

CHAPTER - II

The Social Backdrop of the Themes.

[ 1 ]

Malgudi is the fictional setting of R. K. Narayan's novels and stories. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'border countries' of Sir Walter Scott, 'Lake District' of Wordsworth. 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy or 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. Malgudi is an imaginary South Indian town round which Narayan has woven the complex pattern of the lives of his characters. He takes us to Malgudi to laugh, sympathise, and share the vicissitudes of its inhabitants.

Malgudi came to Narayan's mind all ready-made ; I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadashami, the day on which the goddess of learning is celebrated. Malgudi was an earth-shaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that which would be necessary in writing about Malgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banayan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijayadashami, I sat down and wrote the

first sentence about my town : 'The train had just arrived at Malgudi Station. (1)

Malgudi does not exist on any map of India. It is Lalgudi in Trichinapoly District, fringing the River Cavery which can be taken for the original Malgudi. It is neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. It lives in the imagination more distinctly than any other region described by any Indian writer.

Narayan's Malgudi is a reality charged with all that is intimate and poignant in human life. It is linked again and again with the rise and fall of heroes and heroines and the place Malgudi is everywhere

it is the 'Surroundings' of Narayan's novels and hundred and fifty one short stories. (2) R. K. Narayan, while introducing the serial Malgudi Days over T. V. on 5th Nov. 1986, admits that Malgudi is, no doubt, an imaginary town, yet the people living here can exist every-where, the atmosphere that influences this city lies every

where. The situation of this utopia resembles the suburbs of New York city of U. S. A. The idea of the place struck his mind when he was staying there. The nature and surroundings of Malgudi is quite universal. These recent revelations of Narayan gives strength to the location of Malgudi and we have clear vision of the place as it stands in our imagination. K. R. S. Iyengar points out :

With each new novel we advance in time (a few years at a step) and Malgudi grows in importance and gains in

definition. The major land marks, however, remain. The River Sarayu flows by its side. Fringing Malgudi or just beyond it are Nallappa's mango Grove and the Mempi Forest, reaches by the <sup>n</sup>Gove street and the Forest Road respectively. There is a Trunk Road to Trichinopoly. One can board the train for Madras at the Malgudi Station.<sup>(3)</sup>

Narayan's first novel Swami and Friends introduces us to this town called Malgudi on the boarder of the Status of Mysore and Madras. Malgudi has a Municipality, a Town Hall, a club and two schools. The Albert Mission School and the Board High School even in the early thirties. We hear of Motor cars in which Swami rides to the club. Even in 1935 Malgudi had a 'Threatre - The Palace Talkies' :

Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped threatre -- the Palace talkies -- which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed variety Hall, which from time immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent film.<sup>(4)</sup>

The principal land marks of Malgudi - Malgudi Station, the central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank. The Bombay Anand Bhavan, Kabir Street, Lawley Extension, the Regal Hair-cutting Saloon, the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. The Office of 'The Banner, The Sarayu River, Nallappa's Groves, Mempi Hills, hotels, Cinemas, Colleges -- all these make a strong social frame-work within which

'the juxtaposition of the age-old conventions and the modern characters provides much of comedy as pointed out by Graham Greene in his fine critical appreciation of Narayan.

From Swami and Friends to A Tiger for Malgudi, Malgudi has to adopt many changes. Though the characters belong to Malgudi but they pass through various stages of development. In Swami and Friends Malgudi is neither a village nor a city, but a town of small size, but in each successive novel there is a gradual expansion which becomes obvious in the following lines :

It has grown from a small sized agricultural town to semi-industrialised city. The Malgudi of Swami and Friends is not the same as the Malgudi of The Vendor of Sweets. Even in the same novel, for instances; in The Guide we see it passing through various phases of developments. Speaking from the topographical point of view, the Albert Mission College, headed by principal Brown, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with its imposing structure, the newly-built bungalows in the Lawley Extensions, Englandia Banking Corporation The Sunrise Pictures, all speak emphatically of the story of the growth of the town. (5)

Malgudi is of all-absorbing interest to the readers of R.K. Narayan. It is not a mere geographical expression, it has a distinct personality of its own. We always feel the touch of Malgudi as it appears as familiar as our home town:

It is Narayan's triumph as an artist that makes us have complete faith in the reality of Malgudi. It is so strongly implanted in our imagination that we wonder whom we are going to meet in this town ..... The streets and lanes appear to be as familiar as one's home town. (6)

