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Malgudi: A World of Culture and Tradition

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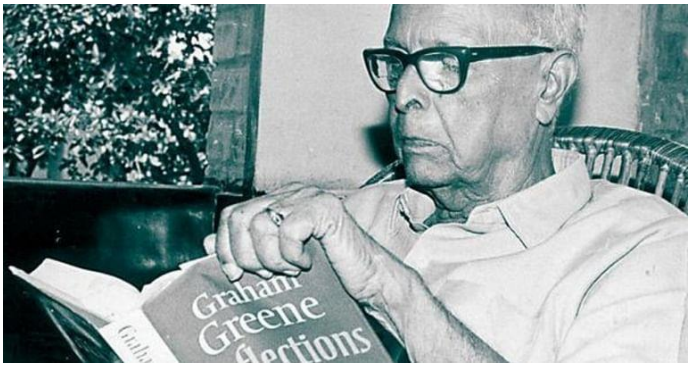
Abstract: A study of the cultural ethos of a community initiates a dialogue between the people of that community and the place where the cultural ethos either originated or flourished. This fiction, the town of Malgudi exudes such an in-depth connection with the characters living in and around it. Though Malgudi is an imaginary town, it has been regarded as "a real living presence" (Hariprasanna, 1994: 23) that "operates at two levels, the human and the topographical" (Hariprasanna, 1994: 23). We would analyse the spatial significance of 'Malgudi' in relation to the author's style of representing the Indian nation in the printed text. Secondly, we critically examine the backdrop in the film text as a crucial deviation from the source text.

Keywords: Malgudi, culture, tradition, community, town, nation, Indian, film, text, examine, characters.

Introduction

"THERE is but one art, to omit!" noted Robert Louis Stevenson many years before R.K. Narayan was born and grown into a publishable writer. "Oh, if I knew how to omit I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knows how to omit would make an 'Iliad' of a daily paper." Out of such knowledge and secret was born Malgudi - India's best-known, best-loved fictional town - and the lovely, grave as well as comedy-laden, art and voice of its literary creator who is widely regarded as India's greatest writer in English of the twentieth century.[1]



All of Narayan's fiction testifies to this secret knowledge, as does much of his non-fiction. His writing career was exceptionally long lasting, encompassing seven decades. His literary output is rich and varied - 15 novels, all but one set in Malgudi; scores of short stories, the best of them offered in two collections, Malgudi Days (1982) and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985); retellings of Indian epics and mythology; travelogues; essays; and an acclaimed autobiography, My Days, published in 1974.Like many a writer, Narayan went through a period of derivative, footloose, "unclassifiable" experimentation - before he discovered his metier. But that the literary secret he prized above all else was the art of omission and that he held this knowledge in his hands even in September 1930, when be began writing his first novel, Swami and Friends (1935), is modestly intimated in the autobiography: "I began to notice that the sentences acquired a new strength and finality while being rewritten, and the real, final version could emerge only

between the original lines and then again in what developed in the jumble of rewritten lines, and above and below them. It was, on the whole, a pleasant experience..." In July 1983, in a conversation with a group of American teachers who managed to meet him in Mysore, the writer was lured into a discussion of this secret by a question on how he had managed to create complex and fascinating books without relying on long narration: " I always blue pencil anything that seems at all repetitive." Interestingly, a few months before Swami and Friends (1935) was published in England, Narayan's 'discoverer' and literary promoter, Graham Greene, had in a letter expressed practical anxieties about the brevity of the debutant's work: "I think if we fail to get it published, it will be chiefly because of its length; 50,000 words is awkwardly short. It may seem foolish that good work should not be published because it isn't padded out to 70,000, but that's how the racket is run..." It is a measure of Narayan's artistic integrity that not once during an exceptionally long writing career was he tempted to compromise with 'the racket', even if he proved adept at learning the ropes of professional writing. This combination of integrity and practicality must have particularly pleased Greene, who staunchly appreciated and protected his only-slightly-younger protege.

Contrasting with the style and approach with which Narayan seemed to arrive, readymade, on the world literary stage was the plenitude of material that seemed always at hand. In 1962, when Ved Mehta asked Narayan in New York if he was ever oppressed by a sense of diminishing literary powers, the novelist came up with an answer that was only half-joking: "I really have more stories than I can write in a lifetime, and probably in the next janma I will be not an author but a publisher... How nice it would be to live in Malgudi." In his September 1981 Author's Introduction to the splendid short story collection, Malgudi Days (1982), Narayan returned to this theme of the richness and diversity of story material India offered any perceptive writer who had the technical competence to work on the ideas: "The material available to a story writer in India is limitless. Within a broad climate of inherited culture there are endless variations: every individual differs from every other individual, not only economically, but in outlook, habits and day-to-day philosophy. It is stimulating to live in a society that is not standardised or mechanised, and is free from monotony. Under such conditions the writer has only to look out of the window to pick up a character (and thereby a story)."Narayan placed a high value on spontaneity and 'non-deliberateness' in fiction. Any knowledge of his fiction reveals that he is the most unselfconscious of writers. He has himself explained, on more than one occasion, how as a writer he let things run their course, allowing characters to surface or ideas to develop without 'deliberateness' of any kind.[2]

