

Chapter: 4

The Representation of Region in R. K. Narayan's Novels

This fourth chapter concentrates on R. K. Narayan's novels that reflect region to elaborate on the representations of regionality. It analyzes the varied forms of Malgudi region and shows how Narayan is able to transform a particular limited region into a symbol of India and its life. Though fictitious, yet Narayan's region of experience represents South Indian culture, Hence, the historical outline of this region is also incorporated in the chapter. The study of characters, the customs, beliefs, superstitions, social evils, socio-cultural life, natural calamity, freedom movement, language, style and life philosophy, etc. integrated in this section define the regional dimensions of native consciousness reflected in Narayan's creative world.

Before interpreting Narayan's region, the facts regarding the South India must be known, i.e. the history associated with the region should be located first to be familiar with the locale or backdrop represented. Narayan represents the South India. Presently, it has been transformed into four states. South India had a huge expansion of land and had experienced the rising and falling of a number of dynasties and empires in course of time. Surveying *A History of India*, South India has been placed among the great ancient empires of India. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermand observe that South India is separated from North India by the Vindhya Mountains and the Narmada River and large tracts of barren and inhospitable land. The Deccan particularly the central and western highlands and the 'far south', the Dravida country had a history of its own. While screening the geopolitics of this region, they state that the history of south India was determined by the contrast of highland and coastal lowland. At the height the early medieval period this became very obvious when the great regional kingdoms of the southwest (Pallavas and Cholas) and the western highlands (Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas) vied with each other for the control of the large

rivers flowing from west to east. The fertile delta of Krishna and Godavari was particularly coveted by rival powers. South India was known 'a rich land' in ancient times. According to the Bible, King Solomon may have sent his ships once every three years carrying gold, silver, ivory, monkeys and peacocks. Megasthenes reported that in the late 4th century BC the wealth of the Pandya rulers was derived from the trade with pearls. The ancient geographers like Ptolemy in the second century AD mentions not only the ports of southern India, but also the capitals of rulers located at some distance from the coast. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermand mention that the pattern of gradual penetration of the hinterland of the southeast coast is clearly reflected in ancient Tamil literature. In the texts of the Sangam period five eco-types (tinai) are mentioned again and again. These five types are the mountains, forests and pastures, dry, barren land, the valleys of the great rivers and the coast. It was initially assumed that Shatavahanas and Kharavela dynasties emerged soon after the decline of the Maurya Empire around 185 BC, but more recent research seems to indicate that they arose only around the middle of the first century BC. The early history of the 'far south' is the history of the three tribal principalities of the Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras mentioned in Ashoka's inscriptions of the 3rd century BC (written in Brahmi script like the Ashokan inscriptions) and in Kharavela's inscription of the 1st century BC. At the end of the Sangama era the development of the three southern kingdoms was interrupted by the invasion of the Kalabharas. It ended only when the Pallava dynasty emerged as the first major regional power of South Indian history. A similar process occurred when the Hoysalas, a highland tribe, emerged at the time when the Chola Empire declined (98-108).

During the medieval era, Muslim kingdoms arose in South India. To resist the dominance of Muslim power, the Empire of Vijayanagar was established in the early 14th century. K. A. Nilakant Sastri in *A History of South India* observes that starting on its career a decade earlier than the Bahmani kingdom that of Vijayanagar became the focus of resurgent

Hindu culture which offered a more successful resistance to Islam in this part of the country than anywhere else. The task of Vijayanagar was thus to conserve Hindu society and save it from the dissolution which threatened it from several directions (8-9). The Southern empires found helpless against the Europeans power arrived during the 16th century CE. They were forced to accept the Europeans dominance. The British set up the Madras Presidency covering the most of South India directly under the British Raj. Hence, during the colonial period the whole region of South India, was divided into the Madras Presidency and Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Cochin, Vizianagaram and a number of other minor princely states. After 1947, the linguistic formation offered South India a new structure and it was divided into four states namely: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. A South India remains is in the Mesolithic until 2500 BC. Microlith production is attested for the period 6000 to 3000 BC. The Neolithic period lasts from 2500 BC to 1000 BC, followed by the Iron Age, characterized by megalithic burials. Comparative excavations carried in Thirunelveli district and in northern India have provided evidence of a southward migration of the Megalithic culture (49-51).

Narayan's region of experience was Madras (Chennai). Coimbatore remained his sister's house where he used to spend his vacation while Mysore is the place where he received university education and also served as a clerk for some time. K.R.S. Iyengar shows the changing scenario of the town and opines that Malgudi can be mere Lalgudi no more, if ever it was; the old familiar taluka town has now acquired richer, more exotic, surroundings, without quite changing its essential self. Has Lalgudi merged with Yadavagiri to become Malgudi? (*Indian Writing in English* 363) Since Malgudi landscape or regional set up seems identical with such places. Lalgudi, a town in Tiruchirapalli district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, is located near Coleroon River and the river Ayyan Vaikal is passing through Lalgudi. While looking to the geographical set up of Coimbatore, it is situated on the bank of

the river Noyyal. It is also known as Kovai. Coimbatore, one of the major commercial centres has often been referred as the Manchester of South India. Situated in the West of Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore is surrounded by the Western Ghats mountain range in the western part while northern region covers the reserve forests and the Nilgiri Biosphere. The fictitious town Malgudi has a similar type of background, but to Narayan Malgudi has no other substitute. In ‘Author’s Introduction’ to his *Malgudi Days*, Narayan himself declares his Malgudi region as an imaginary region and a concept that broaden its appeal to reveal the universal perspectives:

I have named this volume *Malgudi Days* in order to give it a plausibly geographical status. I am often asked, “Where is Malgudi?” All I can say is that it is imaginary and not to be found on any map (although the University of Chicago Press has published a literary atlas with a map of India indicating the location of Malgudi). If I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India I shall only be expressing a half-truth, for the characteristics of Malgudi seem to me universal. Malgudi has been only a concept, but has proved good enough for my purposes. (8-9)

Narayan has not drawn any map of Malgudi to assign it a fixed geographical status. For whatever it stands, but one can imagine the South Indian culture into a form of Malgudi. Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* indirectly specifies Malgudi located in South India, where Swaminathan, the protagonist of the novel, while taking the examination, writes his address on the paper’s flap the elaborate inscription:

Tamil Tamil W. S. Swaminathan

1st Form A section

Albert Mission School Malgudi

South India Asia (71)

It represents an image of south Indian culture in all its walks, Hence, can be assigned a category of one of the towns belongs to South India.

What is the secret of a successful writer? What are the major sources of inspiration to him? What category of narration, method or language attracts the reader? Such questions are often raised while appreciating or examining the writer critically. It seems that all depends upon the careful selection of theme, language, locale, reader's mentality, the contemporary trend or the output which can either be social, political or religious.

Narayan's Malgudi:

The postcolonialism in literature appeals to the native cultural identity or concentrates on the regionality. The success of a novel often depends upon vigilant selection of a particular locale, which is rendered to locate the ideas of a writer to develop his fictional world. The novelist often seems narrowing or limiting particular region through which he visualizes the regional specialties of the selected land. Malgudi, the fictional, semi-urban town is the chosen land or imagined region by R. K. Narayan. The novelist has brought to light the features of common people of this region. Such region can either be a mental or geographical, but it has been conjured and settled in such a way as to represent any other place. The setting for most of his novels is the fictional town: Malgudi, which is conceptualized like the real place. The invention of various regions by writers has assigned them the status of 'Regional' writers. For example, Thomas Hardy's 'Wessex', Faulkner's 'Yoknapatawaha', Gaithe's 'Macondo', Phanishvaranath Renu's 'Purnia' and Pannalal Patel's 'Ishan' region have established the path of representing regionality in literature. R.K. Narayan too, well-known for his 'Malgudi', is very much considered the regional artist among the Indian Writers in English. P.P. Mehta in *Indo-Anglian Fiction* states, "The regional novel finds its full expression in R. K. Narayan" (199). The regional novel generally describes the physical features of the region, locality, its people and their life, customs, traditions, etc.

through which the general image of particular land is reflected. Likewise, Hardy's novels are 'novels of character and environment' also seems true in case of Narayan. Malgudi is the backdrop of his fictions and through the eyes of this region Narayan's characters are developed, assessed and pass through the trials of life. This region offers the author a sort of familiar confinement to base his fiction. Malgudi entered in Narayan's creativity like pre-settled site:

I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadashami, the day on which the Goddess of learning is celebrated. Malgudi was an earthshaking 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 banyan 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 the Malgudi station (Mehta, Ved 156).

The setting is vital to the story and it also becomes a character in itself. Mukharjee observes Malgudi's reality more recognizable in the following words:

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 (Khatri 165).

Narayan, while indicating the sources of his fictitious Malgudi, mentions its historical birth during an age of Lord Rama wherein Lord Buddha and Sage Shankaracharya visited in a later period while conducting their *paribrahaman* (travelling). Malgudi evolved with the changing political landscape of India. A good comparison to Malgudi, a place that Greene

characterized as “more familiar than Battersea or Euston Road”, is Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County (*The Hindu*)

Graham Greene states:

Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi? That is the thought that comes to me when I close a novel of Mr. Narayan’s. I do not wait for another novel. 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 haircutting 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 (Rangel-Ribeiro, May 15, 2001).

The narrator is a shrewd observer of the society from where he receives the design to frame his fiction. He serves as a guide to them and draws a picture of imaginary world in such a way that it looks like the real one. Narayan brought small-town of India to his audience in a manner that was both believable and experimental. Malgudi was not just a fictional town in India, but one teeming with characters, each with their own idiosyncrasies and attitudes, making the situation as familiar to the reader as if it were own backyard (Obituary: R. K. Narayan).

