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A SHADOW

R. K. Narayan

About the Author

R. K. Narayan (1906–2001) was a well-known Indian writer of English fiction. He was one of the first Indian novelists to write in English. The simplicity of his language, his realistic settings and endearing characters have made him one of the most well-loved writers of India. His popular works include *Malgudi Days* (1943), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1961). Besides novels, he has written short stories, travelogues, condensed versions of Indian epics in English, and a memoir titled *My Days* (1974).

About the Text

This is a poignant story about love and loss. Centred around the death of a man, it portrays the deep loss that a family suffers through the eyes and perspectives of a mother and her son. Written in his typical simple style, the story is more complex than it seems. It also highlights the power of cinema/video as a powerful tool to reclaim or revisit memories and relationships.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

1. Have you ever had someone close to you die? What were some of the ways in which you grieved or mourned?
2. There are so many ways in which we make memories. What are some ways that are your favourites (video, audio, photo, etc.)? Why?



Sambu demanded, 'You must give me four **annas**¹ to see the film tomorrow.' His mother was horrified. How could this boy! She had been **dreading**² for six-months past the arrival of the film. How could people bear to see him on the screen when they knew he was no more? She had had a vague hope that the producers might not release the picture out of consideration for her feelings. And when a procession appeared in the street with **tom-tom**³ and band, and with young boys carrying **placards**⁴ and huge coloured portraits of her husband, she resolved to go out of town for a while; but it was a desperate and unpractical **resolve**⁵. Now the picture had arrived. Her husband was going to speak, move, and sing, for at least six hours a day in that theatre three streets off.

Sambu was as delighted as if his father had come back to life. 'Mother, won't you also come and see the picture?'

'No.'

'Please, please. You must come.'

She had to explain to him how utterly impossible it would be for her to see the picture. The boy had a sort of **ruthless**⁶ logic: 'Why should it be impossible? Aren't you seeing his photos, even that big photo on the wall, every day?'

'But these photos do not talk, move or sing.'

'And yet you prefer them to the picture which has life!'

The whole of the next day Sambu was in great excitement. In his classroom whenever his master took his eyes off him for a moment he leant over and whispered to his neighbour, 'My father was paid ten thousand rupees to act in that film. I am seeing it this evening. Aren't you also coming?' 'To see *Kumari*!' his friend sneered. He hated Tamil pictures. 'I won't even pass that way.'

'This is not like other Tamil films. My father used to read to us the story every night. It is a very interesting story. He wrote the

¹ *annas*: a former monetary unit of India and Pakistan, equal to one sixteenth of a rupee

² *dreading*: anticipate with great apprehension or fear

³ *tom-tom*: a small drum

⁴ *placard*: a printed or handwritten notice or sign for public display, either fixed to a wall or carried during a demonstration

⁵ *resolve*: strong determination to do something

⁶ *ruthless*: having or showing no pity or compassion for others

whole story himself. He was paid ten thousand rupees for writing and acting. I will take you to the picture if you are also coming.'

'I won't see a Tamil picture.'

'This is not an ordinary Tamil picture. It is as good as English picture!'

But Sambu's friend was **adamant**⁷. Sambu had to go alone and see the picture. It was an attempt at a new style in Tamil films—a modern story with a minimum of music. It was the story of Kumari, a young girl, who refused to marry at fourteen but wanted to study in a university and earn an independent **living**⁸, and was cast away by her **stern**⁹ father (Sambu's father) and forgiven in the end.

Sambu sitting in the four-anna class was eagerly waiting for the picture to begin. It was six months since he had seen his father, and he missed him badly at home.