In Narayan's novels of Malgudi we do not find whether it is a compound of Mysore and Lalgudi as he paints his quiet little town of Malgudi on the banks of river Sarayu. But one could perhaps take it as a symbol of contemporary India. Malgudi, the small town with its high school, cricket ground, temple and market place, very soon changes with the advancement of time as it acquires a film studio, a road bridge on the river, a college and other amenities of modern civilization. The School boy, Swami and his Friends, the Bachelor of Arts, Krishnan, who becomes an English Teacher, Mr. Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi, Margayya, the Financial Expert, Raju the Railway porter, petty vendor transformed into a 'Sanyasi' are all living personalities from the changing and complex milieu that is our India. The especial feature of the fictional setting of Malgudi locale is its gradual changes. Life here moves at slow pace. It is completely undisturbed by the outside world. Here are the people who believe in deeply rooted traditions and age-old customs. This makes them to look upon any new idea with suspicion and distrust. Srinivas, the editor of 'The Banner' and the scriptwriter of the

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film 'The Burning of Kama' speaks about this never-changing aspect of Malgudi.' I might be in the twentieth century B.C. for all it matters or 4000 B.C. (7)

Even in 1956 Malgudi showed the signs of a semi-agricultural town. The changes were over-night "Plenty of labour from other districts had been brought in because the District Board and the Municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building, and three or four cotton Mills had suddenly sprang into existence. (8) In spite of every sign of an industrialised town Malgudi maintains its peculiarity which is most typical of it. The setting of Malgudi is quite distinctive and most part of it is descriptive. The places of Malgudi are not overshadowed by the people who inhabit it. There are characters who give meaning to the places of Malgudi and make them real and life-like. The sense of familiarity of the streets and lanes of Malgudi is home-bred. It helps the readers to be intimate. It creates a deeper and better understanding of its people and places. There will be no separate identity of Malgudi without 'its financial expert', Maragayya, its printer, Sampath, its editor, Srinivas, its holy man, Raju, its Journalist author-sociologist Dr. Pal and its dandy Sriram. (9)

Malgudi is the projection of Narayan's comic vision. This has been deployed against cheats, bohemians, bossy wives and indulgent grand parents. Malgudi is full of buffoons, ecentrics, kanves, prostitutes, lechers, adulterers, money-grabbers, drunkards, 'Sanyasi'

and would be gangsters. Conflicts of Malgudi belong to a remote past-of the period of the Ramayan and the Mahabharata. There are children revolting against parents and the old ways of life. Husbands are betrayed by their wives. Men are captivated by the beauty of actresses and the female-sex. Malgudi like other places of India is a town where castes and occupation are stable. Marriages are arranged. Astrology is generally accepted, though it not always practised. Malgudi is related to each and every one. Since long with minor changes here and there.

The greatest charm of Narayan lies in making Malgudi its people and their values real for the readers. His most serviceable tools in establishing the intimate sense of reality are keen observation, sympathy, unfailing humour and gentle satire. Still we live in the same familiar surroundings of Malgudi. In Graham Greene's words :

I wait to go out of my door into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the hair-cutting saloon, a stranger who will greet me I know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human existence. <sup>(10)</sup>

There are familiar faces and places. 'Market Road' is the life like of Malgudi, Anderson Lane, Kabir Lane, Albert Mission School, Lawley Extension. The Central Co-operative Land Mortgage

Bank, Englandia Banking Corporation and The Sunrise Pictures give the town a distinct personality, and peculiarity. The word of Malgudi is warm and intimate. It is life-like and interesting with smells, sights, sounds, and flavours of its own.

Malgudi is a place where people are not heroic. They do not have any control over the events although it seems as if they control everything. They are helpless creatures torn by desire and tossed this way or that way by the caprice of fate. Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts (who is intensely in love with Malathi) at last runs away from home. Mr. Sampath is impelled by fortune and at last leaves Malgudi for ever. The English Teacher finds happiness in the world of spirits after the death of his wife. The Guide dies as a ruined man not because he wants to embrace death but because circumstances compel him to do so. It is thus clear that the people of Malgudi are puppets in the hands of fate.

Narayan underlines the eternal quality of Malgudi inspite of changes that occur with the march of time. Malgudi has traditional history of its own. Ram may have passed through this place on his journey to Lanka. Its streets may have been touched by the feet of Lord Buddha. Its past is connected with the past of India. Its legends carry the historical activities of Rama and Sita, gods and goddesses, demons, Sri Shankara and the Buddha, Sir Fredrick Lawley and Mahatma Gandhi.

Narayan's craftsmanship lies not only in the conventional life of Malgudi but in the loving attention he devotes<sup>e</sup> to building up

a real picture of Malgudi and its inhabitants. Malgudi is his greatest character with its Mempi Hills, tiger-haunted jungles, Nataraj Printing shop, Jagan's sweet emporium, Jonsonian characters (adjournment lawyer), twentieth century demon, Vasu and Characters Like Mr. Sampath and Nataraj. Narayan finds plenty of comedy in the normal life of Malgudi. His attitude towards Malgudi remains lovingly sympathetic. He loves to depict the traditional life of Malgudi with all its backwardness and peculiarities. But he treats it with gentle-teasing and deep understanding.

