

The English Teacher

Novel by R. K. Narayan

About the Author

- ▶ R. K. Narayan was one of the pioneers of Indian English fiction.
- ▶ He was born on 10 October 1906 in Madras (Chennai).
- ▶ His full name was Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami.
- ▶ He became famous for creating the fictional town of Malgudi.
- ▶ Narayan's novels focus on ordinary middle-class Indian life.
- ▶ His writing style is simple, realistic, humorous, and emotional.
- ▶ Some famous novels are *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Guide*, and *The English Teacher*.
- ▶ He received the Sahitya Akademi Award and Padma Bhushan.

Introduction to the Novel

- ▶ *The English Teacher* was published in 1945.
- ▶ It is considered one of Narayan's most personal and emotional novels.
- ▶ The novel is partly autobiographical because Narayan also lost his wife at a young age.
- ▶ The story is about Krishna, an English teacher working in a college.
- ▶ The novel describes his journey from ordinary life to spiritual understanding.
- ▶ It combines realism, emotion, philosophy, and spirituality.

Background and Setting

- ▶ The novel is set in the fictional town of Malgudi.
- ▶ It reflects the lifestyle of educated middle-class Indian families during British rule.
- ▶ The educational system shown in the novel follows colonial British methods.
- ▶ Narayan criticizes mechanical teaching and rote learning.
- ▶ The novel also reflects Indian spiritual beliefs about life after death.
- ▶ Family relationships and emotional bonding are central to the story.

Plot Summary – Krishna's Early Life

- ▶ Krishna is an English lecturer at Albert Mission College.
- ▶ He teaches English literature but feels bored with the routine system of education.
- ▶ His life changes when his wife Susila and daughter Leela come to stay with him.
- ▶ Krishna enjoys spending time with his family and experiences true happiness.
- ▶ Their family life is peaceful, loving, and filled with small joyful moments.
- ▶ Narayan presents domestic life in a realistic and touching way.

Plot Summary – Search for a New House

- ▶ Krishna and Susila decide to move into a rented house.
- ▶ While visiting the new house, Susila uses an unhygienic bathroom.
- ▶ She becomes infected and later develops typhoid fever.
- ▶ Krishna becomes anxious and tries everything to save her.
- ▶ Doctors treat her, but her condition continues to worsen.
- ▶ This part of the novel creates emotional tension and sadness.

Plot Summary – Death of Susila

- ▶ Susila dies after suffering from illness.
- ▶ Krishna is shocked and unable to accept her death.
- ▶ He becomes lonely, depressed, and emotionally broken.
- ▶ The loss deeply affects his mental and spiritual life.
- ▶ He struggles to continue his ordinary routine after her death.
- ▶ Narayan describes grief and emotional suffering in a realistic manner.

Plot Summary – Spiritual Journey

- ▶ Krishna tries to communicate with Susila's spirit through a medium.
- ▶ At first, he is doubtful and confused about spiritual experiences.
- ▶ Gradually, he feels Susila's spiritual presence around him.
- ▶ He begins to believe that love survives even after death.
- ▶ Krishna becomes spiritually awakened and emotionally stronger.
- ▶ By the end of the novel, he finds inner peace and happiness.

Plot Summary – Ending of the Novel

- ▶ Krishna resigns from his college job because he dislikes the rigid education system.
- ▶ He becomes interested in the new educational ideas of the headmaster.
- ▶ The headmaster's school encourages creativity and freedom among children.
- ▶ Krishna realizes that true education should develop the whole personality.
- ▶ The novel ends with Krishna feeling spiritually united with Susila.
- ▶ The ending suggests emotional healing and spiritual fulfillment.

Major Themes of the Novel

- ▶ Love and marriage
- ▶ Death and grief
- ▶ Spirituality and life after death
- ▶ Self-discovery and transformation
- ▶ Criticism of colonial education
- ▶ Importance of family and emotional relationships
- ▶ Search for inner peace and happiness

Theme of 'Love and Marriage'

- ▶ The relationship between Krishna and Susila is loving and natural.
- ▶ Narayan presents marriage as companionship and emotional support.
- ▶ Their conversations and daily activities make the relationship realistic.
- ▶ The novel celebrates simple domestic happiness.
- ▶ Even after Susila's death, Krishna's love for her remains strong.
- ▶ Love becomes a spiritual force in the novel.

Theme of 'Death and Grief'

- ▶ Susila's death changes Krishna's life completely.
- ▶ The novel explores loneliness, sorrow, and emotional suffering.
- ▶ Krishna's grief feels genuine because Narayan wrote from personal experience.
- ▶ The emotional pain shown in the novel is deep but controlled.
- ▶ Narayan avoids melodrama and presents grief realistically.
- ▶ The theme highlights the human struggle to accept loss.