The hall darkened. Sambu sat through the trailers and slide advertisements without enthusiasm. After all his father came on the screen. He was wearing just the dhoti and shirt he used to wear at home. And then a little girl came up, and he patted her on the head and spoke to her exactly as he used to speak to Sambu. And then father taught the girl Arithmetic. She had a slate on her knee and he dictated to her: 'A cartman wants two annas per mile. Rama has three annas on hand. How far will the cartman carry him?' The girl chewed her slate pencil and blinked. Father was showing signs of impatience. 'Go on Kumari,' Sambu muttered. 'Say something otherwise you will receive a slap presently. I know him better than you do.' Kumari, however, was a better arithmetician than Sambu. She gave the right answer. Father was delighted. How he would jump about in sheer delight whenever Shambu solved a sum correctly! Sambu was reminded of a particular occasion when by sheer **fluke**¹⁰ he **blundered**¹¹ through a puzzle about a **cistern**¹² with a leak and a tap above it. How father jumped out of his chair when he heard Sambu declare that it would take three hours for the cistern to fill again.

⁷ *adamant*: refusing to be persuaded or to change one's mind

⁸ *living*: an income sufficient to live on or the means of earning it

⁹ *stern*: (here) strict

¹⁰ *fluke*: luck

¹¹ *blundered*: clumsily made an attempt

¹² *cistern*: water tank

When the film ended and the lights were switched on, Sambu turned about and gazed at the **aperture**¹³ in the projection room as if his father had vanished into it. The world now seemed to be a poorer place without father. He ran home. His mother was waiting for him at the door, 'It is nine o'clock. You are very late.'

'I would have loved it if the picture had lasted even longer. You are **perverse**¹⁴ mother. Why won't you see it?'

Throughout the dinner he kept talking. 'Exactly as father used to sing, exactly as he used to walk, exactly...'

His mother listened to him in **grim**¹⁵ silence. 'Why don't you say something, mother?'

'I have nothing to say.'

'Don't you like the picture?'

She didn't answer the question. She asked, 'Would you like to go and see the picture again tomorrow?'

'Yes, mother. If possible every day as long as the picture is shown. Will you give me four annas every day?'

'Yes.'

'Will you let me see both the shows every day?'

'Oh, no. You can't do that. What is to happen to your lessons?'

'Won't you come and see the picture, mother?'

'No, impossible.'

For a week more, three hours in the day, Sambu lived in his father's company, and felt depressed at the end of every show. Every day it was a parting for him. He longed to sit down and see the night show too, but mother bothered too much about school lessons. Time was precious but mother did not seem to understand it; lessons could wait, but not father. He envied those who were seeing the picture at night.

Unable to stand his **persuasions**¹⁶ any more, his mother agreed to see the picture on the last day. They went to the night show. She sat in the women's class. She had to **screw up**¹⁷ all her

¹³ *aperture*: an opening, hole or gap

¹⁴ *perverse*: showing a deliberate and obstinate desire to behave in a way that is unreasonable or unacceptable

¹⁵ *grim*: very serious or gloomy

¹⁶ *persuasions*: the action or process of persuading someone or of being persuaded to do or believe something

¹⁷ *screw up*: (here) idiom meaning to gather one's courage

courage to sit down for the picture. She had a feeling of great relief as long as the slide advertisements, and trailer pieces lasted. When the picture began, her heart beat fast. Her husband talking to his wife on the screen, playing with his child, singing, walking, dressing; same clothes, same voice, same anger, same joy—she felt that the whole thing was a piece of cruelty **inflicted**¹⁸ on her. She shut her eyes several times, but the picture fascinated her: it had the fascination of a thing which is painful. And then came a scene in which he **reclined**¹⁹ in a chair reading a newspaper. How he would sit absorbed in a newspaper! In their years of married life, how often had she quarrelled with him for it! Even on the last day he had sat thus after dinner, in his canvas chair, with the newspaper before him: she had lost her temper at the sight of it and said, 'You and your newspaper! I could as well go and sleep off the rest of the day,' and left his company. When she saw him later he had fallen back in his chair with the sheets of newspaper over his face.....

This was an unbearable scene. A sob burst from her.

Sambu, sitting on his seat on the men's side, liked to see his father in the newspaper scene because the girl would presently come and ask him what he was reading, annoy him with questions, and get what she deserved: father would shout: 'Kumari! will you go out or shall I throw you out!' That girl didn't know how to behave with father, and Sambu intensely disliked her....