The procession of extra-ordinary character that marches through Malgudi consists of animal stuffer, crooked politicians, the adjournment lawyer, film-producers, village idiots and the temple prostitutes. Malgudi is lively with its collection of printing shops, schools, temples, hotels and Mempi hills. It has usual beggars, spongers, tricksters, bohemians and orthodox community. Malgudi is less tolerant of the modernisers. Government planners, and men of violence. So Malgudi takes on a character of its own. The themes, characters and dialogues echo the sound of Malgudi.

Narayan is a realist and thus presents details which he intimately knows. He does not pretend to comprehend the whole of reality. Mature as he is, he is fully aware of his limitations. As such he is rather more concerned with selection of factual materials. The reality of Malgudi has got to be appreciated because of the relevance to the subject has discussed. It is realistic, ironic, pathetic and yet comic. Some of the incidents are dramatic, and moralising. The common factor in most of his novels is that the

main character grows from an average to an influential human being and then comes back to his normal status. The end is always seclusion which is due to his dissatisfaction either with one's own self or with the world around him. This is the case with Raju of The Guide, Sampath of Mr. Sampath, Margayya of The Financial Expert, Swami of Swami and Friends, Natraj of The Man Eater of Malgudi Ramani of The Dark Room and Raman of The Painter of Signs.

Narayan is at his best giving his Malgudi a reality of its own. His energy has been spent over the details of characters and the manners of the people moving over the canvas of Malgudi. Their individual traits and habits have been depicted with relevant details. His Marco of The Guide is interested in his own researches. He is also equally particular about the vouchers. Raju's father takes keen interest in talks regarding litigation. The manners of Raju from tourist guide to the holy man change according to exigencies of situations but his personality remains almost the same throughout. In this way the reality of Malgudi is the reality of manners of characters, their gestures, their attitudes, their tastes and the poise of their personalities. It is usually built round Indian beliefs and superstitions. The smells, sights, sounds and flavours from the parts of the experience of Malgudi. They are conveyed to us with simplicity and vividness.

Narayan has powers of acquiring informations. He has ability to cohere and analyse the whole pattern of Malgudi society.

He has a strong sense of dramatic situations and propensities of characters. He is very informative about the characters and places. This is the reason that his Malgudi has become a sort of legend in Indo-English fiction. Every detail regarding Malgudi and its significant situation and places fit in with perfect relevance. The unwanted facts have been ignored by Narayan. He is interested in social problems and repercussions of the violated morals and in depicting such problems he does not lack the analytical faculty over the details regarding Malgudi society.

He polishes his realism so as to give a brilliance to it. He rejects the clumsy facts and seeks realistic description for the setting. Thus the reality of Malgudi is smooth, and polished. He attempts to paint life as it is by mixing romance, fantasy, sentimentality, social conflicts, follies and foibles of life. Here is, of course, reality as it is, but there is also a conscious attempt not to deviate from the traditional form of realism. At times fantasy is, of course, beyond the art and scope of R. K. Narayan. Even in The Guide a little of fantasy exists in the gullibility of the village folks when they impose the greatness of a recluse on exconvict, Raju.

The reality of Malgudi does not depend on the thoughts of the vagaries of nature. The factual material is not rejected simply on the ground of a moral consideration. Narayan carefully arranges the locale of Malgudi. It is very close to the reality of

human life. There are snap-shots of realistic pictures of nature as well as of human oddities. He describes a particular scene of Malgudi and gets into its details. He convinces his readers with the reality of the situation and the scene. He describes even childhood, middle-age and old-age of a man with a realistic touch.

Narayan knows well that the greater the realism, the better the image. In such cases neither the land scapes nor the social pictures are left without realistic touches. They cover up possible details about them. He has the ability to evoke reality in the minds of his readers. He is also endowed with a wonderful power to give a local habitation and name of any thing. However, it is not done with a microscopic accuracy. It is this realistic narrative which presents the various phases of life against the typical Indian background. The conflict between the old and the new Indian values is presented with precision. The aspirations of individuals naturally differ in accordance with their belief and superstitions. In Malgudi there are people who believe in oriental values whereas there are some who are influenced by western ideas and culture. The purpose of the artist in presenting this conflict is to create a sense of awareness that salvation lies in harmony between the two values.

People of Malgudi are representative of all that is good and bad in Indian society. They have faith in evil spirits. They are equally superstitious. They can believe in the miracles

of pseudosaints. Narayan's awareness of the rural life of Malgudi is superb and he has done full justice to it. It seems that he has observed Malgudian life in its minutest details. Malgudians are typical Indians. They are simple and gullible. They can be easily duped by self-styled saints, printers, publishers, financiers and birth-control workers. The businessmen, the middle class persons and the rural folks are typical of Malgudi. They have their own ideas and ideals. They are unaffected by the west-oriented culture. Malgudi has typical schools and school teachers, specimens of which are most convincingly drawn. The snake charmer, the temple the holy men and the worshippers are as real as Malgudi itself. The holy men are really so-called holymen about whom there is hardly any holiness. Narayan has exposed such pretenders more effectively. The typicalities of Malgudi are its realities. The novelist has an eye even for the trivialities of human life. He is interested in the spirit of persons and objects. In this way Malgudi is not a sage of ideas and Narayan is not a propagandist, he is a realist of reputation. He shows the temper of the time. He limits it to the social conditions and for which he has Malgudi as interpretative medium. He maintains the social climate throughout. It is a sort of historical record for him.