But all this understates, in a crucial respect, what Narayan came to believe a good novelist needed. The art of omission, a plenitude of story material wherever you look, perceptivity, and unselfconsciousness and non-deliberateness in the writing are necessary and vital, but still insufficient conditions for mastery of his kind of literary art. This is made clear in an insight he offered Ved Mehta in 1962: "To be a good writer anywhere, you must have roots - both in religion and family. I have these things..." The idea of being rooted in a society and civilisation - in one own's culture, traditions, values, changing local milieu, modernity and family, and among one's own people - is important to Narayan's development as a writer, and also to his assessment of other writers. "His writing is interesting," he would remark to me about some writer." But you can see the writer has no roots." THERE is a tendency among a few younger writers of Indian origin to denigrate the literary art and achievement of Narayan. Among other things, his style is held to be 'pedestrian,' 'metronomic,' 'predictable,' 'limited and conventional,' and 'impoverished.' But there can be no serious question about where Narayan stands in the literary world, especially in relation to his detractors. His international standing is expressed in the fact that his novels, short stories and retellings of Indian epics and myths can be read in most of the world's major languages; that his

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fiction has been the subject of a substantial scholarly and critical literature produced over several decades; and that elaborate literary tributes have appeared in the world's media following his death on May 13. He was nominated on more than one occasion for the Nobel Prize, although like his friend Greene, he did not win it. Narayan, the most unpretentious and accessible of writers, is also regarded as a writer's writer - with serious admirers and imitators in unexpected places in the world.

Narayan's fiction, deceptively simple and elusive in terms of literary theory and technique, is distinctive for its voice, its fusion of the comic with the sad, and its philosophical depth. He is famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid, undecorated, but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises. Narayan was a master of the 'clear glass' style long before that term of art was invented. "Since the death of Evelyn Waugh," declared Greene, "Narayan is the novelist I most admire in the English language." It was no small praise from one of the great writers of the twentieth century. For John Updike, Narayan's ability to convey the "colourful teeming" of his fictional town places him in the Dickensian tradition.

The remarkable thing about Narayan - master of the art of omission - was that once he discovered his metier and his fictional town, he stayed with it for life. All his originality, inventiveness, imagination, and philosophical resources were invested in the space of his small town, now familiar to millions of people through the medium of television. 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 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 by his art. The stuff of his fiction is the precise registration of the particular and the local, mediated by the art of omission - what a Narayan admirer, V.S. Naipaul, once called the life of "small men, small schemes, big talk, limited means."" Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi?" was the thought that occurred to Greene when he finished reading, usually in manuscript, a Narayan novel. He knew that if he went out of the door into "those loved and shabby streets" of Malgudi, he could see "with excitement and a certainty of pleasure" a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema and 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 experience. "It is 'voice' as much as anything else that defines our writer. Learned essays and treatises have been written about it. As has already been noted, Narayan's is a lovely, original, grave as well as humour-laden voice. In its registration of ordinary life in Malgudi, its unhurriedness, its imperturbable humour set against a "sad and poetic background," its many shades of irony, its never-heavy philosophising, and its detachment and constancy, this voice seems to convey something universal. There is nothing false, strained, 'deliberate' about his fiction.[3]

Narayan's view in novel after novel is completely objective. "This complete objectivity, this complete freedom from comment," noted Greene in his 1937 introduction to The Bachelor of Arts, "is the boldest gamble a novelist can take. If he allows himself to take side, moralise, propagand, he can easily achieve an extra-literary interest, but if he follows Mr. Narayan's method, he stakes all on his creative power. His characters must live, or else the book has no claim whatever on our interests. And how vividly Mr. Narayan's characters do live..."Greene, followed by various men and women of letters, saw in the "underlying sense of beauty and sadness" a parallel with Chekov. When Narayan started out in the 1930s, he had no literary forebears or peers to relate to. When he was ready with his first novel, Swami and Friends, he could find neither a publisher nor a reading public. The India of the 1930s and early 1940s lacked an organised publishing industry. Writers who got published in newspapers or periodicals were paid essentially small change. The absence of a significant book-buying public for Indian fiction in English must have been enormously

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discouraging. It was a real struggle for the first 20 years. But Narayan never wavered, never deviated from the decision he made early on that the only life for him was that of a writer. Recalling that decision made around 1929-30, he once remarked to me: "I wonder how I had the foolhardiness to make such a crazy decision! I don't think I could do it again if I had to make a choice." This part-joking, part-serious remark seemed to capture the essence of Narayan's early life as a writer. He summed it up for his biographers: "Good reviews, poor sales and a family to support."

Once he made his "foolhardy" decision to be nothing if not a writer, he went about it with dedication, modesty, independence, integrity and, eventually, solid literary success. His inner directedness kept him going during the early years. What helped sustain him during this period was the support of a small circle of admiring friends, the joint family safety net, and the remarkable solidarity and practical help extended by Greene, sight unseen, thousands of miles away. In My Days, Narayan fondly recalls the "pleasant experience" of his early, struggling days as a writer. He notes that this quality of experience is "later lost, to an extent, when one becomes established, with some awareness of one's publishers, methods, transactions, the trappings of publicity and reviews, and above all a public. "ON October 10, 1906, the writer was born as Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, a name that appears on his degree certificate given in 1930. In 1935, for literary convenience, Narayanaswami, the given name, was shortened to Narayan at the instance of Greene and the publisher Hamish Hamilton. Narayan's first fifteen years, spent under the supervision of a distinguished grandmother, Ammani, in Madras while the rest of his family lived in princely Mysore, stands out for the unusual quality of the beginnings of a writer. The link between the quality of childhood and adult creativity is now well recognised. Narayan's was a wonder-filled childhood - anchored in a capacious, sociable, enlightened middle class home environment - in an ancient, socially mixed, but changing quarter of a great city. It was an upbringing under somewhat straitened economic circumstances.