Chelva Kanaganayakam in his essay on “Revisiting Malgudi and Little India” remarks that Mulk Raj Anand in ‘Coolie’ and ‘Untouchable’ exposes social and political ills in the country. But Malgudi does provide the basis for a syncretic world that reveals the social and cultural pluralism of the nation. It is an imaginary construct, but not an improbable one. Narayan appropriates both spatial and temporal freedom by sidestepping the dictates of geography and history. The spatial freedom—namely the decision to create a world that is recognizably Indian without specific local markers – enables the symbolic and synecdochic function of Malgudi... Malgudi he presents masquerades as the real India, with a clearly

identifiable social and religious unity (*Mapping the Sacred Religion*. 320). As some of his characters like Raju, Natraj, Krishnan retains the balance between tradition and modernity in their life struggle to be adjusted with the current social set-up. Narayan replies when asked in an interview ‘Where does he like to live in India?’:

I like Madras because I was born there and because in Madras the ancient and Modern coexist. Some Madrasis are very orthodox. There are parts of the city where people with a traditional background in Sanskrit are still living (Narayan 236-37).

Narayan is frequently referred as a regional novelist because of depiction of single locale in most of his novels. His analysis of the idiosyncrasies of small town life has bestowed him good fame as novelist of social order. Walsh in *R. K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation* describes Narayan’s Malgudi a metaphor of India (6). Nirmal Mukherji too, in his *The world of Malgudi* has appended a map of Malgudi in his doctoral thesis, yet all the efforts to identify Malgudi have remained futile, for it is a pure country of the mind which does not actually exist on the map of India. Narayan’s concern seems more social than the topography of the region. Regional backdrop seems to shift towards the universal sphere in the course of time. The greater emphasis is laid upon assessing the customs, traditions and human relationships. Narayan might have thought that imaginary place would prove more beneficial than the real one as it offers more creative freedom according to the necessities of his fictional frame. Malgudi is like Hardy’s ‘Wessex’ region and a dream country in which physical features of various places are rearranged, modified and magnified. Whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere. Truly speaking, one cannot claim that Malgudi is the reflection of entire personality or image of a nation, but of course it represents the mainstream of the major aspects of native life in such a way that it remains the microcosm of the country. Even such vision can be extended to its wider sense or the world at large.

Narayan has transformed his restricted province Malgudi into a symbol of India and its routine life. The portrayal of this region has its general as well as specific appeal. William Walsh very appropriately remarks that Narayan's Malgudi novels are regional, but not parochial (7). Regionality is already woven facet in Narayan's novel, but mere limiting it to Malgudi province would be inaccurate because his characters are seen crossing those regional boundaries and have trans-regional appeal. To that extent, his vision has universal appeal. The Washington Post notes: "R. K. Narayan's Malgudi is a metaphor, not of India, but of the world" (*M.O.M.* 1). Michel Pousse in *R.K. Narayan: A Painter of Modern India* observes that "Malgudi is India and India is the world... This universal appeal comes from the author's humanism" (*xiii*). Malgudi and Malgudi humanity are the themes of his novels. It can be symbolized as the ideal specimen of urban and rural locality. Malgudi humanity is observed in each and every part of the country. Region, nation, people or culture varies, but human approach towards life has the same-like framework everywhere. The novelist constructs a small world within an imagined locale to represent his thoughts or life-philosophy of various cultures. It seems that confinement of locale serves as an essential tool for the writer.

It seems that Narayan himself is the creation of Malgudi because he has preferred to locate himself within this milieu in the form of confinement. Though, the state of such confinement is very dear to him and he loves to live in it. Malgudi is like a treasure house to him from where he could extract the latent magnificence of Indian culture and civilization. When the task of film-making based on his novel *The Guide* was initiated, the selection of Malgudi location was a big puzzle to filmmakers. Narayan narrates his experience in *My Days*, that in the beginning they (the filmmakers) went to great trouble to seek his advice, and he had spent a whole day taking them round Mysore to show the riverside, forest, village, and crowds, granite steps and the crumbling walls of an ancient shrine which combined to make

up the *Malgudi* of his story; they went away promising to return with crew and equipment, but never came back. He learnt subsequently that they had shifted the venue of *The Guide* to Jaipur and had already shot several scenes on a location as distant from *Malgudi* as perhaps Iceland. To add this, when he protested, they declared, “Where is Malgudi, anyway? There is no such place; it is abolished from this moment. For wide screen purposes, and that in colour, Jaipur offers an ideal background; we can’t waste our resources” (*My Days* 196-97). Narayan was very unhappy at that time because by exterminating the Malgudi, the filmmakers had discarded his milieu and human characteristics. Narayan completely disapproved the glamorous world and making a local star into a national figure. Even his attempt to draw Malgudi location was discouraged once by his uncle who showed his hatred for unknown place like Malgudi: “And what’s this *Malgudi*? Where is it? Why do you write about some vague place not found anywhere, while there are millions of real places you can write about? Don’t write about unreal places. You must read Dickens’ novels... There you have a model, write like him” (*My Days* 104). To Narayan the depiction of unknown place was a challenge to that extent, but Narayan could judge well his imaginary place to represent it like the real one.

Alexander McCall Smith in an ‘introduction’ to Narayan’s *My Days* observes the truth mirrored in the Malgudi milieu: “Malgudi provides the strong sense of place... This is India distilled – an urban India, but one in which a hinterland of jungle, of small villages, of wide plains is still present” (xi).

Narayan has shown Malgudi in a developing state. The gradual development of this region is reflected in all his novels. Narayan has caught the rhythm of this imagined region very rationally. Malgudi is viewed as one of the characters in all his novels. The journey of a school boy reaches to its climax in the form of matured school teacher in between the phase of his creativity. The semi-urban Malgudi is transformed into a modern Taluk place or city

like a province in his later novels. Narayan walks with the changing scenario of modern nations. K.S. Ramamurti notes in *Alien Voice*: “He lets us watch from novel to novel the growth of Malgudi...Its emergence from the peace and self assurance of the thirties to the more eventful and sensational years of the Gandhian and post independence period” (Srivastava 69). Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English* also observes Malgudi humanity through which one finds its association with any place: “Malgudi is Narayan’s ‘Casterbridge’, but the inhabitants of Malgudi – although they may have their local trappings – are essentially human, and hence, have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense, ‘Malgudi’ is everywhere” (360).

Here is the detailed sketch of Malgudi in Narayan’s novels:

Malgudi seems almost a day’s journey from Madras as shown in *The Guide* while in Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* it remains neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. The river Sarayu is considered the pride of Malgudi. It is some ten minutes walking from Ellaman Street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by oil mongers, its sandbanks are the evening resort of all the people of the town. The *peepul* branches overhanging the river rustle pleasantly. A light breeze plays about the boughs and scattered stray leaves on the gliding stream below. Birds fill the air with their cries. Far away, near Nallappa’s Mango Grove, a little downstream, a herd of cattle is crossing the river. And then a country cart drawn by bullocks pass, the cart-man humming a low tune. It is some fifteen minutes past sunset and there is a soft red in the west (13-14).

Each region, whether small or big, is labeled the cultural and sacred history of its own in India. People often recite the wonder and significance of particular places on several occasions. Raja Rao’s remark in the Foreword to his *Kanthapura* seems more interesting in this context:

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthalapurana*, or legendary history of its own. Some god-like hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grand-mother always bright. (5)

The birth of the river Sarayu is also associated with the myth of Lord Rama. The novelist has drawn a mythical truth of Indian cultural heritage in his novel *Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi*:

Rama was on his way to Lanka (Ceylon) to battle with evil there, in the shape of Ravana who abducted Sita... He rested on a sandy stretch in a grove, and looked about for a little water for making a paste for his forehead- marking. There was no water. He pulled an arrow from his quiver and scratched a line on the sand, and water instantly appeared. Thus was born Sarayu. (206)

Narayan through mythical tales seems to convey the message of non-violence. This is the region where two extremes are shown integrated. Here, Darwin's theory of 'survival of the fittest' or 'might is right' proves mistaken. Love for all, and refuge to weaker is the Vedantic wisdom. The great Shankara appeared during the next millennium saw on the riverbank a cobra spreading its hood and shielding a spawning frog from the rigour of the midday sun. He remarked: "Here is the extremes meet. The cobra, which is the natural enemy of the frog, gives it succour. This is where I must build my temple." He installed the goddess there and preached his gospel of *Vedanta*: the identity and oneness of God and His creatures. And then the Christian missionary came with his Bible. Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and

mansions appeared and disappeared. The entire country went down under the fire and sword of the invader, and was washed clean when Sarayu overflowed its bounds. But it always had its rebirth and growth (207). One of the tourists on his visit to Malgudi says that there was a small shrine on the peak right in the basin. It must be the source of Sarayu mentioned in the mythological stories of the Goddess Parvathi jumping into the fire; the carving on one of the pillars of the shrine actually shows the goddess plunging into the fire and water arising from the spot', et cetera. Ishvar Temple was in the North Extension- there were hundreds of minute carvings all along the wall (*The Guide* 57, 66). The Ishwara Temple of the tenth century has the carvings of the entire epic *Ramayana* along the wall. There was a little temple at the end of the Vinayak Mudali Street under a cracked dome. It was an inner shrine containing an image of Hanuman, the God of Power, and the son of wind. According to tradition, this God had pressed one foot on the very spot where the shrine stood, sprang across space and ocean and landed in Lanka (Ceylon), there to destroy Ravana, a king with ten heads and twenty hands, who was oppressing mankind and abducted Rama's wife Seetha (*F.E.* 33). The river Sarayu represents the nice portrayal of native culture. It remains the symbols of perpetuity.

The novelist describes the living picture of various streets and lanes of Malgudi: Kabir Street and Kabir Lane, Anderson Lane, Sarayu Street, Kulam Street, Vinayaka Mudali Street, Abu Lane, Ellaman Street (the last street). The region has been beautified through its Mempi Forest, Nallappa's Mango Grove, the Forest Road and the Trunk Road to Trichinipoly. Lawley Extension is named after the mighty engineer Sir Frederick Lawley, who was at one time the Superintending Engineer for Malgudi Circle, which consisted of Government officials. The Trunk Road to Trichinopoly passed a few yards in front of these houses (*S.A.F.* 28). Lawley Extension is the most fashionable residential areas of Malgudi town where the elite class, the government officials, doctors and engineers live. The Market Road is 'the life-

line of Malgudi' (*Mr. Sampath* 5). This is the place where Margayya, the protagonist of *The Financial Expert* uses to reside and has been referred 'crowded, noisy and dirty' locality.