Narayan's India is the real India and his Malgudi is a living creation. The characters, scenes, situations, habits and customs are all real and authentic. His Krishnan and Shushila, the Headmaster and his wife are all real and convincing. So is the old

woman, the perfect stranger, on hearing that Krishnan is a widower, insists on getting him married at once :

A man must marry within fifteen days of losing his wife, Otherwise he will be ruined. I was the fourth wife to my husband and he always married with<sup>in</sup> three weeks. All the fourteen children are happy, What is wrong. (11)

Malgudi has its own doctor, who, on the basis of imagination and without bothering to see the patient, finds out the disease and treats accordingly. He seems no difference between malaria and typhoid. As real is the Malgudi Doctor, so realistic is the description of the disease like Malaria and the Typhoid :

Malaria : The Doctor said, " I was only dreading lest it should be Malaria -- The most erratic and temperamental thing on earth. I would trust it. But typhoid is the king among fevers -- it is an aristocrat who observes the rules of the game I'd rather trust a cobra than a green snake, you can depend upon the cobra to go its way if you understand its habits and moods." (12)

At the time of 'Quit India Movement' Malgudi maintains its reality. Its youths actively participate, Malgudi has patriot-like Sriram and terroriost like Jagdish. They are inspired by GandhiJee. They help boycott of foreign goods. Sriram also pickets a Malgudian shop :

Sriram still lay on his belly and raised his head and said 'It is for people like you that Mahatma Gandhi has been fighting'. (13)

The Co-operative Movement widely spread up throughout India has also its impact of Malgudi. The middle -- aged money lender, Margayya sits under the Banyan tree just in front of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with an old tin bag. He is always busy with his subtle financial transactions with the village folk. Like other places Malgudi has the branch of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank which has completely failed to provide financial assistance to the villagers. The middle man gets its upper hand defeating the sole purpose of the development of Malgudi. Margayya succeeds in his venture to acquire the reputation of a wealthy man whereas the interest of common man is neglected.

It left him admiring the power and dynamism of money, its capacity to make people, do strange deeds. (14)

Malgudi is certainly little, but by no means miserable as Vasu of The Man Eater of Malgudi calls it "a miserable little place". It is so just because it is little. Here every one knows every one else. The happenings of the Temple or the Temple-elephant become matters of common concern. Here is no violence, no confrontation and no hostility. Even the Man-Eater at large is incapable

of being hostile to anybody.

"I could never be a successful enemy to any one. Any enmity worried me day and night. As a school boy I persistently shadowed around the one person with whom I was supposed to be on terms of hate and hostility. I feel actually uneasy as long as an enmity lasted ..... It bothered me like a toothache." (15)

Malgudi has its common tea-stall, the Muthu's tea-stall, which sells tea in unwashed tumblers. It does not refuse any of its customers. The adjournment lawyer has an outstanding credit with his Printers client, Natraj, but wants his own fee in cash everytime to move the court on his client's behalf. His office is not less realistic. It consists of just a chair for himself, a table and a shelf of law books. He used to have an asthmatic attack for a week after a legal consultation.

In Malgudi there is the forest officer with his collection of Golden Thoughts from The Bhagwad Geeta, The Upanishades, William Shakespeare, Mahatma Gandhi, The Bible, Emerson, Lord Avebury and Confusius. There are charitable people who suspect ill-motive of the tailor and his hand in Vasu's attempt to poison the elephant. There is Rangli, the temple dancer, who is black, most ugly and rugged but still seductive. The Veterinary Surgeon, Dr. Joshi has the same prescription for all the diseases of men or animals simply with the variation of dosages. Malgudi has its own trials and tribulations. The Malgudi Police Inspector does not pay

the bus fare to any bus conductor of Mempi Bus Transport Corporation. If he finds a seat no vacated for him, there is threat to the bus to be impounded at the next bus stop on the ground of over-crowding. The Sanitary Inspector is also a typical Malgudian.