That our writer was an exceptional child, not in the least for academic reasons, cannot be missed by anyone who reads the autobiography, My Days, the biography, R.K. Narayan: The Early Years - 1906-1945, and Swami and Friends as well as several of the short stories. From his maternal grandmother, the child Narayan absorbed folk-tales, a fluent narrative tradition, and an appreciation of Carnatic music. A talented uncle, T.N. Seshachalam, impecunious, idealistic and committed to classical Tamil literature as well as to Shakespeare, instilled in him values that endured and influenced his outlook as a writer, especially in the later years. Seshachalam's younger brother, on the other hand, would prove a fount of character material for the future writer. What is clear is that the writer's childhood in Purasawalkam, Madras provided much capital for creativity. The adult Narayan would never lose contact with this quality of experience and even in old age he kept returning, imaginatively and sometimes literally, to the scene of his childhood. Narayan put forward to one of his biographers the theory that even with the passing of many decades, "we are what we are. Whether you grow older, more decrepit, inside, the sense of awareness, of being, is the same throughout. I don't see any difference between myself when I was seven years old in Madras and now here in Mysore. The chap inside is the same, unchanged." This artistic perception of continuity of inner being and experience is, at the very least, unusual. The birth of Malgudi and the development of the writer's vision and voice cannot be separated from the exceptional, wonder-filled child growing up in early-twentieth century Madras.[4]

"Thus ended one phase of my life as a man of Madras; I became a Mysorean thenceforth," remarks the writer in his autobiography, referring to the year 1921. This transition and transformation were of great significance to Narayan's evolution into a full-time writer. For one thing, the rules of the game changed significantly for our young man. In Mysore the adolescent Narayan was enrolled in

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the Maharaja's Collegiate High School where his father, R.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, was headmaster. The young man was captivated by the city's green open spaces and eloquent landscape dominated by the rise of Chamundi Hill. He became part of a large, lively family. The parents were highly principled, had a strong belief in the value of education, and shared a liberal perspective on life that worked against orthodoxy, religious and social. While the father was a disciplinarian at school and generally kept a distance from his sons (as was the practice of those days), Gnanambal, Narayan's mother, brought to her marriage and family an abundance of robust common sense, sociability and a broad, democratic and compassionate outlook. For many years, she was the hub around which the family revolved. Narayan would later describe his mother, who like him lived into her nineties, as "a very rare soul, plain-dealing, transparent and absolutely committed to truth-telling."

Theirs was a trilingual household. Tamil was spoken within the house and Kannada socially (by the younger generation) with an expanding circle of friends and acquaintances, while correct English usage became almost a family obsession. The children's interest in English literature was reinforced by their unlimited access to the library in the school of which their father was headmaster. Regular inflows of journals from England kept Narayan and his siblings abreast of the London literary scene of the 1920s.

For the future writer, this access to informed comment and criticism, and to a broad range of writing, proved important. It clearly influenced his outlook and his sensibility. He became more discerning in his reading, acquiring a critical sense. At the end of his school career, Narayan twice failed his University entrance examination, the first time actually in English. This two-year respite from formal education allowed him to read, muse, take long walks, savour nature, and try his hand at writing. In his autobiography, he describes his first literary efforts as "totally unclassifiable - neither poetry nor prose nor fiction." (Although some of them are still extant, the writer did not want them published.)On hand was a small, but encouraging audience. The writer would read his works aloud not only to his brother R.K. Srinivasan (Seenu), an always-appreciative listener, but also to the select group of friends who accompanied him on walks and for whom he would buy coffee as a tactical investment against hostile reactions. Once the pieces were typed they were dispatched to various publishers, mostly in England, and the author acquired an impressive collection of rejection slips in various colours and styles, "cold, callous...impersonal and mocking." None of these first efforts would make it to print. After finally gaining admission to Maharaja's College, Mysore, where he read History, Economics, Political Science, English and Tamil and was taught by British as well as Indian professors, he found little of interest in the formal curriculum. College life, however, proved absorbing. He made new friends and found among the teaching staff and fellow students characters who would later make an entry into his fiction. During this period, he wrote his first short stories.[5]

To no one's particular dismay, Narayan failed his B.A. History paper in the first attempt and had to take it again. Claiming his B.A. in 1930, he was pressured by his family to try school teaching as a profession but gave it up after two brief stints at a government school in Chennapatna - lasting, in all, four days. Although family expectations were upset, his decision to become a full-time writer was respected. THE year 1930 witnessed the 'breakthrough' creative event in our writer's life. In September of that year, on the "auspicious" day of Vijayadasami selected by his grandmother, he opened a new exercise book and waited for inspiration to strike. After writing his first line, "It was Monday morning," he visualised a small railway station. Suddenly its name "seemed to hurl into view" and Malgudi was born. Quite literally, the Malgudi railway station put our writer and, in a sense, Indian fiction in English on "the right track of writing." Narayan always saw the birth of Malgudi as the pivotal moment of his writing life.