Srinivas while writing his editorial on the housing policy for Malgudi notes that plenty of labour from other districts had been brought in because the municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building, and three or four cotton mills had suddenly sprung into existence. Overnight, as it were, Malgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, with a sudden influx of population of all sorts... The place was beginning to look more and more like a gipsy camp (*Mr. Sampath* 26). Mr. Sampath, while giving a history of the Sarayu Bridge and all its politics is of the view that the idea of putting up a bridge over the Sarayu was as old as humanity. Sarayu was one of the loveliest rivers in India ... an ornament as well as a means of irrigating tens of thousand acres. The wind of change spreads its wings initially in Malgudi when Mr. Sampath tells Srinivas that Mr. Somu, the District Board President is opening a bridge five miles from here across the Sarayu ... it is going to transform our entire Malgudi district.... This is going to be the busiest district in South India (*Mr. Sampath* 70-71).

There are many printing presses in the town: the Crown Electric, the City Power, Acharya Printing, Shape Printing Works, and so on and so forth (*Mr. Sampath* 68).

Malgudi shows the gradual development of the people and their economy. The construction of their houses is viewed very ordinary in the formal stage, which later on catches a modern look. For example, Raju while narrating his past says: "Ours was a small house opposite the Malgudi station. He (his father) chose this spot because it was outside the town and he could have it cheap. He had dug the earth, kneaded the mud with water from the well, and built the walls, and roofed them with coconut thatch" (*The Guide* 10). But when circumstances favour, Raju buys a spacious building, establishing the status of a wealthy man: "The stylish house at New Extension was more in keeping with our status. It was two-

storied, with a large compound, lawns, garden, and garage” (*The Guide* 186). In a later part of the novel the luxurious outward show of Malgudi life is shown when Rosie and Raju use to dine on the terrace of the Taj from where Sarayu is clearly visible. Raju utters the importance of Malgudi proudly thus: “Malgudi; I said had many things to offer, historically and scenically from the point of view of modern development” (*The Guide* 62).

There is the description of various villages which provide setting for many episodes. Tayur, Mangal, Kumbum, Sukkur and Koppal are the villages which figure prominently in the novels of Narayan. Sakkur village is consisted about a hundred houses and six streets. Around the village there are immense stretches of paddy fields (*D.R.* 119). Mangal equally symbolizes the typical of rural India where one finds the thatched huts and muddy lanes, and women having water-pots on their head, no schooling system for children and poverty peeping out of their doors. Talapur is a to some extent larger town than Mempi and is regarded as an important junction near Malgudi. Though, the existing scenario of Indian villages is far better than the past one. The majority of the facilities are now available in rural areas too, and the villages move uniformly with the town life.

During summer Malgudi is described as one of the most detested towns in the South India, where the heat goes above a hundred and ten in the shade sometimes... Even donkeys and dogs, the most vagrants of animals, prefer to move to the edge of the streets, where catwalks and minor projections from buildings cast a sparse strip of shade, when the fierce sun tilts towards the west (*S.A.F.* 90). The colonial governance too contributed to enrich the Malgudi region by implementing certain welfare schemes. While passing the New Extension Raju, the Guide points out, without even turning his head, “Sir Frederick Lawley...The man left behind by Robert Clive to administer the district. He built all the tanks and dams and developed this district. Good man’. Hence, the statue” (*The Guide* 137).

From *Swami and Friends* to *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Narayan reveals new vistas of life. The small town Malgudi seems to change in the course of time. Narayan through Malgudi brings the realistic experience and enlarges such experiences to global limit. Malgudi has been trying to achieve multifarious progress in all walks of life to awaken modernity. Narayan has woven together the eastern and western cultural trends in his novels. He has interwoven the two sorts of history for his region: human and superhuman or divine, the natural and the supernatural. The mythical truths stand side by side the existing state. The native and the alien flavors are intermingled into one region. The locale is requisite to locate the theme and draw residents, as a character without plot cannot be developed, similarly region or locale serves an essential tool to develop the novel incorporating region. The exceptional spirit is generated by the writer to symbolize the places and its people. Amitav Ghosh's valedictory tribute to Narayan truly reflects the spirit of Malgudi life: "His Malgudi has already become a part of the mythic landscape of India... a place where no event is without meaning, and no pain is without remedy" (*Outlook* 58).

Narayan's friend and the editor of *Frontline*, N. Ram opines that Narayan's art receives the universal appeal visualized through the symbolic life of South Indian people:

Narayan had a special ability to make the rhythms, intricacies, and humanism of South Indian life accessible to people all over India, and indeed to the people of other cultures round the world. Central to this achievement was Malgudi, the fictional South Indian town, which he peopled with ordinary men and women, made memorable with his art (Prasad 82).

The rendering of characters like Swami, Krishna, Chandran, Raju, Natraj, Jagan, Ramani, Savitri or Suseela and numerous secondary characters epitomize the real replica and identity of Indian life. These multiple ranges of characters are easily recognizable. Narayan, through skilled art, has used the myth to focus reality which remains straightforwardly comprehensive.

The preaching from *Bhagavad-Gita*, the mythology of Hindu civilization and religious or cultural practices and beliefs offer vitality to the fictional art of the novelist. According to Narayan's *God, Demons and Others*:

Even the legends and myth, as contained in the Puranas... are mere illustrations of the moral and spiritual truths enunciated in the Vedas... each form a part and parcel of a total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four-square understanding of existence... The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. (2)

Narayan has conveyed the philosophy by shaping the rich inheritance of Indian ethnicity and the traditionally woven perception. His' studying of deep insight into human culture and its relationship defines the ideals of Indian civilization. The sources of his creativity remain the Holy Scriptures like: the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* through which he has scrutinized the true concept of Indian distinctiveness. Paul Brains judges Narayan's fiction to be read as postcolonial reading. He opines that Narayan's exclusive emphasis on the private lives of his characters to the total exclusion of the public (even the British) is a 'willful neglect of colonialism or even an act of liberation from it' (Allot 215).

In his first novel, Narayan portrays the pen-picture of Swami who represents the child psychology as well as the background of the schooling system in various regions. The child hardly prefers to approach school because unknown fear haunts him frequently. Narayan also focuses on the wretched condition of the parents who prevent their children from going to school especially in Indian villages. Owing to poverty, the parents engage them in agriculture, cattle-grazing or labour work to earn bread. When Raju investigates the matters, he seems upset. He tries to explicate the poor villagers that "Boys must read first..." (*The*

Guide 44). The character sketch of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* depicts the educated youth facing the problem of unemployment, their dreams, aspiration and disharmony with familial tie and ultimate sense of compromising the circumstances. His aimless wandering as a *Sanyasi* and the ultimate return to Malgudi as a submission to fate seem the symbolic force of Indian traditional values. *The Dark Room* illustrates the oppression of woman by a male dominated culture. Patriarchy in a form of Ramani, suffocates dependent Savitri. The house becomes a dark room for her, but she suffers the blows calmly. Though, tries to commit suicide, but rescued and ultimately returns to save her family: "What despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without a support" (*B.O.A.* 146). Savitri represents the true self of Indian womanhood. Ramani, her husband calls her a dutiful wife! And adds that she would rather starve than precede her husband and she is really like some of the women in our ancient books" (*B.O.A.* 11). She cannot be Nora of Ibsen's *Doll's House*. She is forced to compromise the circumstances as she remains the victim of male-hegemonic past tradition. Shantabai, the coquettish woman proves rather stronger than Savitri. She has left her husband because she cannot be a mere silent sufferer against his ill-treatment. She is an educated woman yet feels insecurity in her existence. She denies the sense that the liberation of woman is only possible through education: "It is all non-sense to say that women's salvation lies in the education. It doesn't improve their lot a bit; it leaves them as badly unemployed as the men (*B.O.A.* 51). Ramani proves his heartlessness symbolizing the patriarchal roots. He is shown a mean and debauch character representing the corrupt class, who prefer free sex life. The name Savitri itself suggests her mythical identity whose sacrifice can perform a miracle by bringing her dead husband alive even from the gate of (*Yamllok*) death. The English Teacher, Krishna shows to some extent different personality, who even after receiving English education could neither adjust nor fully receives the contentment in his personal life. Though, the shock of his wife's early death makes him upset completely. His ultimate

consolation is searched in teaching the small children. It seems that Swami, Chandran and Krishna are in one single form or personality having resemblance at three different stages of life: Swami shows childhood, Chandran stands for youth or immaturity while Krishna comes in the form of maturity. The character of Swami is brought to its perfection in the form of Krishna showing the three different stages of life in an Indian setting, i.e. *Balyavastha* (childhood), *Kishoravastha* (of minor stage) and *Yuvavastha* (youth).

In the second phase of writing, Narayan portrays the sketches of Sampath, Margayya and Raju. They become the mouth speech of the novelist. Mr. Sampath is a complicated personality who possesses qualities like kindness, sincerity, ingenuity and honesty. He welcomes Srinivas warmly in his press to sustain the sense of hospitality and justifies the domestic cultural values: "When a customer enters our premises, he is in our view, a guest of the Truth Printing works. Well, you think The Banner is yours. It isn't. I view it as my own" (*Mr. Sampath* 87). He performs his work as worship and treats his guest as god: *Atithidevo Bhavah*. Srinivas remains unworldly in his approach, even impressed by Shanti and gets ready to marry her. The young artist Ravi too, infatuated with the beauty of Shanti has gone mad later on. Margayya is considered the invention of war and post-war years, which is evident by scarcity of all kinds of goods. His personality introduces aspiration, ingenuity, and cunningness. He represents an image of materialistic that makes money through unlawful means. His thirst for money even brings disaster in the form of his son and disturbs his family attachment. Graham Greene describes the character sketch of Margayya as the most engaging of Narayan's characters. Narayan's third invention in this category is the character of Raju, who also represents thirst for money. The desire to earn more money inspires him to commit forgery and leads him towards fall. Narayan has conveyed the truth through these three characters that too much greed fetches destruction. 'Too much greed is the source of sin' is

traditionally uttered reality. Narayan has defined the influence of money and beauty and symbolized to what extent such things substantiate adversity.