His main business was to keep the city clean, a hard job for a man in a place like Malgudi where the individual jealously guarded his right to independent action.<sup>(16)</sup>

Malgudi also shows breaches in the joint family system, Natraj admits himself :

All the four brothers of my father with their wives and children, numbering fifteen, had lived under the same roof for many years. It was my father's old mother who had kept them together, acting as a cohesive element among the members of the family.<sup>(17)</sup>

Jagan is the sweets vendor of Malgudi. He is a genuine Gandhite. He plies Charkha every day even in his old age. Like Gandhijee he is dedicated to truth and non-violence. He believes in the ancient Indian culture. He is a believer in naturopathy. He is dead against hoarding black money. He believes in earning money by fair means. He is neither a cheat nor an adulterer in his business of sweets. If money is the root of all evils he finds the only way to deal with the evil to go to the root and he presents a solution to this problem by bringing down the price of sweets considerably. This Malgudia of Narayan has also generation gap which is sad and poignant. This wider gap of generation has the impact of the west

which is bound to separate the father and the son. But Jagan is completely free whereas Mali is the victim. In spite of hard striving for an understanding with Mali, Jagan manages to break away from the chains of paternal love and he is left to the abiding reality of Malgudi. Thus, Malgudi with its people, its climate and its value is real. Narayan establishes the intimate sense of reality in his saga of Malgudi. His chief concern is man and man's relationship in the society, a normal and uniform life. He makes us believe in the reality of Malgudi and to get into our imagination, we remember its existence for ever.

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R. K. Narayan's view of social reality is essentially Indian. He does not allow any political ideology to colour his vision of life. It finds expression through his characters, the plot of his novels, and their settings. The social, religious, and political ideas are important issues in the nineteenth century. The writers of the period could not ignore such vital problems. Reform in every social institution is essential so as to liberate people from the curses of ignorance and superstition. The artists endeavour to achieve this result through different mediums.

Indian society is divided into several sets of life and it is guided by 'Varnasramdharma' (a man's role and duties

according to his place in a scheme of castes and stages of life). Karma (the principle of deeds) is worked out both in this life and in successive births until the ultimate release from the cycles of rebirth. The hierarchy of values is classified as dharma (right action). Artha (worldly interest) and Kama (Human love). The fourth is Mokasha - which is salvation where this stage is reached a person does not have to undergo the travails of life and death.

All Hindus do not hold these beliefs in their scriptural form to the same extent. They also do not apply them to all situations, still these are always referred to and also taken for granted in institutions and rituals. The ideal division of man's life is; childhood, studenthood, the status of a house-holder and renunciation of the world. The every period is equally important. The happiness of life depends on the best use of all the periods. there are a few persons who renounce the world at the appointed time. As such the ideal of renunciation has a strong hold on the Hindu imagination.

'Varanasrama' (The idealised stages of life) viz. student, house-holder, pre-sanyasi and Sanyasi finds reference in Narayan. He gives psychological insights in describing these idealised role. In his maturer novels, we get a harper conflict of roles arising out of opposite values. Maragyya has to act as head of the family and as a financier. As the head of the family he maintains his respectability and as a financier he gets success through ignoble means. Rosie, in The Guide, is an example of fixed

roles. Vasu has taken an oath of smashing weak people. Mr. Sampath also follows the same pattern, his position from the average to the most distinguished brings him to the original position.

Generally, in an orthodox Hindu family, free communication between a girl and a boy before marriage is not allowed. These two never meet or talk before marriage their only contact is by way of optical communication. Narayan maintains this by giving the girl an imaginary name, an imaginary life and imaginary virtues :

"He wondered next what her name might be. She looked like one with the name of Lakshmi. Quite a beautiful name, the name of the goddess of wealth, the spouse of god Vishnu, who was the protector of creature".<sup>(18)</sup>

Marriage, is a social institution. It is in its ideal form, a unification of two souls into one. Narayan feels that caste, sects, sub-castes and communal divisions must go:

"If India was to attain salvation these water-tight division must go community, caste, sects, sub-sects, and still further division".<sup>(19)</sup>

Inspired by this ideal of marriage his Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts rises above such petty things and thinks of marrying Malathi whatever might be her caste.

Narayan exposes narrowness, conservatism, debauchery and fraud of the society which are the evils responsible for the

suffering of mankind. But he is always free from preaching and moralising. His middle-aged alcoholic and lecher Kailash in The Bachelor of Arts gets no sympathy from the readers. But his very presence in society tempts Chandran's involvement for the worst evil, prostitution. The tyranny of family life and arranged marriages is narrated with certain aims and objects. Here Narayan appears to defend the traditional class divisions.

Narayan expresses deep concern at the destruction of the sanctity of a marriage life and scandalous love affairs of a husband in The Dark Room.

His view of society is not based on illusions. It rather stands on the sound pillars of reality. His heroes are aware of social and political changes. His Savitri in The Dark Room does not spare her husband for his moral turpitudes:

"I am a human being. You men will never grant that. For you we are play things when you feel like hugging and slaves at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose."<sup>(20)</sup>

She revolts against the ways of her husband. She says :

"You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I cannot cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch". For the sake of her self-respect she can starve to death, but she cannot live with an impure husband:

She fears society. She voices concern at her performance. Whatever she is doing for her self-respect is not in accordance with the Hindu religion and tradition. She fears her position in her next birth. Her progressive idea of living under the 'open sky' comes to an end because she is a believer in religion and tradition. She is defeated :

"What despicable creatures of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support."  
(22)

Malgudi experiences fast changes. Its simple economy is progressively replaced by complex economy with banks and business concerns. The second world war has also affected the economy of Malgudi. In such a situation the role of a financial expert can never be ignored.