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Of Narayan's 15 novels, all but the last, The Grandmother's Tale (1993), are set in Malgudi. Many, although not all, of his finest short stories take place in this fictional town. Malgudi, quite obviously, is South Indian, but it cannot be reduced to any one place. Malgudi is not Mysore (the writer's home of 70 years), nor Madras (where he was born, raised and returned to spend his final years), nor Coimbatore (which he visited frequently over the decades and treated as a second home while living in Mysore). It is an imagined little town into which many real places and experiences have made inputs. Here change happens slowly, but surprises abound at every step in the midst of ordinariness - which is, if you look beneath the surface, not ordinary. Narayan has provided some interesting accounts of the birth of his fictional town and also its significance to his work. He observed, on one occasion, that he was a "treacherous writer" outside the bounds of Malgudi. That must not be taken literally. But critics and serious readers round the world recognise that Malgudi is absolutely central to Narayan's fiction. One of the surprises of Narayan's fictional milieu is how well the televised series, in which the Malgudi characters speak Hindi, has been received all over India.

THE story of how Narayan began his escape from Mysorean obscurity has a whiff of Coleridge-like magical poetry. The good fairy was Krishna ('Kittu') Raghavendra Purna, a young neighbour whose conviction that his friend would become a major writer of international stature was unshakeable. When he went to Exeter College, Oxford in the early Thirties, Purna made it his mission to get Narayan into print. His literary interests and leftist political leanings brought him into contact with Greene and the two became close. Late in 1934, he showed Greene a dozen of Narayan's short stories. The British writer was positive (finding most of them "excellent", as he told Purna in a December 1934 letter), but non-sanguine about their prospects of publication in Britain. Undaunted, Purna in 1935 pressed Greene, who had moved to London after a three-month African journey, to read the much-travelled typescript of Narayan's first novel, which the author had, somewhat quaintly, titled "Swami Nathan the Tate. "The novel had been making the rounds of London publishers and the last of them, Dent, had been requested, in the event of rejection to send the typescript to Purna at Exeter College, Oxford. Narayan had actually instructed his friend to "weight the manuscript with a stone and drown it in the Thames." As a last resort, Purna took Swami to Greene. The rest is literary history. Thanks to Greene's intervention, the first three novels, Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), and The Dark Room (1938), found British publishers - Hamish Hamilton, Nelson and MacMillan - although, as Narayan notes in his autobiography, none of them would venture to publish him twice. Greene also found his friend a literary agent, David Higham of Pearn, Pollinger and Higham. The reviews were enthusiastic, but the sales poor. Narayan now had a family to support. Departing from convention he had found his own bride, Rajam, and married her in 1934 in the face of a grave astrological hurdle ("Mars in the Seventh House," a theme which figures recurrently in Narayan's fiction). In 1936 a daughter, Hema, was born. The struggling writer found it difficult to make ends meet, although the joint family continued to provide a safety net. THE death of his wife from typhoid in 1939 dealt him the most shattering blow of his life. He was plunged into a period of darkness from which he took several years to emerge. His effort to come out of it and his eventual return to a normal life and to creative literary pursuits was as arduous, courageous and moving a struggle as any encountered in literary history. The quality of this whole experience, set out in his fourth novel, The English Teacher (1945), helped him come to terms with his loss and to fashion a personal philosophy which would suffuse all his subsequent work. Unusually for his times, he rejected the idea of re-marriage and brought up his daughter himself, supported by his joint family. Infidelities are well known in the literary world. In Narayan's case, he would remain faithful to Rajam all his life.There can be no doubt that the extraordinary experience of 1939-1945 had a profound influence on Narayan the writer. Greene noted, in his 1978 introduction to The Bachelor of Arts, that

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"something had permanently changed in Narayan" and that "the writer's personal tragedy has been our gain." Sadness and humour in later Narayan would go "hand in hand like twins, inseparable."[6]

Discussion

From the 1950s, Narayan's star rose steadily. He already had five published novels. The decade saw the appearance of three novels, The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), and The Guide (1958), and a new collection of short stories. He now had a following in the United States, helped by the publication of some of his work by Michigan University Press. In 1956, for the first time in his life, he travelled beyond South India. En route to the United States on a Rockefeller Foundation grant, he stopped off in London and had his first sight of Greene, his friend of two decades. The outline of The Guide was in his mind and he consulted Greene on the denouement, more specifically whether the hero should live or die. Greene was unequivocal and Narayan thus had on his hands "the life of a man condemned to death before he was born and grown" (My Days).

By the second half of the 1950s, Narayan had gained an Indian and worldwide public. For the first time in his life, his economic circumstances were comfortable and even prosperous. But he chose to maintain a simple lifestyle in Mysore. The sole indulgence was a blue Mercedes he imported, with special government sanction, in the 1960s. He who, until his 50th year, did not venture out of South India became an inveterate traveller. The 1960s saw the publication of two novels, The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967). In 1964 appeared Gods, Demons and Others, Narayan's retelling with his characteristic delicacy and irony of India legends. Amused by the title, Forster queried: "Who is left out?" Narayan followed this up in the next decade with his own rendering of The Ramayana (1972) and The Mahabharata (1978). These would prove perennially popular. His autobiography, My Days, was published in the United States in 1974 to critical acclaim. Two years later came another novel, The Painter of Signs (1976), in which official India's obsession, family planning, came in for gentle fun and the predicaments of a liberated woman were explored. Narayan's twelfth novel, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), retained the small town setting but took the experimental step of making the narrator-protagonist a captured tiger, which by the end of the novel has been through it all. This anthropomorphic tale was the culmination of the writer's longstanding interest in animal behaviour and psychology.