Jagan, the sweet vendor emphasizes the Gandhian philosophy demonstrating an Indian ideology on the contrary; his spoiled son Mali symbolizes the western culture discarding the age-old values. The clash between the two cultures ultimately generates the disorder. Similarly, Natraj of *The Man-eater of Malgudi* favours the non-violence, observing the religious norms cited in the Holy Scriptures, while H. Vasu: the taxidermist is the product of money-oriented world. He represents the mythical character Bhasmasur, who had destroyed himself. Narayan favours the sayings from *Bhagavad-Gita: Yatodharmahstatojayh* (where there is a religion, there is a triumph). Natraj tries to harmonize the tradition with modernity as he prints books, saves innocent creatures like an elephant as well as organizes temple festivals to celebrate the marriage of Radha and Krishna and preserves nuclear family.

The female characters like Rosie (Nalini), Shantabai and Shanti remain the symbols of beauty towards which the male class is simply tempted and excited to be owned. Though, Rosie's attitude shows her love for classical dance and hers is not an abandoned status like Shantabai or Shanti. She shows her protest when she feels that her familial ties would smother her art. Simply looking, circumstances or evil predicament escorts them to link so-called uncivilized culture.

All the characters portrayed by Narayan are viewed under three categories: simple, complex and bizarre characters. The characters like Swami, Chandran, Krishna, Srinivas and Natraj can be judged under the first category. They are shown kind, straightforward and thoughtful, but lack self- confidence. Though, they seem determined, but could not act upon the desired chore. The second category covers the characters like Ramani, Margayya, Raju, Mr. Sampath and H. Vasu. Their outlook towards life seems intricate, i.e. they remain impetuous, unpredictable or mystifying in their ways. Their ultimate goal is moneymaking by

hook or crook. They are shrewd and seem determined to achieve their desired end anyhow. Though, their individual characteristics make them different than each other. The characters of Marco, Kailash and Verraswami can be treated under the third category called grotesque or bizarre characters. These characters leave their impression as fascinating eccentrics. Similarly, female characters of Narayan's novels fall under two sets: the ideal housewives and unconventional women. Savitri, Krishna's mother, Raju's mother and the mother of Chandran should be considered ideal housewives as they possess qualities like modesty, gentility and obedience. Their effort is to manage religious, traditional and domestic values of Indian culture and ultimate concern is the welfare of the family. The women like Rosie, Shanti, Shantabai and Rangi can be placed into second group, i.e. unconventional one. They neither care for tradition nor chastity in their way of life. Theirs is the professional approach. Though, each of these characters varies in nature and viewpoint then the rest.

Some of the subsidiary characters like the forest officer, the doctor, the veterinary officer and the police inspector represent slightly comic, local image of Malgudi life. It seems that Malgudi is the treasure house of the world literature where the forest officer is having a collection of *Golden Thoughts* translated into Tamil from *The Bhagavad-Gita*, *The Upanishads*, William Shakespeare, Mahatma Gandhi, *The Bible*, Emerson, Lord Avebury and Confucius. He wishes to bring them out in book form and distribute such rich heritage among school children, free of cost and this is how he wants to serve the country. He is shown as the sentinel of the prosperous tradition of ancient culture. Through the character sketch of the veterinary surgeon and the police inspector (circle), Narayan shows his wit and mocking approach. The inspector has influence over the rest of the people. He has always a reserve seat in the bus: "If another passenger occupied it, it was a matter of social courtesy to vacate it or at least move up closer to the driver and leave enough space at the end of the seat of circle" (*M.O.M.* 48) while Dr. Joshi prescribes the same remedies for any diseases to all:

“Most animals and men are alike, only the dosage of a medicine differs” (*M.O.M.* 107). The bus conductor of Malgudi seems witty character who insists the discipline to be strictly observed in bus service: “I am not stopping for more than five minutes; if anyone is left behind he will be left behind, that’s all. I warn you all, don’t blame me later” (*M.O.M.* 46). But the passengers never care his threat to follow.

Hence, the novelist has shaped his characters noticeable, showing their attachment to the old ways with the use of colloquial speech and by particular traits central to the region. Narayan’s characters prefer to survive in their natural world. The note of endurance varies from person to person, but their ultimate approach is to pursue the established tradition to manage harmonies in social life. Some of them tries to protest against the rigid formation of the society, but proves feeble towards the end. His characters grow and develop from common to high-ranking status and finally return to a customary stage. In context to this, it has been remarked very appropriately: “Narayan’s characters are fully alive in their doubts, their affections and aspirations-concern shown with assumed carelessness, Hindu customs observed as often as they are ignored, shown with gentle and wry humour. The reader enters a subtle and rewarding world bright with the colour of difference” (*B.O.A.* cover page).

Whatever happens in India happens in Malgudi. Malgudi is no exception. The customs or beliefs in social framework are natural threads woven since the earlier period in Indian cultural history. Man is considered the product or part and parcel of society, where society judges his actions, attitudes or manners. The traditions woven into a social framework inspire and influence its people in general. R.K. Narayan too, seems traditionalist who exercises to apply a diversity of beliefs observed in Indian culture. The appeal may either be universal or local, but through such narratives we come to know the cultural range of a particular region or nation. The sense of perception is set behind such beliefs. In course of time they vary. They do not have fixity of structure. What seems useful today can prove un-methodical or

useless tomorrow is equally true. Even though, customs or beliefs bear valuable preaching through which virtues and morals are justified. Narayan's center of interest is Hindu religious beliefs where a faith in God performs its vital function. The well-known critic V. Pandurang in 'The Art of R. K. Narayan' appreciates Narayan's art in the following words: "Narayan is a writer with full commitment to certain spiritual and religious values and ideas, with which Indians are normally familiar" (Ramtake xxii).

Jagan, the sweet vendor does not eat beef because the cow is worshipped and treated a sacred animal in Hindu culture: "The Shastra defined the five deadly sins and the killing of a cow headed the list" (V.O.S. 57). It is prohibited in sermons. Slaughtering of cow is considered a sin since Vedic culture. Swami condemns Jesus for being non-vegetarian. He is of the opinion that an ideal Brahmin should purely be a vegetarian. Sriram of *Waiting for the Mahatma* remarks: "I have not even eaten cakes because they contain eggs" (195). A Brahmin's whole body jerks with disgust at the very thought of non-vegetarian diet. Sriram, as a pious soul never eats meat or eggs nor drink alcohol. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* shows his true Brahminic identity. When he is offered alcohol by Kailas, he rejects the proposal soon: "I made a vow never to touch alcohol in my life, before my mother" (98). These words even impress Kailas very much and soon he realizes the importance of mother in one's life: "As long as my mother lived she said every minute 'Do this. Don't do that.' And I remained a good son to her. The moment she died I changed. It is a rare commodity, sir. Mother is a rare commodity" (99). Sriram's Granny does not prefer to sit in a canvas chair because she believes that canvas is made of leather, perhaps of the cow-hide (W.F.M. 20). Natraj observes the norms of non-violence in a strict sense. He is frustrated with Vasu's slaughtering of innocent animals in *The Men-Eater of Malgudi*. He claims: "I had been brought up in a house where we were taught never to kill" (60). Natraj remains the protector as well as promoter of value system ingrained in Indian philosophical thought. Garuda is

thought of ‘the sacred animal and messenger of God Vishnu’ (59). People pay the due reverence while watching it encircling in the sky. In Indian scriptures each deity has his/her vehicle assigned (as a means of transportation), i.e. Garuda with Vishnu, the mouse is with Ganesh and Goddess Amba keeps a tiger as her vehicle. The caring and worshipping of the natural world among Indian has been practiced since the Vedic period.

People use to spend their old-age in visiting holy places. It is generally believed that if one visits such places with owing reverence; he is sure to receive emancipation from the sins committed during the whole life. Taking a bath in the holy river Ganga clears out their course of the journey to heaven after death. Banaras (Kashi) is called such a sacred place where people use to spend their spared life and prefer to die in its lap. Sriram’s Granny passes the concluding days of her life at Banaras: “She is in Banaras with a number of others, old persons who are waiting to die. They cheerfully await their death, and look forward to the final fire and the final ablution in the sacred Ganges” (W.F.M. 203).

It is a well-known custom in India that barren couples vow to God to perform *Pujas* or offer their valuables, if they are blessed with children. For example, Margayya prays for a son and takes a vow to offer his weight in silver rupees to the lord of Tirupati. He fulfills his promise by visiting the lord after the birth of Balu. Jagan, the sweet vendor goes to Badri hills with his family where his wife seeks the blessing of Santhana Krishna. Jagan believes that this faith has blessed him a son Balu within a year of his pilgrimage.

The religious customs like ‘tonsure ceremony’ is also mentioned in Narayan’s novel *The Vendor of Sweets*. Jagan’s cousin says that he has gone to Tirupati for a tonsure ceremony with the judge’s family. This act shows the complete surrender of man to God. In this ceremony one offers his/her hair to Lord Venkateshvar.

Narayan has also focused on the religious belief by viewing that once the body (whether dead or alive) is sent to the cremation ground for burial ceremony, it cannot be

brought back to the house or society. It is called ‘inauspicious because such task can wipe out the whole town by fire or plague’ (W.F.M. 184). For example, Sriram’s Granny actually not dead, brought to the burial ceremony, is revived and the doctor declares that she must be taken back home, but the priest warns them not to cross the boundaries of so-called superstitious religious beliefs. Narayan often depicts the reciting of the prayer which leads men towards truth, knowledge and illumination. Natraj offers prayers to the Sun-God and recites *Shlokas* to illumine and enlighten the self. “He rises in the morning and sets out to the river for ablution” (M.O.M. 5). Natraj also conducts deep prayer to save Kumar, the temple elephant. His faith has been responded and justified after the death of mighty monster Vasu. Vasu symbolizes the nature of Asura who resists the spiritual harmony and disturbs the routine life of innocent people. Though, materialistic vision also keeps many in touch with the offerings and rituals. Margayya seeks some advice from astrologer to regain his wealth. The suggested remedy, Laxmi-Puja for forty days with ash from a red lotus and ghee made out from a gray cow in order to please the goddess of wealth, is performed by Margayya. Swami, the school boy believes that through prayers pebbles will be converted into coins, seems silly. People often recite prayer when placed in a critical position. The faith that ‘God is the only saviour’ and offering and praying always bring favourable outcome, is criticized by Narayan in a humorous way. Swami when feels completely lost in an unknown land, he promises to offer two coconuts every Saturday to the elephant faced Ganapati, takes a vow to roll bare-bodied in dust, beg and take the alms to the Lord of Tirupati, if God make possible his return to Malgudi anyhow. Rajam, the son of superintendent tries to convince the friends that the fostering of enmity leads one towards hell and visualizes them the horrifying state of hell: “it was written in the *Vedas* that a person who fostered enmity should be locked up in a small room, after his death. He would be made to stand, stark naked, on a pedestal of red-hot iron. There were beehives all around with bees as big as lemons. If the sinner stepped down

from the pedestal, he would have to put his foot on immense scorpions and centipedes that crawled about the room in hundreds...” (S. A. F. 52). It seems that Narayan has focused on *Garudpurana*: the Shastra, recited after the death in Hindu religion. No one has ever seen where the heaven and hell are located in the space. Milton too, has imagined the three divisions of the whole cosmos and wretchedness of Satan and his followers in hell in his *Paradise Lost*. Whether be the symbolic or general truth, but the mythical analysis citing certain beliefs to some extent proves fruitful governing factors in maintaining the worldly order.