While awaiting eagerly the **snubbing**²⁰ of the girl Sambu heard a burst of sobbing in the women's class: presently there was a **scramble**²¹ of feet and a cry. 'Put the lights on! Accident to someone!' The show was stopped. People went **hither and thither**²². Sambu, cursing this interruption, stood up on a bench to see what the matter was. He saw his mother being lifted from the floor. 'That is my mother! Is she also dead?' screamed Sambu and jumped over the barrier. He wailed and cried. Someone told him, 'She has only fainted. Nothing has happened to her. Don't make a fuss.' They carried her out and laid her in the passage. The lights were put out again, people returned to their seats, and the

¹⁸ *inflicted*: cause suffering to someone

¹⁹ *reclined*: leaned back

²⁰ *snubbing*: rebuffing or putting someone in their place

²¹ *scramble*: move in a hurry as a group

²² *hither and thither*: here and there

show continued. Mother opened her eyes sat up, and said, 'Let us go away.'

'Yes, mother.' He fetched a **jutka**²³ and helped her into it. As he was climbing into it himself from the darkened hall a familiar voice said, 'Kumari! Will you go out or shall I throw you out!' On hearing it Sambu's heart became heavy and he burst into tears: he was affected both by his mother's breakdown and by the feeling that this was the final parting from his father. They were changing the picture next day.

Points to Ponder

Loss and death are a part of life. However, everyone reacts to and deals with them differently. Some are able to put their loss in perspective and carry on with their lives easier than others. Some are never able to get over it. Some get depressed or anxious. There is no right or wrong way to deal with death. We can be sad, anxious, angry and yet find the space and the love to move on, remember the bright and loving times and not let it overshadow one's day to day life. For that we need to be patient, loving and accepting of ourselves and our reactions to loss. Be kind, be gentle with yourself and others.

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.

1. How much was a ticket for the movies in the story?
2. Why was Sambu so excited to see the film?
3. Who was the lead actor in the film and why was he so important to Sambu?
4. How does Sambu react to the trailers and advertisements at the beginning of the movie?
5. What does Sambu's mother feel when the village took out a big procession before the release of the movie?
6. Why does Sambu's mother faint?

²³ *jutka*: a horse-drawn cart

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. How does Sambu and his mother's reactions to the trailers and advertisements differ and why?
2. Why does Sambu's mother not want to see the film?
3. How would you describe Sambu's attitude towards the film?
4. Why do you think Sambu keeps pestering his mother to see the film?
5. How would you describe Sambu's reactions at the end of the story?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. Compare and contrast Sambu and his mother's reactions and memories to various scenes in the film.
2. How does the author deal with the idea of death and memory in the story?
3. Comment on the title of the story and how it relates to what the story is about?

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LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

John Keats

About the Poet

John Keats (1795–1821) abandoned his medical profession to become a poet. His imagery is colourful and sensuous, and his word paintings are remarkable. Influenced by Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, Keats's poetry blends the Romantic with the philosophical. Keats's poems were badly received by critics during his lifetime, but his reputation as a poet grew steadily after his death with the increasing popularity of Romanticism. He is now seen as a key figure of the Romantic Movement in English literature. His works have greatly influenced later writers, and are still very popular today.

About the Poem

'La Belle Dame sans Merci' is written in the form of a ballad. Like most traditional ballads, it tells its story through dialogue. The first three verses ask a question. The answer contains the story of a knight who met an otherworldly lady. She took him to a strange cave where he had a terrible dream. When he awoke, he could no longer find the beautiful lady nor get back his strength. The poem can hold many possible meanings. The pitiless lady could symbolise disease; she could be poetry; or she could be the cruelty of life itself. The knight could be somebody suffering from an incurable disease; he could be a poet who can never become extraordinary; or he could be a sensitive human being for whom life, though beautiful, is painful to experience. It may also be about the dangers of addiction. Thus, despite the beguiling simplicity of its surface narrative, the poem is open to many interpretations.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

1. Have you ever had an experience that felt stranger than fiction? What was it and how did it affect you?

2. There are certain people in our lives whom we feel drawn to, sometimes without good reason. Is there any such person in your life? How would you describe them? Why do you/did you feel enchanted by them? What kind of impact did they have on your life?



