

## **Underrepresentation, pacing, and the American reception of R.K. Narayan**

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*Abstract.* I propose that some cases of underrepresentation reflect different conceptions of what is an appropriate time frame for assessment, using the publication history of R.K. Narayan to illustrate my hypothesis.

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*Whoosh—the player ran past—*

*And the season passed ever so fast.*

There is a literature on the underrepresentation of historically discriminated groups in the analytic tradition of philosophy – why so few women? why so few ethnic minorities? – but it is natural to wonder about the relationship between underrepresentation here and elsewhere. Do comparable hypotheses explain both?<sup>1</sup> With this question in mind, I wish to examine the case of fiction writer R.K. Narayan.

The dust jacket of my copy of Narayan's most esteemed novel, *The Guide*, tells us:

Upon the English publication of his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, in 1935, Graham Green immediately cited him as not only an inimitable and charming interpreter of the Indian way of life, but a great new contributor to English literature.

The blurb goes on to say:

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<sup>1</sup>An article from the opening year of the decade conveys hypotheses (Beebee and McCallion 2020: 167).

Mr. Narayan was introduced to the American audience in 1952, when the Michigan State University Press, with unusual imagination and foresight, began to publish his latest works and also several of the earlier ones.

Narayan had published a lot before 1952 and he is generally regarded as a very reliable contributor. Even a severe critic, soon after Narayan died, uses the metaphor of metronomic, though enigmatically in relation to style (Tharoor 2001). And yet Michigan State University Press's move to publish his works is described as one of unusual imagination and foresight, as if the publishers were taking a rare risk.

Now what would you think if you have been trying to find an American publisher and after 16 years you still have not found one? American publishers are not interested! But there may well be a mismatch between your sense of the pace at which interest expresses itself and the evaluator's sense, in certain fields. And such mismatches may explain some cases of not incorporating individuals from underrepresented groups, though perhaps only few. After 17 years of tracking the fellow, the American evaluator thinks, "Let's do it! Let's sign this guy up." But you have given up by then and the enthusiasm that helps sort various matters out is absent.

## **References**

Beebee, H. and McCallion, A-M. 2020. In Defence of Different Voices. *Symposion* 7 (2): 149-177.

Narayan, R.K. 1958. *The Guide*. New York: The Viking Press.

Tharoor, S. 2001. Comedies of Suffering. *The Hindu* 8th July 2001.