



## My Dateless Diary: An American Journey

*R.K. Narayan*

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## **My Dateless Diary: An American Journey** R.K. Narayan

An unusual and witty travel book about the United States of America.

At the age of fifty, when most people have settled for the safety of routine, R. K. Narayan left India for the first time to travel through America. In this account of his journey, the writer's pen unerringly captures the clamour and energy of New York city, the friendliness of the West Coast, the wealth and insularity of the Mid-West, the magnificence of the Grand Canyon...Threading their way through the narrative are a host of delightful characters—from celebrities like Greta Garbo, Aldous Huxley, Martha Graham, Cartier Bresson, Milton Singer, Edward G. Robinson and Ravi Shankar to the anonymous business tycoon on the train who dismissed the writer when he discovered Narayan had nothing to do with India's steel industry. As a bonus, there are wry snapshots of those small but essential aspects of American life—muggers, fast food restaurants, instant gurus, subway commuters, TV advertisements, and American football. An entrancing and compelling travelogue about an endlessly fascinating land.

## **My Dateless Diary: An American Journey Details**

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## From Reader Review My Dateless Diary: An American Journey for online ebook

### Rita says

I suspect other books of his are better.

It's just a miscellaneous collection of tidbits, jottings, about a few months he spent in the U.S.; no unifying theme that I could see.

There were definitely interesting moments and observations, but on the whole the author simply comes across as self-centered, self-absorbed, somewhat denigrating of women, highly susceptible to flattery. And not very 'objective' in his observations, though perhaps that shouldn't be desired?

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### Shweta Ramdas says

In "My Dateless Diary", the beloved RK Narayan chronicles his traversal of America. New York, Detroit, Madison, LA, Berkeley...we breathe the air of these cities, overhear familiar conversations about joint families and Yoga, and glimpse the (often impressive) personages he encounters there. His observations, in true Narayan style, are gentle and unjudging, and always incisive, as when he laments being caught between the two-way doors of a bus often before breezily remarking that perhaps the doors would change when a white man gets caught instead.

Narayan chooses not to bookmark his journey with actual dates. What we thus get is a sense of timelessness-that feeling you had during summer vacations of yore, when days would melt into each other, carefree yet full.

The perfect pick-me-up.

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### Krishna Kumar says

This book, as the name suggests, is a series of writings from R K Narayan's journal. It is about his first visit to the United States on an invitation by the Rockefeller Foundation. He stayed around 9 months in the country, starting and ending in New York, but also traveling across the country to places such as Chicago, California, and New Mexico. It is non-fiction, obviously, and highlights his encounters with various luminaries in the literature, academic and film-making fields, as well as among the Indian expatriate circles. Narayan also has several experiences with ordinary American citizens, many of whom (in the year 1956) are fascinated with the idea of India – the mysticism, Jawaharlal Nehru and so on.

This was a very difficult book to read. The book seems to have been pulled from the diary without much editing. I mean that literally without hyperbole. A couple of quick giveaways are the tense usage (swinging wildly from present to past to past participle) and the fragment sentences. I didn't mind that, but there seems to have been no effort to cut out the extraneous and focus on experiences that give the overall book a

direction and meaning. Instead, we have a series of disjointed events, some of which are very tedious. For example, there is an encounter between Narayan and a couple of men at a station who apparently were intent on extorting money out of him, but reluctant to use force. It seemed totally unbelievable (as is sometimes with real events) and worth leaving out of the book.

The other problem is that Narayan made this trip at the age of 50 and, unlike some younger version who might have been more accepting and open towards a different culture and people, there is a weird cynicism in his attitude towards everything that happens. I guess there must have been a significant culture shock, but instead of expressing that, Narayan takes the tack of lightly mocking almost everyone in the book. I am reminded of back-benchers in my school days who would make fun of teachers (while they were not around). They would notice something that most of the other students missed and then use that to ridicule them. In this book, Narayan manages to observe some flaw in most people he interacts with, except for those who seem to have been extremely courteous to him.

The book can be interesting, if we ignore Narayan's viewpoint. We see many Americans very interested in knowing more about India, and many of the encounters where Narayan had were positive. 1956 was a very different world. India was a newly independent country and had recently become a democratic republic with its own constitution with a charismatic Prime Minister. There must have been high hopes for India's future and for many Americans, India must have seemed like a strong friend and possible ally. Of course, as we know, the next few decades would change those hopes in many ways (India's stagnant economy and its non-alignment strategy coupled with friendship towards the Soviet Union). But in 1956, much of that was in the future.

A short portion that struck me was Narayan's experience in a bus to Nashville that was segregated by color (remember, this was prior to the passage of the federal Civil Rights Laws). He tells the story of a white couple who were unable to get seats in the "white" section, but who decided to suffer for the complete journey than sit in a vacant seat next to Narayan in the "colored" portion of the bus. What is it about bigotry and racism that prevents people from even looking at their own advantage? So again, it was a different world and in this case, a much worse one.

So yes, some interesting portions and a blast from the past. The book could have been much better if Narayan had taken a more high-level view of events instead of getting into the weeds.

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### **Aanu says**

Nice account of first time observation of a new place...As usual book was rich in RKN's style-simplistic, realistic and honest..

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### **Sundeep Supertramp says**

Though the subject is boring, the author made it a very energetic and witty read.

The only reason that made me abandon this book is the very plot. It is not very interesting and as usual it was a mistake that I started reading the book without having an idea of the content. I was hoping for a memoir of a writer.