O what can ail¹ thee, knight-at-arms²,
Alone and palely³ loitering?
The sedge⁴ has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard⁵ and so woe-begone⁶?
The squirrel's granary⁷ is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily⁸ on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew⁹,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth¹⁰ too!

I met a lady in the meads¹¹,

¹ *ail*: makes one feel ill

² *knight-at-arms*: a man, usually of noble birth, who is awarded a military rank for his services

³ *palely*: (here) sickly; without vigour; lacking vitality

⁴ *sedge*: grass-like plant growing in wet places

⁵ *haggard*: looking unwell or exhausted

⁶ *woe-begone*: sad or miserable in appearance

⁷ *granary*: a storehouse for food (here, refers to the squirrel's habit of collecting nuts in its home for the winter when food is hard to find)

⁸ *lily on thy brow*: The white lily flower was often associated with death. This line may also be a poetic way of saying that the knight looked very pale.

⁹ *anguish moist and fever dew*: The knight's face is described as being wet with the sweat of severe pain and a high fever.

¹⁰ *withereth*: (archaic) withers; fades

¹¹ *meads*: (poetic) meadows

Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was **light**¹²,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and **fragrant zone**¹³;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

I set her on my **pacing steed**¹⁴,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of **relish**¹⁵ sweet,
And honey wild, and **manna-dew**¹⁶,
And sure in language strange she said—
'I love **thee**¹⁷ true.'

She took me to her **elfin**¹⁸ **grot**¹⁹,
And there she wept and sigh'd full **sore**²⁰,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she **lullèd**²¹ me asleep,
And there I dreamed—ah! **woe betide**²²!

¹² *foot was light*: The fairy lady walked lightly and left no trace of herself.

¹³ *fragrant zone*: sweet smelling belt; here, 'zone' means belt

¹⁴ *pacing steed*: walking horse

¹⁵ *relish*: flavour; taste

¹⁶ *manna dew*: (Biblical reference) Manna was food (appearing in the form of dew) miraculously supplied by God to the Israelites during their forty years of exile in the desert. Here, it could refer to the sweet dried juice of the manna-ash plant.

¹⁷ *thee*: (archaic) you

¹⁸ *elfin*: relating to an elf

¹⁹ *grot*: (short for 'grotto') a small cave

²⁰ *sore*: sad

²¹ *lullèd*: calm or send to sleep with soft soothing sounds

²² *woe betide*: an expression of sorrow meaning 'alas!' or 'oh, no!'

The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all:
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci'²³
Hath thee in **thrall**²⁴!

I saw their starved lips in the **gloom**²⁵,
With horrid warning **gapèd**²⁶ wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I **sojourn**²⁷ here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Points to Ponder

This is a poem that seems to focus both on the creativity of the imagination as well as the way we are enthralled by certain people or things in our lives. Looking up to or being fascinated by a certain person or certain attitudes or substances is something that all of us have encountered in our lives. It might be worthwhile to examine why these things or people have such a strong hold over us and whether we are actually benefitting from or being deluded by them. Having a sense of objectivity and perspective may help you from being pulled into a situation that may end up harming you.

²³ *la Belle Dame sans Merci*: (French) 'the beautiful lady without kindness/mercy'. Keats took the title from *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, a medieval French poem on courtly love, by Alain Chartier.

²⁴ *thrall*: being under the control of another person

²⁵ *gloom*: (archaic) twilight

²⁶ *gapèd*: opened wide

²⁷ *sojourn*: to spend a certain length of time somewhere

COMPREHENSION**A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.**

1. What attribute does the knight share with the kings, princes and warriors of his dream?
2. What season or time of year is the poem set in?
3. Who is the narrator of the poem?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?
5. What do you think the word 'wild' means in the context of the fourth stanza?

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. What is the question posed in the poem?
2. Describe the appearance of the knight when the poet finds him. How does his appearance reflect his mental state?
3. Describe the knight's dream in detail.
4. Who or what do the people in the knight's dream represent?
5. How would you describe the main characters in the poem?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. Keats makes multiple references to nature in this poem. How do these references relate to or symbolise the condition of the knight?
2. How does the poet establish the supernatural atmosphere of the poem? Focus on the diction and imagery used by Keats.
3. Comment on the title of the poem and how it relates to what the poem is about?

WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR

Rabindranath Tagore

About the Poet

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who contributed immensely in putting modern India on the world literary map, was a multifaceted personality. He was a poet, a dramatist, a short-story writer, an educationist and a novelist. He was also a philosopher and nation-builder. He wrote primarily in Bengali, but translated a number of his own works into English (and in the process wrote them afresh). Of the volumes of poetry which he rendered into English, the important ones are *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener*. The songs of the *Gitanjali* are mainly devotional poems in the Indian tradition. *The Gardener* consists mainly of love poetry with a human, rather than a divine slant. Sense and sensibility are combined in his poetry to present deeper truths.

About the Poem

‘Where the Mind is without Fear’, which is Poem 35 of the *Gitanjali*, is one of Tagore’s most anthologised poems. It is an expression of the poet’s reflective spirit and contains a simple prayer for his country, the India of pre-Independence times. But the prayer has a universal message which makes it still relevant. He prays that his country will rise above petty concerns and narrow prejudices and soar high into a world of freedom of thought and action based on truth and fearlessness.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

1. Do you think there is any kind of freedom other than political freedom? Why? What could these freedoms be?
2. In what ways, do you think, we limit our own freedom? How do these limitations affect our lives? Can you write a few sentences on how you limit your own freedom and whether it is by choice, conditioning or forced upon you?



Where the mind is without fear and the **head is held high**¹;
 Where knowledge is free;
 Where the world has not been broken up into **fragments**² by
narrow domestic walls³;
 Where words come out from the depth of **truth**⁴;
 Where **tireless striving**⁵ stretches its arms towards perfection;
 Where the **clear stream**⁶ of reason has not lost its way into the
dreary⁷ desert sand of **dead habit**⁸;
 Where the mind is led forward by **thee**⁹ into **ever-widening**¹⁰
 thought and action—
 Into that **heaven of freedom**¹¹, my Father, **let my country**
awake¹².

Points to Ponder

This poem reveals that Tagore, who believed in the essential oneness of humanity, dreamt of a truly global society. At the end of the day, we are all human beings, no matter the colour of our skin, the names of the gods we pray to, the gender we claim, the food we eat, the language we speak or where we live. To rise past these boundaries and 'walls' is the essence of freedom. To be equal, to be recognised as equal and to have all the rights and privileges of being human is the essence of freedom.

¹ *head is held high*: refers to pride in one's freedom

² *fragments*: pieces

³ *narrow domestic walls*: a metaphorical reference to boundaries of caste and creed

⁴ *truth*: the ultimate reality, the goal of great poets and philosophers

⁵ *tireless striving*: constant struggle towards a goal

⁶ *clear stream*: pure flowing body of water; not large enough to be a river

⁷ *dreary*: dull and gloomy

⁸ *dead habit*: outdated practices

⁹ *thee*: archaic form for 'you'

¹⁰ *ever-widening*: that which is always expanding its horizons

¹¹ *heaven of freedom*: a joyful abode which has freedom for the individual

¹² *let my country awake*: Tagore prays not just for territorial independence for his country, but also for its intellectual and spiritual freedom.

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.

1. How is the country imagined in the poem?
2. Whom does the poet refer to using the phrase 'my Father'?
3. What is reason compared to in the poem?
4. What does the poet hope our mind would be directed by?
5. What does the word 'domestic' in the phrase 'narrow domestic walls' indicate?

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. What does the poet mean by 'Where ... the head is held high'?
2. What does the poet say about knowledge?
3. Explain the phrase 'dreary desert sand of dead habit'.
4. What is Tagore's definition of freedom?
5. The poet wishes that 'words come out from the depth of truth'. What does this wish indicate about the present state of the world?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. Describe the central idea of the poem.
2. Does the poem apply only to pre-Independence India or is it relevant to all countries at all times? Give reasons.
3. What qualities does the poet wish his country to have and why?