The 1980s also saw the appearance of two fine short story collections, Malgudi Days (1982) and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985). Their offerings, taken from different periods of the writer's career, include such classics as "An Astrologer's Day," "Gateman's Gift," "Fellow Feeling," "A Horse and Two Goats," "A Breath of Lucifer," and "Annamalai." Greene's disappointment that the tale "Under the Banyan Tree," which he described as "the story of all us storytellers," had been left out of Malgudi Days prompted Narayan to make it the title story of the 1985 collection. The ninth decade of the writer's life saw his creativity undiminished. The period saw the publication of three novels, each first serialised in Frontline - Talkative Man (1986), The World of Nagaraj (1990), and The Grandmother's Tale (1993). The last, a delicately crafted fictional recreation of some family folklore, is the only Narayan novel without a Malgudi setting. This decade also saw him regularly contribute sketches and essays which he titled "Table Talk." Over the decades, a number of awards and honours came Narayan's way. In 1961, The Guide won the Sahitya Akademi Award - the first work of fiction in English to do so. In 1980, the writer received the Arthur Christopher Benson Award from the Royal Society of Literature and in 1987, the Soviet Land Nehru Award. In 1981, he became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Honorary doctorates were conferred by various universities. In 1964, Narayan was awarded the Padma Bhushan. In 2000, he received the Padma Vibhushan. In 1985, he was

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nominated to the Rajya Sabha for his distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life. During his six-year term as MP, he made it a point, during his rare interventions in the parliamentary forum, to speak up for India's children. His observations on the overburdened school curriculum symbolised by the weighing down of children by their school bags provoked much discussion. In the early 1990s, the writer suffered some bouts of illness and, chiefly for medical reasons, left Mysore for Madras where he set up home with his daughter, Hema, and her husband C.S. Chandrasekaran (Chandru). Her death from cancer in April 1994 was the second great blow in his life, but his hard-won philosophical understanding allowed him to come to terms with it with something like equanimity. "We are all in the queue. She has jumped the queue," he remarked to me soon after the news came from hospital. He then went on to discuss the side effects of chemotherapy under certain circumstances. "It's like setting fire to the house to roast the pig," he said, recalling the 'Chinese manuscript', or rather fable, in Charles Lamb's essay, "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig."[7]

Living in an apartment with his son-in-law, he continued to write, spend time with his granddaughter and great-grandchildren (and, when opportunity permitted, his U.S.-based grandson), and enjoy the company of friends. APPROACHING 90, Narayan worked intermittently on a novella, fragments of which have been published. He used to remark that as writers grew older, their novels got shorter. "It's like the Indian goldsmith at the end of the day," he told me once. "He sweeps in the dust carefully to retrieve the gold particles he thinks can be found in the dust. "Narayan's mind was extraordinarily clear till the last. Writing an introduction to a Narayan novel, Greene once speculated that "a writer in some ways knows his own future - his end is his beginning." Imaginatively, Narayan in his nineties would return, now and then, to the characters and scene of his childhood, as though he were examining them as subject matter for new, shorter fiction. Just a few hours before he went on a ventilator, while he was experiencing fairly severe cardiac-respiratory problems and the duty doctor was cautioning against the strain of talking, Narayan told us who were at his bedside about a "short novel" he wished to begin straightaway. He spoke of its plot at some length. It would be based on the life of his tahsildar grandfather, who had managed to accumulate property way beyond his legitimate means and lost it all. "Part biography, part fiction," these words keep ringing in my ear. We discussed the book's length, I enquired, "about 35,000 words?" and the writer agreed: "that will be appropriate." He wanted us to bring him a diary in which he would start writing his 16th novel. He was in the habit of writing his fiction and essays in old diaries when he did not use elegantly bound notebooks. "Will it be a 2000 diary or a 2001 diary?" were the last words I heard from him. THE criticism is occasionally heard, from literary scholars and others, that Narayan's Malgudi is a literary cocoon, where real-life conflicts, turbulence and socio-economic misery are not encountered. Naipaul, for one, seems to have given some credence to this complaint. But when Narayan is in flow, such criticism seems misdirected, almost banal. Who is to say with what theme or problem or slice of life or imaginative experience a novelist must deal? Since the 1930s, when Narayan - in the company of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao - cleared the path for modern Indian fiction in English, there has been a remarkable flowering of literary talent of Indian origin in English. Successful and, in some cases, world-renowned writers of Indian origin have dealt with imaginative themes in diverse ways in varied voices and different styles. You can take your pick of world-view, approach, theme, narrative technique, style, voice, it is a free literary world. In the midst of all this, Narayan's work stands tall - unpretentious yet original, understated yet path-breaking, 'non-deliberate' and accessible yet philosophical and profound.

It will ensure that Malgudi lives on, long after works by younger writers have lost their public. The daily life of the Indians, the traditions of the land and indeed the superstitious and values of India gain a form in the remarkable novel The Guide. R.K Narayan quite consciously in his novel The

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Guide echoes the more and tradition of the Indian society, amidst his literal symbolism, R.K Narayan chief concern is to give an artistic expression of Indian life, though his art form is westers, his theme, atmosphere, situations and senses are truly Indian. Malgudi, Narayan's India is symbolized by Malgudi. Malgudi of course does not exist, its an imaginary landscape inhabitat by the unique characters of his stories. It is an average town with swami's, baggers, postman, shopkeepers, spongers etc. Narayan creates his fictional world of Malgudi as an essentially Indian society or town gradually grows like any other town and becomes a city of tourists, a centre of attraction for scholars of ancient Indian culture and even Americans who see the future of India in its growth. The Indianness and Indian sensibility provided the whole place. Narayan's Malgudi is also a microcosm of India it grows and develops and expands and changes and is full of humanity. Two locals, in The Guide there are two locals namely Malgudi and Mangla. Though Mangla is the actual setting, Malgudi is a part of recollection and consciousness. The hero is common in both the locals like all other heroes of R.K Narayan the hero of The Guide has a longer consciousness and involved with bigger concern of life. The Village School, Narayan gives vivid and faithful picture of a village school the 'pyol' school, with its respected but not well paid teachers; the schoolmaster sitting on a cushion with classes going on simultaneously the routine of school boys shouting and getting caned; the foul-mouthed teacher who abuses instead of including good manners; the co-operative effort of the parents catering to the needs of the school master all these are typically Indian and represent a typical village schools.[8]