This is a author's 10-month travel through the US.

If you are aware of the plot and still want to read the book, you should definitely go for it. The author wouldn't disappoint at all.

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### **Kar says**

I found this book by doing something I never do - closing my eyes in a used bookstore and grabbing something off the shelf. It turned out to be great - an Indian author touring America in the 50's (he meets Greta Garbo!) and his perspective is wonderful. I always love when authors write about San Francisco and I can recognize places. Easy to read and very entertaining, plus culturally educational.

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### **Akshat Solanki says**

#### **Withdrawn**

In a book called *Bookless in Baghdad: Reflections on Writing and Writers* the author, Shashi Tharoor has written about RK Narayan and his writing style, which surely, comes as an awkward surprise.

I found reading this book pretty much difficult because of the way the author used his vocabulary. The narration was getting difficult as I continued reading despite its simplicity because RK Narayan thinks in his language and write in English.

Which is problematic whenever you're writing something.

And Shashi Tharoor had mentioned the similar thing, citing the reasons why he finds reading RK Narayan difficult or a little lesser interesting.

Now, I should talk about the book. So, as the title suggests it's the author's American journey which he has penned down, and there are many beautiful events happened to him, exciting him and some saddening too.

It's a great delight in reading this book, except, of course, the unusual vocabulary.

*Akshat Solanki*

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### **Adithya Bharadwaj says**

Some insights about the American society during R.K's period. At some places there are brilliant comparisons about the Western Society and the Indian way of life. But mostly it's about meeting authors, producers etc. It gets a little boring, but to be fair, the author has mentioned in the preface that it does not serve as any guide or anecdotal piece but just a reflection of his thoughts during the journey.

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### **Senthilprabhu says**

Wonderful presentation of America. The difference highlighted between an American and an Indian is perfect.

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### **Senthil Kumaran says**

A simple narration of Narayan's trip to USA. Throughout the book, Narayan shares his observation of American society and the culture during his trip and every now and then, but not very often, he has some profound to share. One example being how he explains about joint family system to american friends, about religion and gods etc. Good quick read.

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### **Ashishg says**

A marvelous and lucid recollection of events portraying foreigners and their perception of India.

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### **Karthik says**

RKN uses a diary-like sentence style. It would read like this: « went to Empire State today. Lunch at saravana bravan. » This style doesn't make for pleasant reading. Although the style tries to stay faithful to a diary, it suddenly switches to a « next Sunday » like witty essay within the diary entry so it isn't clear is the diary is truly personal and a Non-Fiction account or whether these are entries written partly as a daily log and partly to entertain. This confounding of intent detracts from the overall enjoyment. It also meanders like a diary but lacks the confessions of a diary. I think the book would have done better re-written as « next Sunday - part 2 ».

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### **Siddhartha Das says**

He is a master story teller. Part travelogue, part autobiographical. Very rare do you see such a good combination of imagery, wit & nonchalance

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### **Kshitiz Goliya says**

These were the two questions that R K Narayan was frequently asked in U.S.; How do joint families work?; Why don't Indians eat beef (keeping in mind the endless supply of cows on streets) as it may solve country's malnutrition problem. He wasn't troubled as he was as much trying to understand American mind as they were trying to understand his. Interestingly, it was during his U.S. travels that Narayan penned 'The Guide' which later became the most important part of his oeuvre.

Besides struggling to find good vegetarian food and dealing with the haphazard workings of U.S. railways

system, the journey was pretty amazing for Narayan. He traveled across the country from the quite eastern shores of San Francisco, through the industrial Midwest, passing the racially segregated Nashville and finally reaching the cosmopolitan New York.

He also encountered several awkward table conversations where people knew he is an author but hadn't read his novels, and feared that he would start questioning them about his works.

He warns that the book is not a sociological text on United States but just an account of his personal travel through an amazingly enterprising nation. However, the book not only reveals several aspects of USA but also takes you on a humor filled journey through America's common folk and academic circles.

Narayan eloquently describes various authors and academics that he conversed with in the middle of many wine filled parties. During these parties, mostly thrown in his honor, he also met some strange characters that make for a good laugh. He jokes that while Indians won't miss a chance to acquire material things like a latest gadget from America and show it off to their friends, Americans were amazed by the ascetic and simplistic lifestyle of Indians. This put Narayan in tight spot many a times for his patrons took him for a sage from east who would have answers to all the philosophical questions. They would repeatedly and sincerely ask him about Karma, reincarnation and various other Indian mythical theories, for which he would seldom have answers.

He also records insightful talk with several defining personalities such as the great author Aldous Huxley and the famous actress Greta Garbo.

Narayan was also amazed how decisive Americans were and quick to grasp a business opportunity, unlike him who would want to put off any big decision for next day. He recounts the ordeal of choosing a publisher among dozens of prospects as all of them looked nice. He writes about his experience of working on 'the Guide' (which wasn't named till then) and how it grew into a manuscript and then into a book which led to an equally popular film.

Although he struggled to find a typist who could put his handwritten text into an intelligible typed manuscript, the Guide did manage to reach its publisher before deadline.

The books ends with his conversation with Greta Garbo who says to him while he is leaving, "How I wish we would stop time from moving and always taking us on to a moment of parting!"

It was indeed a sweet journey with a sweet ending.

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## **Manikantan says**

Good narration and capture of sentiments and behaviour. Especially liked the section about coffee

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