The ritual of praying and fasting has also left its influence in Narayan’s creativity. Whenever the natural disaster like scarcity of rain is experienced, fasting is observed to please rain-God (Varuna). It is supposed that by offering such ceremony, the rain comes. Raju, the Sanyasi is forced to observe fourteen days fast to bring rain. Though, Narayan has not clearly mentioned whether it rains or not, but Raju experiences its arrival: “Velan, it’s raining in the hills, I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs. He sagged down” (*The Guide* 247). Ignorance or illiteracy frames certain blind belief. For example, if rain doesn’t fall, the ignorant rural people interpret the situation in a slightly humourous way. They simply ask Swami: “Is it true Swami that the movement of aero planes disturbs the cloud and so the rains don’t fall? Is it true, Swami that the atom bombs are responsible for the drying up of the clouds? Science, mythology, weather reports, good and evil, and all kinds of possibilities were connected with rain (*The Guide* 92-93).

The female community generally found worshipping the *peepal* tree because *peepal* tree is considered sacred tree where God Vishnu dwells. Certain stones are placed under *peepal* tree as religious marks. People use to worship them as God. The worshipping of idols is being observed in India for centuries. Narayan’s *The Guide* describes that there is a large platform under a *peepal* tree at whose root a number of stone figures are surrounded, which

are often anointed with oil. Among Hindu deities Hanuman is generally offered oil and vermilion.

Narayan's characters express their belief in fate. They are not found heroic in their manner, but prove their worth as ordinary human beings. Chandran's mother fully accepts the dominance of fate when Chandran receives the girl of his mother's choice. She seems to justify the well-known saying 'marriages are made in heaven'. She states: "It is all settled already, the husband of every girl and wife of every man. It is nobody's choice" (*B.O.A.* 159). Raju, the railway guide shows such feelings to Velan: "whatever is written here (on his forehead) will happen. How can we ever help it"? (*The Guide* 212). Horoscope has been emphasized as Indian belief. In most of Narayan's novels astrology plays its major role. The matching of horoscope for selecting the deserving bride or bridegroom is revealed in the case of characters like Krishna, Chandran, Malathi, Jagan, Balu and Natraj. For example, "Mars in the 7th house of the horoscope kills the life partner, if the other partner's horoscope also does not suffer from the same flaw" (*B.O.A.* 87-88). Chandran could not marry Malathi because their horoscopes do not tally (*B.O.A.* 38). *Upnayan Sankara* (bearing the sacred thread on the body) is also mentioned in *Mr. Sampath*, where the old man, the landlord of Srinivas bears sacred thread. The reverence for Guru, Sanyasi or Saints is also focused in Narayan's fictional world. People accept their dominance and have deep faith in their yogic power. The illiterate persons of the village seem to expect a miracle to be performed by Raju the fake Saint, who can even bring rain to survive them. Sainthood is highly respected in the society. People acknowledge their miraculous yogic power. For instance, the villagers in *The Guide* whisper among themselves: "Do, you know sometimes these yogis can travel to the Himalayas just by a thought?" (32). Velan's sister seems highly impressed with Raju, the Sanyasi. She tells everyone: "He doesn't speak to anyone, but if he looks at you, you are changed"! (30). Chandran's mother in *The Bachelor of Arts* seems very much worrying of the

curse of holy man who steals flowers from her garden every day. Marriage is considered the sacred ceremony in Hindu culture. The ritual of *Saptapadi* (where bride and bridegroom take an oath ‘made for each-other, never to depart’ for the entire life in witness of Fire-God and parents) remains the indispensable part and without performing such ceremony, they cannot live together. It is treated as sin if it happens. Though, living together in friendship or relationship without conducting marriage is a modern concept, but Narayan’s concern seems to preserve the age-old values of Indian civilization. Mali in *The Vendor of Sweets* keeps the Americanized girl, Grace without performing the marriage ceremony, but his father, Jagan is not ready to permit such wicked joining together. He opines that “I can’t understand how two young persons can live together like this without being married, I feel my home is tainted now, I find it difficult to go back there” (137). Chandran, the product of modern age too, compares and contrasts the life in two cultures (the eastern and the western). He shows his contempt by viewing the rigidity of Indian people and favouring the liberty of white people: “The white fellows are born to enjoy life. Our people really don’t know how to live. If a person is seen with a girl by his side, a hundred eyes stare at him and a hundred tongues comment, whereas no European ever goes out without taking a girl with him” (*B.O.A.* 15).

Narayan through Swami’s character conveys the truth of uncertainty of fate, i.e. fate cannot be guessed. Swami places the ant in the boat made of paper. When it passes under a tree, a thick dry leaf falls down and upset the movement of the boat. Swami runs to see if he could save the ant. But both the boat and its cargo are wrecked beyond the recovery (*S.A.F.* 36). Ant, the helpless creature is left to its fate must have met its end certainly. The flow of the stream is symbolized to human life and ant as a human being. None could presume the end, how and when. Narayan’s Malgudians remain wholly helpless human being in the hands of cruel fate. Though ‘character is destiny’ is viewed in Shakespearean tragedies is equally true, but here Narayan’s aim is to present the life-philosophy in Indian culture. The great epic

Ramayana too, focuses on perception of vagueness of human life: ‘Even Lord Ram did not know what would happen tomorrow’.

The beliefs in ghosts, evil spirits or devils are deeply ingrained in Indian mentality since centuries. Illiteracy is the major cause in generating such elements. Though, educated mass has narrowed down its influence on society in the modern era. Such beliefs are treated as mere superstitions. For example, people in *The Man-eater of Malgudi* believe that ghosts are visible to dogs, that’s why they bark at night (79). Krishna’s mother is fully convinced by the fact that evil eyes might have fallen on Susila, Hence, she dies. She also applies experiments to cure his son’s wife by inviting the specialist who knows the black magic. Ravi’s mother in *Mr. Sampath* also invites such fake people to cure his madness. *The Dark Room* depicts the mindset of Kamala and Sumati who do not dare to look into the cook’s eyes. It is so because they believe that if one looks into the cook’s eyes at a certain moment would surely be turned into stone: “they had been told that many of the furlong and mile stones in the place were once human beings who had dared to look into the cook’s eyes; after they became stones the Government people came along, chiseled them into shape, and carved miles and furlongs on them” (151). Alchemy, the invention of the earlier period has also left its influence on Swami’s character who thinks that the coachman with some special metal, pot and herbs is able to convert copper coin into silver. Mari in *The Dark Room* while returning from his nocturnal visit with a few withered betel leaves sees an apparition. He assumes that it might be Mohini, the Temptress Devil. He experiences: “Ah, the Devil can walk on Water” (132). It is generally thought that ghost can take any shape and perform the most difficult task in a moment. Swami, the school boy has the similar experience in the forest, where he could see different shapes materialize in the dark night. Whether psychological or not, Krishna, the English teacher too experiences the existence of his dead wife’s spirit. Narayan has woven the philosophy of reincarnation or rebirth that the human

Soul returns after every third generation in the form of a grandson or a granddaughter or in the shape of the nearest and dearest one. For example, Sriram's Granny sees the soul of her dead husband in Sriram's existence: "They say that the grandfather's reincarnation is in his grandson. You have the same shaped nose as he had and the same eyebrows. His fingers were also long just like yours. But there it stops. I very much wish you had not inherited any of it, but only his brain" (*W.F.M.* 8).

Narayan has woven the concept of auspicious omens in his novels. To initiate any task the tradition-bound people insist the fixed time or moments. Particular signs or symbol stands for good omen. For example, while starting on a journey, if one meets the woman carrying the pot of water on her head, it is thought that the success is sure to come or say it's a suggestion of good omen. Sastrigal in *The Bachelor of Arts* experiences such omens while approaching the astrologer to match the horoscope of Chandran with Malathi: "I am certain that this marriage will take place very soon. Even as I started for their house a man came bearing pots of foaming toddy; it is an excellent omen. I am certain that this alliance will be completed" (78), but it remains unjustified because their marriage does not take place. The shopkeeper in *The Waiting for Mahatma* feels that one should not return money on an auspicious Friday: "This Friday and would it not be inauspicious to give back a coin? I'll be ruined for the rest of my life" (121). In Hindu society certain burial ceremony like offering the drops of water of Ganga in dead's mouth and putting a small piece of gold or silver coin in it is also conducted. For example, the priest advises Sriram on the cremation ground to put two silver coins on his dead Granny's chest so that it would smooth out the passage of the soul into the further regions: "Our elders have decreed that the Dear Departed should have two silver coins on his or her chest from the hand of the nearest and dearest" (179).