Results

Religious beliefs, The Guide also depicts Indian religious belief superstition and philosophy. The blind faith of the Indian masses in sadhus and religious man is depicted in there acceptance of Raju as a swami. Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of life for social and spiritual good, an ideal of Indian philosophy is portrayed through all this. Selfishness gives way to altruism and sacrifice; Raju epitomize this Indian belief, he moves from scepticism to idealism, he changes his psyche and from a criminal he become as a Swami with true feelings for those who have fed him. Thus, he sacrifices his life for the well being of the villagers. Indian Culture in all these Narayan characters like Raju, Marco and Rosie are deeply rooted in Indian culture - Rosie a devadasi daughter stands for traditional Indian culture; Marco embodies modern man appreciating the Indian heritage; Raju's death and faith stand for men's faith in Indian tradition. The temple and rural poverty widen his prospective in contrast with his urban life with Rosie and he gains spiritual faith and peace. Indian faith and tradition are ultimately triumphant in spite of modernization. Family Relationships being a part of Indian tradition the main theme of family, too is characteristically Indian. Narayan gives a graphic description of Raju's family and inter family relationship. His relationship with his father and mother is expressed vividly the theme of family relationship is also depicted with reference to Velan who has the responsibility of marrying off his sister. Indian Scenes and Situations in fact at each and every step we come across Indian scenes and situations. The mother and son argument over marriage, the material uncle endeavour to bring Raju to the scenes, the establishment of Raju as a fake Swami, the fascination of tourist for King Cobra dance, the renovation of the temple, chanting of holy text, lighting of the lamp at the temple, the Mela, like atmosphere while Raju is fasting are all typically Indian. Narayan also gives a realistic picture of the plight of Indian villages. He authentically portrays the problem of a country dependent on agriculture and monsoons. Drought lands to the inevitable feminine dying cattle, lack of water, hoarding by merchants, riots, penance, Pooja's and sacrifices to appease the rain God.

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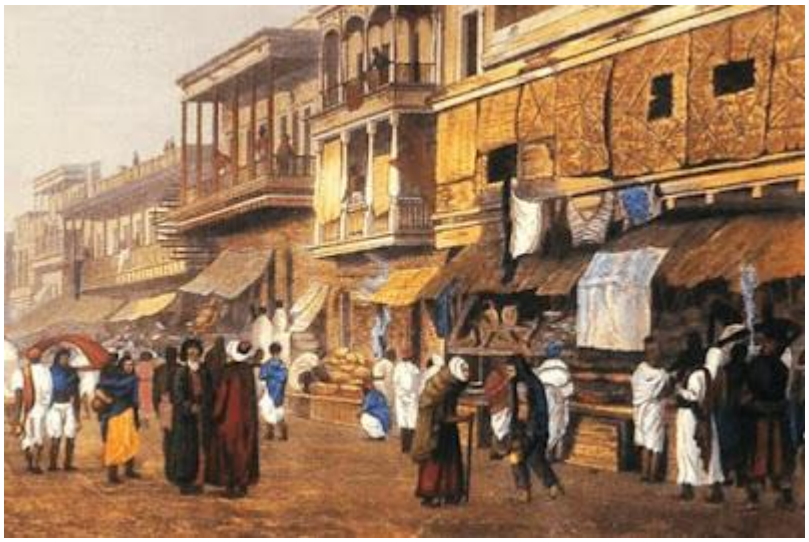

The faith in swamis at the time of drought and the consequent fasting by Raju is typically Indian. Narayan in his authentic portrayal of India, uphold The traditions Hindu worldview. By juxtaposing several symbolic elements Narayan represents the religious and philosophical believe based on the great Indian epics, legends, folks and tales. It affirms values of Indian traditional life and undeniably confers on the novel its artistic uniqueness.[7]

Implications

Malgudi Days is a collection of short stories by R. K. Narayan published in 1943 by Indian Thought Publications.The book was republished outside India in 1982 by Penguin Classics.The book includes 32 stories, all set in the fictional town of Malgudi, located in South India. Each of the stories portrays a facet of life in Malgudi. The New York Times described the virtue of the book as "everyone in the book seems to have a capacity for responding to the quality of his particular hour. It's an art we need to study and revive."In 1986, a few of the stories in the book were included in the Malgudi Days television series and directed by actor and director, Shankar Nag.In 2004, the project was revived with film-maker Kavitha Lankesh replacing the late Shankar Nag as director. The new series was telecast from April 26, 2006 on Doordarshan.In 2014, Google commemorated Narayan's 108th birthday by featuring a Google Doodle showing him behind a copy of Malgudi Days.

