”

“You know my name!” the other said, taken aback. “As I know all other things. Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is two days’ journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home.” He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it to him. “Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again, and you will live to be a hundred.”

“Why should I leave home again?” the other said reflectively. “I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him.” He shook his head regretfully. “He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved.”

“Yes,” said the astrologer. “He was crushed under a lorry .” The other looked **gratified** (खुश) to hear it.

The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly midnight when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said “Count them. One man gave all that.” “Twelve and a half *annas*,” she said, counting. She was overjoyed. “I can buy some jaggery and coconut tomorrow. The child has been asking for sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some nice stuff for her.” “The swine has cheated me! He promised me a rupee,” said the astrologer. She looked up at him. “You look worried. What is wrong?” “Nothing.” After dinner, sitting on the *pyol*, (चारपाई) he told her “Do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here, and married you. He is alive.” She gasped. “You tried to kill him!” “Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled, and quarreled badly one day - why think of it now? Time to sleep,” he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the *pyol*.

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