The issues like national education system, the awakening of native cultural, social and religious identity, wearing of Khadi and boycotting English goods, practicing of non-

violence, removal of untouchability, upliftment of marginalized group, especially women community and rural regions, and maintaining of communal harmony projected by Gandhiji had inspired the literary fields of the period to its greater extent. Gandhiji's writings, speech, movements and his practicing of Vows, all remained a model to lead the nation to its indigenous spirit. Krishna Kripalani in *A Cultural History of India* aptly remarks on "Modern Literature" that Gandhiji bestowed:

A powerful ethical stimulus to the literary trend and his insistence on non-violence and on simplicity and purity in personal life touched a responsive chord in the inherent idealism of Indian thought and thus served as an indirect inspiration to creative literature. (406-22)

Two major divisions have been emerged in Indian society: the ruling and the oppressed class since past. The people in power have money and wealth while the suppressed class seems crushed under the dominance of the elite class. Those who lack power have been deprived of their human rights. They have been categorized as socially and economically backward class. Their self-respect has been damaged to a greater extent. It is our intellectual helplessness or slavery that the term 'dalit' is still applied to only backward class people. Though, such belief proves meaningless in the present era. The notion of dalit has completely been changed in the modern time. The term should not be narrowly viewed or delimited to a particular class. Actually dalit is a common identity of people who have been marginalized, suppressed or ignored in social, political or religious sphere. Marxists view that people belong to scheduled caste category should not be considered only dalit community, but the landless community, the adivasis, the labour class, the exploited or those who reside outside the village border are all considered dalits. Broadly speaking, those who are underprivileged their rights anyway, can also be defined under this category. It makes no difference whether the victimized one represents so-called higher or lower class. Untouchability is the result of

Hindu class and caste system. It was Gandhiji who coined the word untouchable as Harijan (man of God). Though, Ambedkar and his companions were against the naming of 'harijan'. Ultimately on 4th of November 1931 they used 'depressed classes for untouchables. Gandhi considered untouchability as a curse: "Untouchability as it is practiced in Hinduism today is, in my opinion, a sin against God and Man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism" (*India of My Dreams* 252).

Looking to the historical formation of castes in India, people in India remained divided into four groups: Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaishya (traders and artisans) and Shudra (servants and slaves). Each of these groups is assigned their role-play or duties. The Shudra has been assigned the task of cleaning the dirt of the upper-castes. The imaginative myth, *Purusha-Sukta* (the Hymn of Man), divides the *Purush* (man) into four parts where the Shudra has been viewed as the bottom part of his body: 'Padbhyam Shudrojayat': "Brahmanosya Mukhmamasid Bahurajanyah Krutaha Urutadasyavadvaishyaha Padbhyam Shudrojayat" (*Yajurveda Purushasukta*). Such a rigid division forced them to breathe under the dominance of Brahmin and Kshatriya class. Dr. Polanki in a paper entitled "Image of India" remarks: 'Man in Hinduism is conceived in caste. Caste is *jati* or *Varna*, *birth* or *colour*. To be born is to be identified ... caste is at once man's identity and vocation, his status and function in a divided labour. One is, therefore, born as a brahmin or cobbler, and if a brahmin, he is *bhu-deva* (literally, god- on- earth) and therefore to be worshipped and served; if a cobbler, he is *asprishya* (literally, the untouchable) and therefore to be shunned' (McLeod 138). Though, contemporary society has narrowed down such old-age concepts. After independence, the norms of inequality have been reducing gradually.

Being inspired by Gandhian ideals, Narayan has exposed the evils of hatred for untouchables in some of his novels. Narayan's generation was different; say the orthodox

mentality was deeply rooted in the social system. Narayan has described the wretched condition of untouchables in *The Waiting for Mahatma* thus:

This was one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived on the bank of the river. It was probably the worst area in the town and exaggerated even to call them huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin sheets, and shreds of coconut matting all crowded in anyhow, with scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust. (37)

Their food habit and vocation is depicted as:

If a cow or a calf died in the city they were called into carry off the carcass and then colony at the river's edge brightened up, for they held a feast on the flesh of the dead animal and made money out of its hide. (37)

While narrating their miserable plight Narayan criticizes their 'feast on the dead animals'. Though, Narayan seems to disrespect their mean task and celebration of joyful moments. On the contrary in one of his stories *An Astrologer's Day* Narayan exposes certain hidden secrets of elite class people too. For example, while travelling on the Madras-Bangalore Express, Rajam Iyer, the Brahmin faces the rudeness conducted by the fellow passenger who reminds him that Brahmins' days are over. The newcomer justifies that the sacredness of Brahmin community and their hegemony seems declining gradually: "The cost of mutton has gone up out of all proportion... Yes and why? Because Brahmins have begun to eat meat, and they pay high prices to get it secretly" (55). Surveying the sources of untouchability Dr. Ambedkar observes that Vedic Aryas were non-vegetarian and eating beef. In a course of time the Brahmins considered cow as sacred animal and started worshipping the cow, the other communities pursued the same path. As a result the cow-slaughtering became a sin and a person who eats the beef identified as a sinner and assigned the name untouchables (Ambedkar 13). It has also been argued that their residential instability and uncivilized

manner made them untouchables. Gradually they were seen separated from the mainstream and people belong to the rest of the class assigned them lower caste category. Though, even after declaring them as untouchables, they were retained as Hindu because such rejection as Hindu would certainly have damaged the dominance of upper class society. It was the premeditated social set up where they were forced to carry the tasks like sweeping the dirt, burial of the dead animals, etc. Hence, the hegemonic social frame seems surviving in course of time.

As a part of his mission called the ‘upliftment of backward caste’ the fictional Gandhi in *The Waiting for the Mahatma* invites the untouchable boy of Malgudi. He shows his warmth and favour by offering him a seat on his divan and an orange to eat in the presence of the elite class (47). Gandhiji appeals the local leaders like Natesh to decrease the distance between untouchables and elite class. The age-old orthodox tradition stored in old generation like mothers of Sriram and Raju, prevents them from accepting and assimilating with untouchables. Sriram’s mother is shown unhappy with Gandhiji who allows ‘untouchables into the temple’ (62). The children kept in a refugee camp are offered the name of flowers and birds in place of their caste identity by Bapu and Bharati, with a view to avoiding any misconception.

Repetitively, Narayan indirectly mentions the worst condition of untouchable in *The Financial Expert* where they are assigned the task like the burial of the orphan or unknown body and digging:

They collected enough money at the end of the day to give a gorgeous funeral to the body. They ever haggled with the grave digger and were left with so much money at the end of it all that drank and made merry for three or four days and gave up temporarily their job, such as scavenging, load carrying and stone quarrying. (28)

Narayan also focuses the generosity of depressed classes in a novel *The Dark Room* where Mari, the blacksmith and burglar comes to rescue Savitri's life. Ponni, (Mari's wife) offers shelter to dying Savitri. She tries to retain Savitri's Brahminic purity by viewing that she belongs to lower caste and Savitri as a Brahmin would not stay with her or touch her food: "I see you are a Brahmin and won't stay with us. I will ask someone of your own caste to receive you.... or stay in our house. I will buy a new pot for you, and rice, and you can cook your own food. I will never come that way" (106). Though, Savitri doesn't seem to claim her higher caste obsession.

Narayan has exposed the evils of the dowry system. Chandran of *The Dark Room* shows his hatred towards such deep-rooted custom of demanding dowry from bride's parents, but his mother gets irritated in the case of denying dowry: "My mother gave seven thousand in cash to your father, and over two thousand in silver vessels, and spent nearly five thousand on wedding celebration. What was wrong in it? How are we any worse for it? It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law. We can't disregard custom" (84-85). Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* is of the views that in order to establish communal harmony, India will have to forget the differences prevailed among castes: "If India was to attain salvation these watertight divisions must go – Community, Caste, Sects, Sub-sects, and still further divisions" (56). Similarly Raju's mother in *The Guide* treats Rosie, a dancing class woman a mean community: "After all, you are a dancing-girl. We do not admit them in our families" (91). Though Raju considers her: "the noble caste on earth" (84). Further, Raju's Uncle reminds Rosie her lower caste status in harsh words:

You are not of our family? Are you of our clan ... No.? Are you of our caste?

No. Our class? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No.

In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not

admit them in our families. Understand? ... You cannot stay like this in our house. It is very inconvenient. (149)

Devdasi is treated as a mean community in India even though Devdasi represents the classical Bharatnatyam tradition which has been considered one of the indigenous factors to define nation's prestige. Looking to the historical formation of Devdasi tradition, it has been observed that the upper caste Hindu families used to offer their first girl child in the service of God, i.e., the girl child was being sent to serve in the temple where she had to perform the activities like dancing and singing to please God and Goddesses. Gradually during Muslims domination and the subsequent periods the tradition of offering 'the Dalit girl-child as Devdasi' took place. Such Devdasis were being seduced and exploited by temple authority. As a result, the children born to Devdasis were treated as an orphan. Their caste or clan identities were kept concealed. Hence, those orphans were offered the new name 'Harijan'. Such kind of tradition still exists in some states of South India (Vankar 15).

In response to a complaint raised by Grace, Jagan, the follower of Gandhian principles in *The Vendor of Sweets* assures her that he doesn't believe in such type of caste differences. He reminds her Gandhi's role in diminishing the caste bias: "Gandhi fought for its abolition" (66). Though, Jagan doesn't seem pleased when his son Mali brings Grace to his house without performing marriage ceremony.

Narayan has very brilliantly described various categories of the rituals observed among Indian societies with a view to reflecting Indianess. These rituals survey the ceremonies conducted on marriage, inauguration and cremation time. The celebration of fairs and festivals is an indispensable part of Narayan's fictional world. As stated in Sanskrit 'Utsav priya khalu manava' (people are fond of celebrating festivals) shows its living appeal in Narayan's novels. He artistically weaves together the commemoration of *Janmashtami*, *Diwali*, *Shivaratri* as well as spiritual fairs like *Kumbhamela*. Even the organization of fairs is

also viewed by the novelist. Raju's fasting in the river to bring rain arouses the curiosity of the people in the drought-stricken area. The place soon turns into a pilgrimage, where a huge crowd gathers to see the miracle to be performed by Sanyasi. The sacrifice of the holy sage proves the beneficiary to the rest. The scene has been satirized in such a mocking aspect to reveal opportunist mind and the mass psychology: "shops sprang up overnight, as if by magic, on bamboo poles roofed with thatch, displaying coloured soda bottles and bunches of bananas and coconut- toffees. The tea-stall is set up, and its posters, green tea plantations along the slopes of blue mountains, are pasted all around the temple wall. The khakhi-clad health inspector sprays every inch of space with DDT and, with needle in hand, coaxed people to inoculate themselves against cholera, malaria, and what not. People sit around the blank space on the rear wall of the temple to enjoy the film show. Far off, outside the periphery, a man has opened a gambling booth with a dart-board on a pole, and he has also erected a crude merry-go-round, which whines all the day. Peddlers of various kinds are also threading in and out, selling balloons, reed whistles and sweets" (*The Guide* 239-240).