Theme of 'Spiritual Awakening'

- ▶ The novel explores Indian spiritual beliefs about the soul.
- ▶ Krishna gradually learns to move beyond material life.
- ▶ He believes that Susila's spirit continues to exist after death.
- ▶ Spiritual communication helps Krishna overcome despair.
- ▶ The novel suggests that death is not the end of love.
- ▶ Krishna finally attains spiritual peace and understanding.

Theme of 'Education'

- ▶ Narayan criticizes the British colonial education system.
- ▶ Krishna feels that teaching grammar and textbooks is mechanical.
- ▶ The headmaster believes children should learn naturally and joyfully.
- ▶ The novel supports creativity, freedom, and practical learning.
- ▶ Education should help in the development of personality and character.
- ▶ Narayan questions the usefulness of rigid academic systems.

Character Analysis – Krishna

- ▶ Krishna is the protagonist and narrator of the novel.
- ▶ He is educated, thoughtful, and sensitive.
- ▶ At the beginning, he follows a routine and ordinary life.
- ▶ After Susila's death, he becomes emotionally disturbed.
- ▶ His suffering leads him toward spiritual understanding.
- ▶ By the end, Krishna becomes mature, peaceful, and spiritually awakened.

Character Analysis – Susila

- ▶ Susila is Krishna's wife and an important emotional center of the novel.
- ▶ She is loving, caring, intelligent, and cheerful.
- ▶ Her simple domestic nature creates warmth in family life.
- ▶ She supports Krishna emotionally and brings happiness into his life.
- ▶ Even after her death, her spiritual presence guides Krishna.
- ▶ Susila represents love, purity, and emotional strength.

Character Analysis – Leela

- ▶ Leela is the young daughter of Krishna and Susila.
- ▶ She represents innocence, joy, and hope.
- ▶ Her playful nature creates happiness within the family.
- ▶ After Susila's death, Leela becomes Krishna's emotional support.
- ▶ Her presence helps Krishna continue living despite his sorrow.
- ▶ Narayan uses Leela to symbolize the continuity of life.

Character Analysis – The Headmaster

- ▶ The headmaster is an unconventional and idealistic character.
- ▶ He believes education should encourage creativity and individuality.
- ▶ He dislikes discipline based on fear and punishment.
- ▶ His educational philosophy influences Krishna deeply.
- ▶ He represents progressive thinking and human values.
- ▶ The headmaster helps Krishna understand the purpose of life and education.

Narrative Style and Language

- ▶ Narayan uses simple, clear, and natural language.
- ▶ The novel is written in a calm and conversational style.
- ▶ Humor and sadness are balanced effectively.
- ▶ The narration is emotional but never exaggerated.
- ▶ Narayan uses realistic dialogues and everyday situations.
- ▶ His style makes deep philosophical ideas easy to understand.

Symbolism in the Novel

- ▶ The college represents the mechanical colonial education system.
- ▶ The headmaster's school symbolizes freedom and creativity.
- ▶ Susila's death symbolizes the temporary nature of human life.
- ▶ Spiritual communication represents hope beyond death.
- ▶ The family home symbolizes love, warmth, and emotional security.
- ▶ The novel uses simple symbols to express deep ideas.

Critical Analysis

- ▶ *The English Teacher* is both realistic and spiritual.
- ▶ The novel combines personal experience with philosophical ideas.
- ▶ Narayan successfully portrays ordinary middle-class Indian life.
- ▶ The emotional scenes are touching and believable.
- ▶ The novel differs from Narayan's earlier humorous works because of its seriousness.
- ▶ Critics consider it one of Narayan's finest and most mature novels.

Importance of the Novel

- ▶ The novel is an important work in Indian English literature.
- ▶ It presents Indian culture, family life, and spirituality realistically.
- ▶ The novel questions the value of colonial education.
- ▶ It explores universal human emotions like love and grief.
- ▶ Readers connect emotionally with Krishna's journey.
- ▶ The novel continues to be widely studied in colleges and universities.

Conclusion

- ▶ *The English Teacher* is a touching story of love, suffering, and spiritual growth.
- ▶ R. K. Narayan presents deep emotions through simple language.
- ▶ The novel teaches that true happiness comes from emotional and spiritual understanding.
- ▶ Krishna's journey from grief to peace forms the heart of the novel.
- ▶ The novel remains timeless because of its human values and emotional depth.