Narayan handles such social economic problems as catastrophe. Margayya, the Financial Expert, is tempted to accumulate wealth with a view to providing a bright future to his son, Balu. His financial acumen and dubious methods that he adopts for accumulating money simply demonstrate that he never cares for the society.

The Financial Expert records the changes in Malgudi life in terms of Margayya's phenomenal rise from a small financial adviser working under the Banyan tree to a financial wizard of ample means. Margayya's adventures are of course,

comic, for his downfall restores him back to the reality of his position in a hierarchical social order.

Through Margayya Narayan has represented the dishonest money-lenders and crafty people of the society; but we have his deeper view of social realism also.

Prostitution causes moral turpitude. It is even nasty to think about other women. Vasu, in The Man Eater of Malgudi, finds it necessary to satisfy his sexual appetites with the help of prostitutes and other degraded women of Malgudi. This adversely affects the social life of Malgudi. Narayan writes :

Sometimes a slim girl went by, sometimes a fair one, sometimes in between type, sometimes a fashionable one who had taken the trouble to tidy herself up a bit before coming out ... I had no notion that our town possessed such a varied supply of women. (23)

Quite in violation of the social codes, Vasu's ~~egoism~~ and / sadism disturb the serenity of Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi community including Vasu's mistress is morally against him. As A. N. Kaul has pointed out that in the midst of this solid reality, Vasu becomes not impotent, but unreal. The unreal has no place in Malgudi, which always stands for the real. After the clouds have gone, Malgudi is once again its old

self. Vasu, the domonic preserce that has threatened the peace loving orthodox community of Malgudi meets his ordained end. But during this brief period of Malgudi's life Narayan has carved out a brilliant human comedy out of the fear and faith of an innocent people nurtured on the hoary traditions of India.

The Man Eater of Malgudi offers a panorama of the Ancient and the Modern juxtaposed together. Once again we are in that placid atmosphere of the small town Malgudi. There are discussions on Nehru's Third Five Year Plan and other harmless political and social topics.

Narayan's treatment of the social aspect of Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets is to depict the traditional life of an Indian, who at last leaves his life as householder and businessman to save his soul from social degradation and mockery. Narayan favours Jagan's actions and advocates for a traditional way of life. He is also instrumental in changing eccentricity into genuine renunciation. In both The Financial Expert and The Vendor of Sweets there is a complete breakdown of communication between two generations, represented by conflict between the father and the son.

Narayan presents in The Guide the complex and tragic figure of society suffering to purify the sins of others. In the end his tragic hero, Raju, becomes the reality. The metamorphosis

of Raju from a petty vendor to a tourist-guide, from a fateful lover to a desperate prisoner, and from a 'Sanyasi' (Saint) to a martyr is a kind of escapism from society.

Raju, reared in the ancient Indian tradition is lured by the glamour of the new way of living. His degeneration accompanies his defiance of Malgudi's time-honoured social codes. Whether any tangible result has been achieved or not by the penance of Raju, is immaterial. More important is that the individual has sought his salvation according to the great Indian tradition.

Raju's metamorphosis is suggestive of Narayan's affirmation in the old values. The changes in Malgudi and also in the characters are confined to the surface and at bottom it is only the age-old spirit of India that sustains their existence, restoring to them the vital life force even on the brink of their destruction.

Narayan probes the attitudes of both on the sound footings of social obligations and gives the readers an understanding that matrimonial advertisement of the newspaper cannot prove healthy for marriages in Indian Society. Such marriages are rather disastrous and never fruitful. In our society our age-long customs and rituals of marriage can bring hopes and happiness for the married couple. Here the Westernised marriage system has been ridiculed. Narayan believes that Indian institution of marriage is superior to that of the West. Rosie reacts and confesses to Raju "I would have preferred any kind of mother-in-law, if it has meant one real, live husband."

Narayan treats forgery as the most sinister thing in society. It can solve the social hurdle and can enhance the economic position but the result is disasterous and catastorphic.

Narayan portrays the helplessness of women in society. Rosie of The Guide has been denied the privilege to grow into a perfect womanhood. When she gets it at the hand of Raju she is once again deceived.

Narayan is traditional in his approach and whatever falls short of it is not approved of by him. But he is always detached and never preaching. As a conscientious artist he soon resumes the narrative with usual gusto without any suggestion for improvement anywhere. Over propaganda is none of the concern of the novelist. He only conceives the social values.