Malgudi also experiences the 'Quit India' and 'Co-operative' movement. The purpose of the co-operative movement was the promotion of thrift and the elimination of middleman, but Margayya, the financial expert does not believe in advocating thrift and his living depends upon helping people to take loans from the banks opposite and from each other. Malgudi possesses the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank built in the year 1914, named after a famous Registrar who lost his voice explaining co-operative principles to peasants (*F.E.* 1-2). Malgudi people seem actively involved in non-cooperative movement. Gandhiji's arrival in Malgudi is greatly welcomed and it becomes the talk of the town. People show their reverence for 'Bapu' and readily join the movement to protest British rule. Native conscious is awakened, people boycott the foreign goods and the concept of *Swadeshi* has its high regard. Malgudians too, like the rest of the Indians, assert nationalism and free nation

state. Sriram is a true patriot who follows Gandhian Philosophy. He teaches the school children to cry, 'Quit India' in a chorus. When villagers ask him what does it mean? He elucidates them that the British people leave our country. 'We will rule it ourselves' (*W.F.M.* 103-104). The idea of a free nation is awakened here. He advises the timber contractor that: "This is not the time for acquiring wealth. This is the time to join in the fight for independence" (*W.F.M.* 107). On the 15th of August, 1930, about two thousand people assemble on the bank of Sarayu to protest against the arrest of Gaurishankar, a political leader and hear the speech of freedom fighter attentively: "We are slaves of slaves" (*W.F.M.* 110). The task of boycotting the English goods is also conducted then.

Narayan uses to portray the joint family life in the majority of his novels. All the characters like Swami, Chandran, Krishna, Ramani, Raju, Natraj, Sampath, Margayya, Jagan and Sriram have a well-built attachment to their parents, children, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters. Natraj in *The Man-eater of Malgudi* confesses: "All the four brothers of my father with their wives and children, numbering fifteen, had lived under the same roof for many years" (12). The bondage of familial ties makes them harmonious to manage human relationship. Domestic norms guide them all to protect the age-old beliefs and tradition. Though, Narayan's prime focus is on South Indian Hindu society which to some extent seems appealing domestic Indian life in its broad-spectrum.

Prof. William Walsh explains:

Narayan's fastidious art, blending exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety, is without precedent in literature in English... It is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian setting (*A Critical Appreciation* 169).

Narayan's creativity explores the comic sense and primarily his art justifies the aim of art for art's sake. But in a much broader sense, such observation seems slightly confusing when one reads his novels with different perspectives. It is equally true that Narayan writes with a purpose. Narayan seems confessing his life-values in representing Malgudi: "My own values in the milieu and human characteristics" (*My Days* 230). The family relationship is his major concern. It seems that he offers due respect to family ties since the domestic relationship is pivotal in most of his novels. Narayan observes that the bondage of family prevents one from committing the evil deeds and if one attempts to violate those norms, the disorder will be the natural outcome. To reinstate the order and place normalcy one seeks the rescue from family. He depicts various types of relationships between father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, grandmother and grandson. Among all the father-son relationship is of vital importance. The paternal love and generation gap are at the center in the novels like *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Financial Expert*. In spite of Jagan's love and affection, his son Mali discards the domestic values under the impact of western civilization. Margayya, the Financial Expert also tries to establish his son, Balu in a well-to-do position, but all his efforts go in vain and ultimately destroy his dreams. The increasing locality of old-age houses is the result of such generation gap viewed in modern society. The older age group insists on certain value system while the youth seems to apply the modern trends in routine life. Narayan's emphasis upon the role of the family shows his favour for Indianness. To him Indian myth is a reality through which he is inspired to draw the themes like renunciation, incarnation, re-birth, the philosophy of *Karma* and non-violence. *Mr. Sampath* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* define the theme of 'Return to Nature'. The restoration of ethical order is the key-note in Narayan's novels. Narayan has shown that the ultimate solution for harmonious life lies in sense of adjustment. The characters like Swami, Chandran, Savitri, Sriram and Mali escape or protest the age-old structure, struggle to reshape

it, but prove feeble in their endeavors. The return to domestic ties is the ultimate compromise to all in Indian setting. Nataraj's insistence on morality based deeds and Sastri's faith in mythological truth brings normalcy in Malgudi. *The English Teacher* presents the theme of psychic reunion with the spirit of dead one.

European critics judge Narayan's creativity in accordance with their standards of judgement, but the native inhabitants can grasp the essence of his cultural norms in a far better way, is equally a true logic. Walsh's analyzes the theme of Narayan's *The Guide* as: "The complex association of sincerity and self-deception" (114) seems primarily true, yet further facts could be discovered by observing the views from Indian cultural inheritance. It also seems that Narayan here views the transformation of the sinner. Vices are shaped into virtues. Raju, the fake Sanyasi truly proves the worth of assigned role. His self-deception leads him towards self-realization. He realizes that he cannot play the game further and hurt the feelings of innocent people. His realization inspires him towards sacrificing the self for the sake of the public good. Looking to its messaging frame, Narayan has succeeded in bringing the ground reality to the level of common understanding and made his reader realized certain morals as even fake Sansayi too can transform his identity by pursuing the ethical norms cited in holy scriptures. *Swami and Friends* is thematized on child psychology and its roots are observed in socio-political realism. The feelings of dedication and devotion of a woman in an orthodox cultural milieu is the theme of the novel *The Dark Room*. Such is the social framework which mirrors the world of Malgudi and its humanity.

The majority of Narayan's characters represent the Brahmin community. His prime focus is on Tamil and South Indian Hindu society. The morals, the perception and the conventions of Indian civilization are typified in most of his novels. The characters like Swami, Chandran, Ramani, Krishna, Margayya, Raju, Natraj, Mr. Sampath, Srinivas, Jagan, Sastri, Savitri, and Susila belong to Brahmin community. Grace is an American-Korean girl

whereas Ebenezer and Marco represent the Christian community. Though, the caste-identity of characters like Rosie and Rangi are unknown, but they stand for lower communities who are viewed as public women, i.e. Devdasi groups or the traditional dancers. Narayan's Brahminic favour is clearly apparent in most of his novels.

Narayan, in his traditional world of Malgudi draws the variety of occupations conducted by his characters. Narayan's is a literate society wherein majority of his characters are shown well positioned. Some of these represent professional touch while conducting their routine work. On the contrary, few of them show their discontent over their handsome career. He has introduced school boys (Swami, Rajam, Mani, etc.), college student (Chandran), teachers (Krishna, Ebenezer), clerk (Ramani), housewife (Savitri), tourist guide (Raju), journalist (Sen), printers (Mr. Sampath, Nataraj), shopkeeper (Jagan), film-artist (Srinivas), astrologers, dancers (Rosie, Rangi), doctors, etc. Narayan's major concern is middle class people and the majority of them are seen tradition-bound people. S. Girija's comment in an article on "Indian Customs and Conventions depicted in the writings of R. K. Narayan" shows that Narayan's India generates to some extent conventional image: "Narayan sees South India as a fundamentally conservative Hindu society changing under the impact of the western industrialization and modern ideas. Conservative India is seen with humour and some satire as a mixture of traditional holiness, with the comfort-looking sterility of the bourgeoisie" (Bhatnagar 57).

Narayan's articulation echoes the routine pace of the life of middle class people of Malgudi. As Philip Rahv in *Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction* observes:

All that we can legitimately ask of a novelist in the matter of language is that it be appropriate to the matter in hand what is said must not stand in a contradictory relation to the way it is said (qtd. in Bhatnagar 9).

Narayan presents elegant prose style in simple language. He has applied the language of the common man in usual life in his novels. He often uses the Indian English idioms and some known proverbs: For instance ‘mug up’, behave like a rowdy’ (*V.O.S.*), or ‘you may close the mouth of an over, but how can you close the mouth of a town’ (*M.O.M.* 180). Since the beginning of his career Narayan prefers to write in English. The attitude developed towards English language by Narayan seems to have resulted from the reality existed in the postcolonial setting. His first person narration and simplicity in the dialogue delivery are ample mirrors of reality. V. Y. Kantak in his essay on “The Language of Indian Fiction in English”, discovers Narayan’s language casual, convincing, objective, modest but “closest to the language of the newspaper and the Sunday Weekly” (qtd. in Surendran 13). His characters converse in simple language, having fluency and lucidity of Indian English. They employ regional words without changing in pronunciation. The change in accent is unnoticed. William Walsh sums up Narayan’s use of the English language in the following words: “Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone, but always an evolved and conscious medium... Narayan’s language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different sensibility” (*A Human Idiom* 8). Narayan’s favor for Indianness consists of certain words, some of which have already been accepted in the vocabulary of the English language, e.g. *Saree, Deepavali, Pyol, Dhoti, Puja, Ahimsa, Jutka, Idli, Pulav, Khadi, Jibba, Puranas*, etc.

Most of Narayan’s characters prefer to wear Indian traditional dress. The male class prefers dhoti or loincloth as usual whereas female are dressed in cotton or silk sari. The dhoti is a long piece of white cotton cloth wrapped around the waist and then drawn between the legs and tucked into the waist. Raju wears his usual khakhi bush-coat and dhoti. Rosie is dressed in Saris of bright hues and gold lace, and she loves to wear diamond earrings and a heavy gold necklace. Marco is dressed like a man about to undertake an expedition; with his

thick coloured glasses, thick jackets, and a thick helmet over which was perpetually stretched a green, shiny, waterproof cover, giving him the appearance of a space-traveler (*The Guide* 9-10) Margayya too uses to wear dhoti (*F.E.* 23). Ramani is dressed in a silk suit and with a sun-hat on it (*D.R.* 3). Men like Jagan and Natraj too, prefer wearing dhoti and jibba. Narayan's creative span witnessed the pre to post-independence phase of the 20th century wherein traditional culture shows its living appeal, although Malgudi region has its close connection with colonial governance. Hence, the modern outlook in dress code too is apparently seen among its people. Looking to their food, rice and sweet made of pure ghee is a luxury item that they enjoy during festivals while coffee is one of their favourite drinks.

