



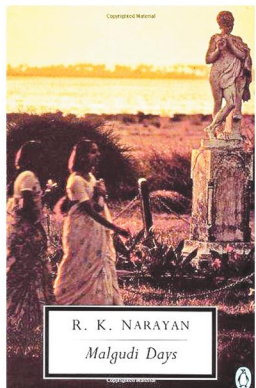
R K Narayan, one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English, brought the rhythms, humour and complexities of everyday Indian life to readers around the world



A later portrait of R K Narayan, whose understated storytelling made ordinary people and everyday experiences the centre of Indian English literature



R K Narayan's former home in Yadavagiri, Mysuru, was converted into a museum preserving his books, photographs, furniture, awards and personal belongings



R K Narayan's fictional Malgudi travelled from the printed page to Indian television through Shankar Nag's much-loved adaptation

The Man Who Made Malgudi Immortal

There was no grand kingdom, no sprawling metropolis and no imaginary land filled with mythical creatures in R. K. Narayan's fiction. There was only Malgudi — a small, fictional South Indian town with a railway station, a market, a school, a river and a cast of ordinary people. Yet through this modest setting, Narayan created one of the most enduring worlds in Indian literature.

Born Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan in Madras on October 10, 1906, Narayan became one of the pioneering figures of Indian writing in English. His writing was deceptively simple: schoolchildren worried about examinations, shopkeepers struggled with money, families quarrelled, lovers hoped and ordinary people stumbled into extraordinary situations. Behind this simplicity was a sharp understanding of human nature.

Narayan grew up partly in Madras under the care of his grandmother and later studied at Maharaja's College in Mysore. His early years exposed him to schools, teachers, Indian traditions and the rhythms of everyday middle-class life — experiences that would later become the raw material of his fiction.



His first novel, *Swami and Friends*, appeared in 1935 and introduced readers to Malgudi. Its central character, Swaminathan, or Swami, is a mischievous schoolboy navigating friendship, school, authority and the uncertainties of childhood. The novel established one of Narayan's defining literary qualities: his ability to find humour and meaning in seemingly insignificant moments.

Narayan's literary career soon expanded beyond childhood. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, he explored youth, romance and the anxieties of adulthood. The English Teacher, written after the death of his wife Rajam, was deeply personal, exploring grief, love and the possibility of emotional connection beyond death. The Financial Expert examined ambition and the pursuit of wealth, while *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* used dark humour to explore the disruption of ordinary life.

His best-known novel, *The Guide*, followed Raju, a railway guide whose life takes an unexpected turn as he becomes involved with the dancer Rosie and eventually acquires the reputation of a spiritual figure. The novel won the Sahitya Akademi Award and was later adapted

into the acclaimed Hindi film starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman.

But perhaps no work captures Narayan's literary universe better than *Malgudi Days*. The collection brings together stories about astrologers, postmen, doctors, shopkeepers, students, beggars and businessmen. In Narayan's hands, a missing letter, a railway journey or a schoolboy's trouble could become a story about fate, morality, loneliness or human folly.

His characters were rarely heroes or villains in the conventional sense. They were flawed, funny, selfish, generous and confused — often all at once. Narayan observed them with irony but rarely judged them harshly.

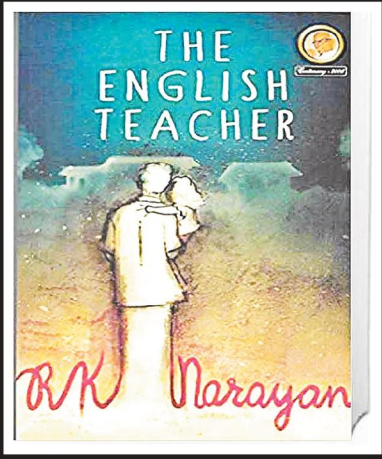
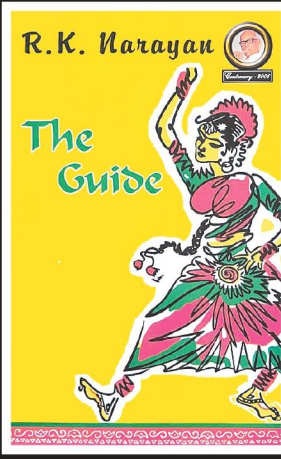
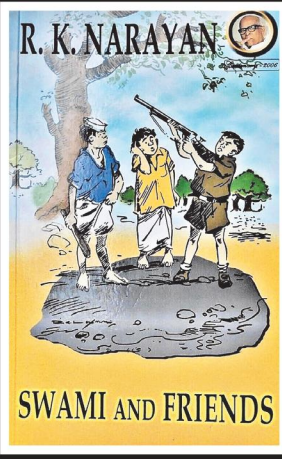
His relationship with the English language was equally significant. At a time when Indian writers were establishing their voice in English, Narayan demonstrated that the language could carry the

rhythms, humour and social realities of Indian life without losing their authenticity. Alongside writers such as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, he helped establish Indian English fiction as an important literary tradition.

Narayan received the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan, among other honours. He also served in the Rajya Sabha and continued writing well into old age. He died in Chennai on May 13, 2001, aged 94.

Yet Narayan's greatest creation remains alive. Malgudi exists only on paper, but generations of readers have recognised themselves in its streets and residents.

Narayan's genius lay in showing that an ordinary life was never really ordinary. In Malgudi, the smallest human experience could become a story — and the smallest story could reveal something profound about being human.



From Swami and Friends to The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets, Narayan created a body of work rooted in everyday Indian life

BOOKS REVIEW

The Machines Took the Chairs. What's Left Is Us.

In a data-heavy yet oddly consoling new book, a scholar-administrator asks what work will mean when knowing things is no longer enough.