He portrays domestic life, morality and commercialism. He is not satisfied with the mental make-up of the people in general. He points out that commercial instinct ruins the moral of a man. He deals with this question in most of his novels. He is aware of the social and individual taints. There are also small issues of social nature in his novels. The changing social life is a sort of historical document. He socialises human emotions and he does it on two counts - socialisation and moralisation, but views them from a distance quite dispassionately. His social problems are ever engaging. His social anxiety remains largely aesthetic in his approach to the material he deals with. His treatment of economic

and commercial motives has subsidiary importance. He has an eye on 'Sadhus' (Saints) cheating the people in the country. A holy man in the country is not always holy. India is flooded with the so-called holymen. Narayan has spot-lighted this social evil. We realise that the man is greater still for man does not hide even the ugly facts of his life. The confession of guilt and proper penance to undo this can make the life of a man nobler.

The social evil rises to heights but speeds down very soon. This sudden change of social evil is the result of social consciousness of our Indian culture which is superior to the other cultures of the world. Narayan feels that a simple life free from the greed of money can be much happier than that of a person infested with it. False glamour and cheap popularity is not permanent and it leads to ruin. The shallow social values are responsible for the fall of a man. He keeps on scrutinising the social temper of the time while working as an artist. The behaviour of the community receives his full attention but it never hampers the art impulse. His subjectivity does not interfere with his objectivity. He nowhere peeps from behind the curtain while describing social problems. He watches the series of events passionately. An image is not allowed to intervene his creative effort to paint the social milieu. He casts numerous shades on the social aspect of Malgudi and its people. He has also control over the situations. He does not let any one of them go without proper description of treatment. They remain firmly within his grasp. They act in the way the novelist wills them to act. For

For social values, he enters the skins of his character and gives them individuality and brushes aside the public opinion with courage. For other writers, it would have taken a lot of courage to execute such a thing. In the very start of his novels he conceals the social motive and the purposes with an admirable wearing of mask on his face. It is very rarely that he is tempted to peep through the pages. His own view of society does not matter much and the emotions also do not explode anywhere. He has hardly anything to preach. He works out the details -- the workings of society or the social conditions in the form of art pattern. This is simply his art impulse and not his social philosophy.

Narayan is simply an analyst of individual feelings, emotions and actions and an explorer of human conflicts. He keeps very close to surface reality and his aim of writing is to give a picture of society that strikes him as typical of everyday reality. It is, of course, true that the aim of art is an understanding which comprehends all forms and creeds. Narayan feels that understanding cannot be gained by blindly accepting all or a section of existing forms and creeds.

Narayan's novels are the expression of various problems of middle class society in which he has been all absorbed. The balance between his characters and society is well maintained. They are more the pictures of a society than simple characters in which an individual does not feel himself in opposition to the collective responsibility of the society. The novelist himself is an integral part of it. But he never puts himself in conflict with his characters. His

characters are types. They symbolise wisdom, courage, loyalty, and treachery. They deal with the weal and woe of the individuals in their private life.

Sometimes there is struggle of the individuals against society, against nature and the social way of life. But they cannot live without society in which myth and reality are indistinguishable and the time is without terror. Narayan has seen people and society in their true colour. He is critical and ironical. He analyses them like a scientist. It shows that his characters and their problems are incapable of solution within their society, but they surrender to their respective lot.

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Malgudi exists on two dimensions simultaneously -- the age-old values and beliefs that have gone deep down the Indian psyche shaping its cultural and emotional outlook and the new way of living that the Western notions of economic progress have forged. Grandmothers, uncles and aunts with their rigid caste system, their innumerable religious rituals are finely counterpoised against the new generation represented by Mali, Balu, Dr. Pal and others. Malgudi emerges as a comic amalgamation of the old and the new, of ancient temples and modern hotels and becomes an image of the incongruities involved. "Malgudi is an Indian small town and stands at a nicely calculated comic distance between the East and the West ... Just as the true tragedy of

colonialism lay in the culturally untouched but economically ravaged Indian countryside, the true comedy of this same historical fact was to be observed in the Indian small town". Behind the fact of this comedy, Narayan presents the poetry of the life of an entire community.

Into this small South Indian town with its orthodox values, the modern civilization comes in all its manifestations raising a flutter here and there, disturbing the quiet waters of Malgudi life. Malgudi gives Narayan the comedy of deviation and disturbance of the normal .... the comedy in the novels after 1946 depends very much on the abnormal outside influence with the placidity of the town. Even under colonial subjugation, the Malgudi of earlier years has not woken up to the sinful living of the modern civilization and like Swami, Malgudi is still in its adolescence. The smugglers' arcade that we notice down the Market Road in The Painter of Signs is not there in Swami and Friends. In the 1930s Malgudi has not registered these drastic changes and except the peculiarities of the teachers, the funs and quarrels among children, the car ride and the cricket club, Malgudi presents no other visible features of Western influence.

As years advance, Swami tells his grandmother about cricket and Tate. This mutual reciprocity between two generations marks an unadulterated Malgudi existence. But with the growth of years, there develops, gradually, a gulf between these two generations.