Narayan is considered a pure artist who pursues the art for art's sake principle, yet the overall impression of his creativity indirectly confirms that he writes with a purpose. His prime concern is not to preach any philosophical principle directly, yet Narayan remains successful in manifesting certain life values through his comic vision. He has premeditated over the human conduct in practical life. The issues related to human relationship either of father-son or of husband-wife, are at the centre of his interest. His humour is intermingled with pathos and satire which defines life as it is with all its follies and foibles. The eastern and western cultural scenario is found mixed in his fictional world of Malgudi, but the ultimate solution sought by the novelist is the return to natural life. Human virtues and vices are exposed in his writing. His novels render the dissonance and irrationality spread in society. His attempt seems to generate the awareness towards certain hidden dissolute standards. Through his writings Narayan has endeavored to discover the genuine fissure between preaching and practicing norms. The double standards in practicing the Brahminic values, Gandhian philosophy, etc. are satirized with a view to screening the naked face of so-called cultured people. The preaching from *Bhagavad-Gita*, Holy Scriptures, etc. is

symbolically interpreted through his imaginative plots. Here is the brief account of his philosophical utterances transmitting certain ethical standards in proverbial form.

- God will destroy us if we attempt to usurp His rights (*The Guide* 16).
- What must happen must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of that river (*The Guide* 22).
- Who would decorate a rainbow? (*The Guide* 72).
- An empty vessel makes much noise (*The Guide* 236).
- Money is an evil (*V.O.S.* 81).
- Every man must perform his duty in the right spirit and the right measure (*V.O.S.* 99-100).
- Union is strength (*V.O.S.* 101).
- Equanimity is more important than anything else in life (*V.O.S.* 138).
- God is the owner (of house) and I am his slave (*E.T.* 25).
- There is no escape from loneliness and separation. . . Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends. . . We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement (*E.T.* 177).
- The law of life. No sense in battling against it. . . (*E.T.* 177).
- Success must be measured by its profitlessness, said a French philosopher (*E.T.* 182).
- Mother is a rare commodity (*B.O.A.* 99).
- It is all settled already, the husband of every girl and wife of every man. It is nobody's choice (*B.O.A.* 159).
- God helps those who do their duty (*F.E.* 165).
- Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise, what is to happen to humanity? (*M.O.M.* 205).

- Nonviolence is India's contribution to civilization. . . Violence can be conquered only by nonviolence (*A Tiger for Malgudi* 82).
- Life or death is in no one's hands: you can't die by willing or escape death by determination. A great power has determined the number of breaths for each individual, who can neither stop them nor prolong. . . (*A Tiger for Malgudi* 142).
- Don't probe too far into the origin of a river or a saint! You will never reach the end (*A Tiger for Malgudi* 154).

Hence, Narayan accepts the helplessness of human being and superiority of omnipotent. Narayan's appeal seems to confirm the worldly truth that man should live an honest life in harmony with nature without crossing the boundaries of natural order to avoid the possible dangers.

To conclude this chapter the researcher would say that the majority of Narayan's novels concentrate over the middle-class life breathing in Malgudi which has been imagined as a fairly large district of South India. Narayan is considered a regional novelist and all his novels by and large are termed as 'local colour' or 'regional novels'. Looking to the contemporary criticism the place or the spirit of the locale has been given a new dimension and due importance, as a result 'place' is being considered an essential aspect of fiction similar to theme, language or narrative techniques applied. D.H. Lawrence draws our attention to the significance of the spirit of place accordingly:

Every people is polarized in some particular locality which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. The Nile valley produced not only the corn, but the terrific religions of Egypt. China produces the Chinese, and will go on doing so. The Chinese is

San Francisco will in time cease to be Chinese, for America is a great melting-pot (qtd. in Leonard 140).

Similarly Miriam Allot is of the view in *Novelists on the Novel* in context of the setting in a novel:

The artistic self-consciousness which compels the novelists to make ‘things of truth’ from ‘things of fact’ by adjusting them to their new context has gradually seen to it that the background and setting of his ‘scene’ shall be as integral to his design as his plot, his characters, his dialogue and his narrative techniques. (215)

While assigning a local name and the surroundings, the novelist transforms his aesthetic realization into authentic and convincing picture of a particular locale. The experiences earned from day-to-day life, the novelist unites them within the frame of his setting to develop the plot. The novelist’s concern with the place serves as an asset to his creative power. Though, the depiction of landscape viewing its artistic touch plays its important part in defining the aesthetic sense of the writer, but while offering a regional touch the novelist deals with the entire environment covering various factors like customs, religion, social and cultural life, politics, economic status and educational environment, occupations, etc. of his chosen land. The chosen region can be a small town, city or a small village, i.e. a larger or smaller unit, but it represents realistic portrayal of the life lived in it. The novelist while depicting the regionality of particular land uses to locate his own vision to bestow it a gorgeous touch. Hence, it seems the combination of both the real one and dream country to a certain extent. Hardy remarks in a Preface to *Far From the Madding Crowd*:

The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene. Finding that the area of a single county did not afford a canvas large

enough for the purpose, and that there were objections to an invented name, I disinterred the old one. The region designated was known but vaguely; and I was often asked even by educated people where it lay.... since then the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, partly dream country, has become more and more popular as a practical provincial definition into a utilitarian region which people can go to, taken a house in and write to the papers from. (X-xi)

As stated earlier in the thesis, Narayan's Malgudi represents south India. One cannot fix the identity of this location; even Narayan himself has clearly stated that his' is the imaginative land. He has portrayed the general traits of his experienced south region where one finds its similarity with Lalgudi or Yadavagiri. Some of the places located in Malgudi seem partially real one, whereas some remain a dream country. Narayan shows Malgudi in a dynamic status. The old scenario remains, and new ones are added gradually. Somewhere old places receive their new names. Malgudi defines both the ancient and modern values. The birth of this place has its roots in mythic tales and it offers the history associated with Lord Rama, the great Shankaracharya and Lord Buddha while ongoing, changing set up shows its dealing with modernity. As shown in his novels, the northern part demonstrates the historical association of Malgudi where the river Sarayu flows incessantly. The eastern part offers the administrative wing of Malgudi where the Taluk office is situated. The southern part remains one of the busiest centers of the town where the railway station adds the tourist charm while the localities like Lawley Extension and New Extension confirms the modernity of the town. The Nallappa Grove near Sarayu River labels the beauty of the location. The beauty of such natural places attracts the people to visit its living form. Though, the ugly sight of an open gutter near the Market road gives a proof to managerial deficiency over carelessness in matters of hygiene. The evils of black- marketing and bribery also reflect the impact of war

and materialistic attitude of people. Though, certain native traditions still continue to exist in Malgudi, but the rapid expansion of industrialization has damaged their routine social and economic life. The people belong to older generation express their regrets over the rising mechanic culture and perishing cultural and religious values. They remain helpless against the wretched predicament of a new era. The outsiders like Vasu: the taxidermist, Dr. Pal and colonial teaching community generate the obstacles to damage the peace of domestic life of Malgudi people, but their native cultural values and religious faith still offer them power to face any danger. Men like Jagan and Natraj endeavor to restore the original culture mingled with Gandhian philosophy. The generation gap develops day by day, but anyhow the social harmony of Malgudi retains its impression in general. The setup of Malgudi seems a combination of age-old conventions and modernization wherein worshipping of deities and faith in astrology still dominates. Certain changes are noticeable as a symbol of modernity, but the return to native life is the ultimate compromise to Malgudi people. Malgudi translates the Indian reality or say it's a symbolic version of India; hence, whatever happens in India happens in Malgudi too. Malgudi walks with the nation. It cannot be free from certain evils like female exploitation, untouchability or oppression, which are woven together in its traditional structure. Deepika Srivastava and Kaushal Sharma seem to disagree over Narayan's Malgudi novels as regional novels while judging certain norms of regional novel according to Walter Allen's affirmation: "the very nature of the novelist's characters is conditioned, receives its bias and expression, from the fact that they live in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other country sides" (qtd. in *Four Great Indian English Novelists* 57). But to say that mere 'regional identity' must be quite separate than other region or must have an independent identity than the rests is the excessive norm to some extent. The strict adherence to certain individual norms would be an unjust in a literary sense. Except certain individual characteristics, the differences between geography, language,

dress-code, diet, customs and traditions are very natural, but human mentality, nature or human feelings have same-like tone or approach. Each and every region doesn't have its queer or diverse traditionalistic identity. The people belong to any region are after all earthly human beings. They neither represent a heavenly form, nor alien world. To higher or lower proportion, all earthly people represent human forms; hence, the discovery of traditional differences per each and every region is inequitable to this sense. If man follows certain fix tradition every time, there remains little scope for further movement. The impact of new tradition will naturally leave its influence over the people, even if their strict adherence to established tradition. The curiosity of the human mind will definitely tempt him towards a new direction.

Narayan through microcosmic explorations of individual feelings demonstrates his concern for the nation. Each of his novels while defining the native way of life shows his greater concern for national identity. Narayan's chief anxiety is over the fate of nation. In that sense, his personal experiences seem to represent the allegorical of public and national destiny. Malgudi seems far more than the physical site since it incorporates numerous ways of considering India say social, spiritual and mythological which come together to construct its distinctive landscape. Narayan's image of India is chiefly defined as an upper caste Hindu centered particularly Tamil Brahmin perspective. To contemporary readers and critics, Narayan's image of India as a mere Hindu nation seems no longer acceptable as a national metanarrative, as it fails to some extent to tackle the multiplicity of discourses that has constituted India. To that extent, researcher of this thesis would say that mere Narayan's India cannot define the entire personality of this land, but it can be treated as traditional India, which to some extent represents a symbolic form of India and its cultural scenario. If it doesn't represent the ideal image of a nation than it reflects at least the contemporary status of Narayan's era which shows its broader expression in existing socio-cultural set up of India.

Hence, to render the concrete portrait through imaginative aspect is rather an awkward exercise. What literary artist can bring into its live appeal remains his or her world of experience that eventually manifests symbolic version of national culture.

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