The most unnerving image in Dr. Manish Ranjan's new book is not a robot. It is furniture. Forty chairs in a London law firm's document-review suite, occupied six weeks earlier by junior associates pulling twelve-hour shifts, now sit empty on an ordinary Tuesday morning while an AI system reads five thousand contracts before lunch. "This is not a story about the future," Ranjan writes. "This is a story about last Tuesday morning."

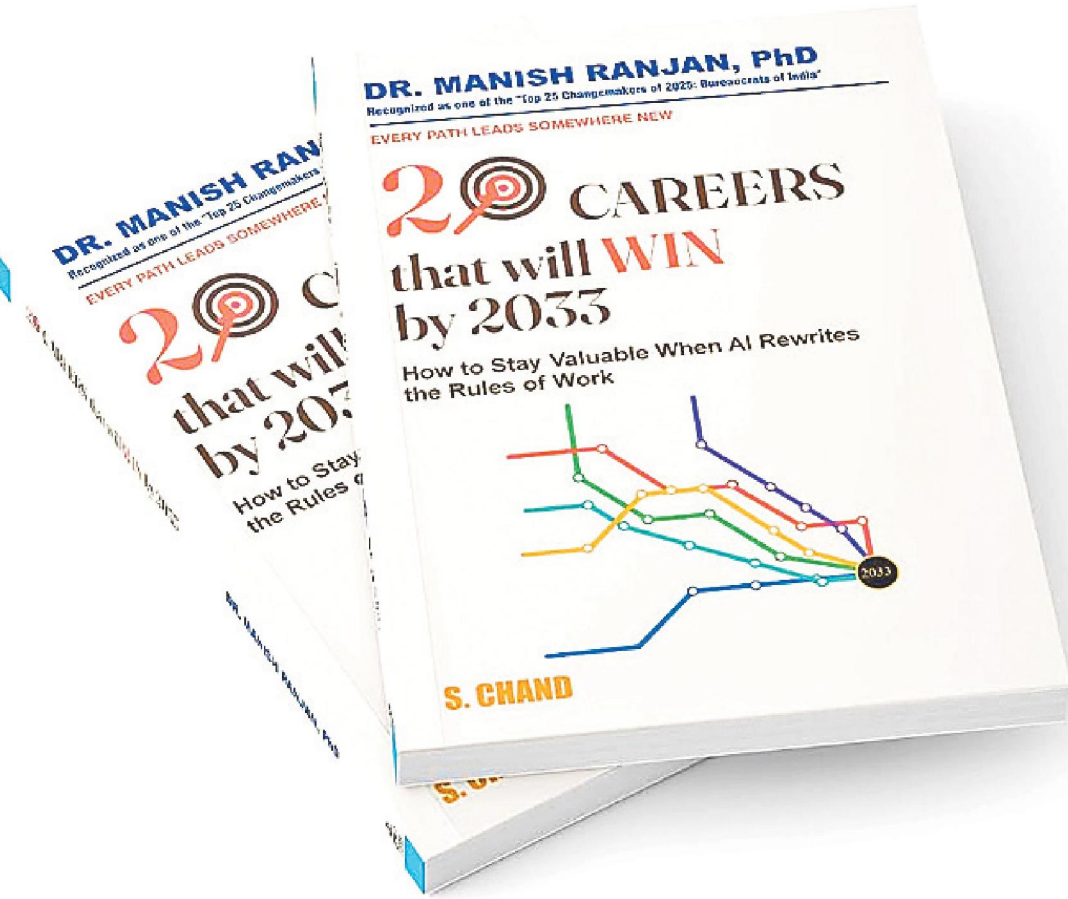
It is a canny opening, because the future-of-work genre usually offers readers a choice between two sedatives: panic or pep talk. Ranjan — a civil servant educated at Berkeley and Oxford who has spent a career watching institutions collide with change — declines both. His wager is stranger and more interesting: that artificial intelligence is not abolishing human value but auditing it, exposing the difference between work that merely processes information and work that is, in his phrase, deeply human.

The book's architecture rewards the reader's trust. Five units march from diagnosis to prescription: the "great displacement" of knowledge workers; the "human premium" of empathy, intuition and presence; the new occupations sprouting around

AI's edges — ethics officers, curators, human-in-the-loop validators; a world tour through Africa's leapfrog, China's state-led model and Silicon Valley's pivot, with a sobering detour into India's five-million-job reckoning; and finally the promised twenty careers, each screened against five criteria and anchored, somewhat obsessively, to Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, World Economic Forum surveys and McKinsey data. Nurse practitioners, it turns out, may inherit the earth: a 52 percent growth projection, the highest in the American occupational outlook.

One could quibble. The salary tables speak in dollars, an odd accent for a book so determinedly global. And any forecast dated 2033 is a hostage to a technology that has embarrassed better prophets. Ranjan seems aware of this; he calls the book a framework, not a crystal ball, and the hedge feels earned rather than evasive.

What lingers is the reframing at the book's heart, delivered with the timing of a good courtroom lawyer: being smart is now the floor, not the ceiling. For six decades, knowing things was a moat. The moat has drained. What remains — judgment, care, the nerve to decide under uncertainty — is harder to teach and, Ranjan



argues, suddenly better paid.

Parents will read this book anxiously, students strategically, mid-career professionals with a flashlight under the covers. That may be the surest sign it has found its moment.

The empty chairs of that London law firm will fill again — just not with the people, or the

skills, that once occupied them. Ranjan's real gift to the reader is not a list of twenty careers but a lens: once you have seen the difference between what machines process and what humans decide, you cannot unsee it. Books rarely change the questions a family asks at the dinner table; this one is built to.