Malgudi awakening to the excitement of the new civilization. In such a context, there are the history association and the endless debates of the college union, Gajapathy's distaste for post-Eighteenth century literature and his dismissal of Shaw, Wells and Galworthy, Brown's humour and the English club, the second show cinema with coffee and cigarettes. Malgudi is suddenly lifted from the docility of a conventional life to the excitement of a new living.

Malgudi stands for the Real. Any deviation from it only results in a comic scene, and characters, ordinary as they are, are bound to come back to the folds of Reality, that is Malgudi. The illusions of the modern the West, no more exist and Malgudi alone appears Real with its traditional way of living. The movement from Swami and Friends to The English Teacher is a progress from the innocent pleasures of childhood to the wisdom of a mature adult. The comic note that is perceived in the Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts is markedly absent in The English Teacher. The Indian background in this novel is envisaged in terms of the grave and serious Hindu metaphysics. The novel confines itself to domestic and then later to a metaphysical plane, as a result of which the trivialities that go to make up the boisterous Malgudi life in all other novels, are conspicuously absent here.

The idea of The Age of Reason that Raman advances in The Painter of Signs seems hardly tenable in the context of our awareness of the ancient beliefs and practices. In The English Teacher, one, of course, misses the fun and laughter typical of Narayan's fiction. The

economic progress and the various expansions and advancements of Malgudi in The Dark Room result in a corresponding erosion in traditional values and a fast adoption of the new style of living. From the quiet small town of Swami and Friends or of the childhood years of Raju in The Guide, Malgudi swiftly changes into a commercial centre. The transformation of a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, the emergence of 'The Banner' and The Sunrise Studio and various other things speak of an awakening in the economic and cultural areas of the Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi has been caught up in a frenzy in response to such awakening. But despite all this, the old ways continue to affect the life of Malgudi.

A political theme blended with a romantic one characterizes Waiting for the Mahatma. Malgudi is caught in the political current of the country; but what we find here is very much a tame Malgudi with its usual fervour and gaiety conspicuously absent. The novel operates on two planes - the political and the romantic. Malgudi, as our experience has proved it, is no field for any of these passions. That is why, the action instead of confining itself to Malgudi alone, stretches far beyond to the villages and to Delhi. The Sriram-Bharati romance cannot function in the normal course of even partly because of the orthodox barriers of Malgudi and partly because the 'ideals' dominate the character of Bharati, as in the case of Daisy in The Painter of Signs. For such romance to fruition, the sanction of the Mahatma is needed, who embodies the grand Indian

tradition.

In the interaction of various forces, Malgudi positively has lost much of its virginity. A backward glance over the years enables us to see an innocent, idyllic Malgudi in the childhood years of Raju. The details of this memorable past and of the successive changes are transparently true to life. By means of these details Narayan weaves a cultural, social, economic and emotional complex from which the individual emerges with his dreams and aspirations only his way to salvation. The focus is on the individual as well as on the milieu from which he comes, thus leading to a total impression.

A chronological study of R. K. Narayan's novels helps us to realize the temporal changes that have come over Malgudi over the years and the eternal spirit that has withstood all such changes. Amidst all the manifestations of change, there is somewhere an ancient home or temple, a grandmother or an aunt. In the Malgudi of Swami and Friends the anxieties and tensions of the modern changes are not prominent. Yet afterwards, "the comparative calm of the thirties is gone, or is going : we are heading towards the war and the post-war years of hectic striving, chronic uncertainty, expense of spirit and lust in action". In this twilight world of Malgudi, old values still persist, old customs are still observed in all their religious details. In the outskirts or Malgudi, the villages with their ancient way of living are

viewed as the repository of the orthodox traditions and they are closely interwoven with the Malgudi existence. Though Malgudi has come under the blandishments of the new civilization, the silent, hidden self of Malgudi still holds dear the traditional values of life.

Malgudi is an intimate part of Narayan's experience. The disintegration of joint family, the emergence of a middle class, the rise of economic individualism are some of the accompanying factors of the modern civilization that Narayan himself has experienced. These are vividly portrayed in his autobiographical works. Narayan's concern is with the middle class and it is this class which oscillates between the Old and the New. The middle class hero loses the illusory to gain the real. Raju, Balu, Mali, all middle class youths, in their attempts to gain independence (which is feature of the modern age of democracy and individualism), economic as well as social, get isolated from everything. As years pass by, changes are bound to occur. These changes reflected in the Malgudi milieu are noted in minute details and the unique human responses to such changes have been sympathetically viewed in all these novels. Compared to Swami and Friends, the Malgudi of The Painter of Signs or A Tiger for Malgudi, is much altered; its virginity and intimacy have given place to a shocking impersonality. Yet the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley who has built this town years ago still remains. The Sarayu river still flows on as

it has been doing since time immemorial. On her sand Swami played; Gandhiji spoke to the people of Malgudi; Krishnan buried his wife, and Raman now paints his signboards.

CHAPTER - II

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