- "An Astrologer's Day":

A short story about an astrologer who knows nothing about stars or astrology. He applied for the job after going on the run, though we are not told why he ran away. The townspeople believe his predictions because of his study, practice and shrewd guesswork. One day, a customer bets a large amount of money the astrologer can't reveal anything of substance. The astrologer resists the bet until he recognizes the man (who is called Guru Nayak). After some haggling, the astrologer tells the man he had been stabbed and left for dead in a well. The impressed customer pays up (although not the promised sum) and the astrologer warns him not to travel to this part of the country again. That night, the astrologer's wife asks where he had been so late, and he confesses he had tried to kill the man years ago.[8]

- "The Missing Mail":

A story about Thanappa, a postman who always talks to the people on his route. He delivered to a man named Ramanujam from before his daughter was born to the time she is of marrying age. After the last marriage prospect falls through, Thanappa recommends a suitor in a faraway town.

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The meeting goes well and everyone is rushing to get the wedding done May 20th. If it is delayed even one day, the groom's "training" will delay it three years. After the wedding, Thanappa reveals a postcard to Ramanujam about the death of a relative, which should have been delivered May 20th. Thanappa did not want to disrupt the wedding, even though hiding the letter should cost him his job. Ramanujam says he will not issue a complaint.

- "The Doctor's Word":

A story about Dr Raman, who by time and tradition is only called for life-and-death situations. As such, he believes pleasant lies can't save lives. He is very staunch about that. Suddenly his best friend, Gopal, falls terribly ill. After treating him, the doctor privately thinks he has 1:1000 odds of surviving, but his chances are worse the more he exerts himself. Gopal begs the doctor to tell him if he will make it; if not, he needs to sign his will then and there. Raman can't bear to tell Gopal the truth, but can't let him keep straining himself. He tells Gopal he will be fine. The next morning, Gopal's health is splendid, and the doctor says his survival will puzzle him the rest of his life.[6]

- "Gateman's Gift":

A story about Govind Singh who served as a gatekeeper and security guard. He only spoke to the General Manager twice in his 25 years of service, and came to perceive the GM as a god. After retiring, he took up the hobby of making miniatures and dioramas using clay, sawdust, and paints. Each time his pension comes, he delivers his clay work to his old company, always asking what the GM thought of his last one. The accountant always says he liked it. One day, a registered letter from the GM comes, and Singh is too afraid to open it, thinking it is something horrible. He goes to an X-ray technician to see what's inside without opening it, but they tell him he is unwell. Singh concludes he is mad because he plays with clay, not because of his response to the letter. He goes through town acting like a complete madman until the accountant sees him and opens the letter. The GM had thanked him, sent a large check, and hoped to see more of his work in the future. Singh gives up his clay hobby, saying it is no work for a sane man.

- "The Blind Dog":

A story about a stray dog who befriends a blind beggar. When the old woman who cares for the blind man dies, he leashes the dog and begs while walking the streets. The blind man finds he has greatly increased his income this way becomes greedy. He constantly kicks the dog and beats him to keep working. When the market sellers learn he is so rich he's lending money, they cut the leash with scissors and the dog runs away. After a few weeks of not seeing the blind man or the dog, they see them again and the dog's leash is a metal chain. The blind man says his dog came back to him one night. The sellers pity the dog.

- "Fellow Feeling":

A story about Rajam Iyer, a Tamil Brahmin who is travelling on an express train. Another passenger gets on and starts verbally abusing a third passenger. Rajam gets involved and the bully complains that Brahmins are secretly eating meat and driving prices up. The argument escalates until they stand to fight. Rajam stops short of the first blow and explains that he will rearrange the bully's face so his mouth is under his left ear, bluffing. As he is about to strike again, the bully sees they are at a stop and leaps out the window, saying this is his stop. Rajam lies and tells the other passengers the bully got back on into a different compartment, but they don't believe him.

- "The Tiger's Claw":

A story about The Talkative Man, a recurring character in several short stories. Some hunters bring a dead tiger into town, and The Talkative Man tells a story to some children. When he was a

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fertilizer salesman, he stayed in a tiny village overnight in their train station. He left the door cracked because it got too hot to sleep. A tiger barged in and woke him up in the middle of the night. He barricaded himself behind a lot of furniture, so the tiger could only reach in one paw. The man used his knife to cut off three toes before the tiger retreated. Back in the town, the children ask to see the tiger's paw; sure enough, three toes are missing. The hunters say some tribesmen like to take tiger cubs and cut off three toes as good luck charms.

- "Iswaran":

A story about a man named Iswaran who failed his intermediate college exams nine years in a row. After taking the exams a tenth time, the day scores are reported has arrived. Instead of viewing his scores, Iswaran goes to the cinema. When other boys come in to the theater celebrating their own success, Iswaran becomes self-loathing and is sure he failed again. He decides to drown himself in the river. He writes a suicide note and leaves it in his jacket on the shore. But wanting to know for sure, he checks his score. Not only did he pass, but with second-class honors. In his excitement, he leaps into the river. His body and suicide note are discovered the next day.[5]

- "Such Perfection":

A story about a sculptor who finishes a statue after five years of labor. It is a statue of the god Nataraja, and everyone insists its form is perfect; so perfect that if the people saw it, the glory of the god would consume them. The priest asks the sculptor to break off its little toe so that it will be safe to view, but the sculptor won't do it. The priest thus refuses to consecrate it in the temple. The sculptor turns his house into a temple to have it consecrated there. The god then comes to life and rattles the region with every kind of natural disaster. The people beg the sculptor to mar the statue's perfection after so many lives were lost, but he won't. He ran to the overflowed lake to drown himself as an offering to the god, but on the way, a tree falls on his house. He returns to see the statue was unharmed except for a severed little toe. The imperfect statue is consecrated at the temple, and the sculptor gives up his trade.

- "Father's Help":

A story about Swami, a character from his first novel "Swami and Friends". Swami oversleeps on Monday and convinces his mother to let him stay home from school. His father insists he still go to school with a "headache," so Swami lies and says his teacher Samuel beats children severely for lateness or any small offense. His father writes a letter for Swami to deliver to the headmaster and sends him to school. The letter will surely get Samuel fired, maybe even imprisoned. At school, Swami provokes Samuel to do something deserving of getting fired. But Samuel only canes his hands a few times, which Swami doesn't even react to. When he tries to deliver the letter to the headmaster, he is on leave all week. The assistant headmaster could accept it, but it's Samuel. Swami runs home without delivering the letter. His father thinks he was lying about the headmaster being on leave and says he deserves Samuel.

- "The Snake-Song":

A story about the Talkative Man. A group of men leave a concert hall having enjoyed the performance, but the Talkative Man looked tortured. He says taste has sunk and tells his story. He studied the bamboo flute with a master musician (who is so obscure his name is unknown, of course). A beggar interrupts the Talkative Man's practice at night and asks him for food. He declines the beggar even the right to come in and listen to him practicing. The beggar curses him, saying this was his last day of music. Later that night, a massive cobra comes and listens to him play. It gets agitated when he stops or plays anything other than the snake-song. After playing the same song all night, he throws himself prostrate and begs the snake to spare him. When he looks

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up, it is gone. The Talkative Man says he gave up his flute, but if he could find the beggar and ask forgiveness, he would take up his flute again.

- "Engine Trouble":

Another story about the Talkative Man. A carnival comes to town, and he wins a road engine (steam-powered tractor). Not knowing even how to drive or power the road engine, he simply leaves it in the park. The city starts to fine him for the parking space at over double his home rent. He arranges to move it, but it crashes in a wall instead, leaving him to pay for the damages. A swami comes to town, eating glass, burying himself alive, etc. The swami asks for a road engine for his assistant to run over his chest, but the city magistrate refuses to allow it. After a massive earthquake, the road engine lodges in a well owned by the same man whose wall was destroyed. He thanks the Talkative Man, as the city was going to fine him for the dirty water if it wasn't sealed. Of course, you can't see the engine lodged in the well anymore, as it is now sealed with concrete.[4]

- "Forty-Five A Month":

A story about a daughter, Shanta, and her father, Venkat Rao. Shanta is a primary school student who is eager to go home from school early, as her father has promised to take her to the cinema. At home, she gets dressed up and waits for her father. When he doesn't come home by the time he said he would, she tries to find his office, but gets lost. A servant leads her back home. We flash back to that morning and follow Venkat Rao's day. He feels guilty that he stays at work till after his daughter goes to bed, seven days a week. So when Shanta asks to be taken to the cinema, he promises to take her. That afternoon, he asks his boss for personal leave or else he resigns. His boss tells him nothing is more urgent than work, so he goes back to working. Fed up with being bought for forty rupees a month, he writes a letter of resignation. His boss tells him he got a raise to forty-five rupees a month, so he tears up his letter. Venkat Rao gets home after his daughter falls asleep and tells his wife he can't take Shanta out at all since he got a raise.

- "Out of Business"

A story about Rama Rao, a man who had just lost his gramophone business as the only factory in the region closed down. Rama Rao looks for a local job, to no success. The family lay off their servants and rent out the house they built to live in a smaller abode. With no more job prospects, Rama Rao enters a magazine crossword contest, where everyone who gets every answer right wins 4000 rupees. After seeing how badly he lost, he lays down on the train tracks to die. After waiting too long, he finds a crowd at the station and hears that a derailment has delayed all trains three more hours. Recognizing his good fortune, he goes home and his wife tells him the renters want to buy their house. He is excited to sell for 4500 rupees and will use some of the money to go to Madras and get a job there.

- "Attila":

A story about a friendly dog named Attila, after the "Scourge of Europe". After the neighborhood experienced a number of break-ins, a family buys a dog for security. He is friendly with everyone and does not stop thieves from taking their garden flowers, so the family keep him inside at night. One night, a thief named Ranga does break in to steal jewels. Attila is so excited to meet this new friend that he follows Ranga into the open street. The family assumes the dog was stolen too, but they see Attila run to catch him. Ranga gets scared and runs, but trips over the dog, spilling the jewels he stole. The police arrest Ranga, and Attila is praised for being a master detective.

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- "The Axe"

A story about Velan, who an astrologer predicted would live in a three-story house. Velan came from the poorest family in his village. At age 18, his father slapped his face in public, and he left. After a few days of walking and begging, he got a job as a gardener for an old man. The plot of land was large and they built a three-story mansion on it, but Velan lived in his hut on the grounds. After being awed by the mansion's construction, he grips a margosa's stem in his fingers and tells it to grow up big and worthy of the house or he will pluck it out. It does grow, and his master's great-grandchildren play under it and hundreds of birds live in its branches. Velan's master dies and the house trades hands with family members for some years until wear and tear make the house look haunted and no one will live in it, except Velan when he is given the keys. Some years later, a man arrives to say the plot has been bought and will be cleared for small housing. One morning, Velan awakes to the sound of men chopping the margosa tree with axes. He begs them to stop until he has gathered his belongings and gone out of earshot.[3]

- "Lawley Road"

Another story about the Talkative Man. Just after India's independence, there was a flurry of patriotism. The municipality renamed streets from English things to Indian names. There was a statue of a Sir Frederick Lawley in town, and when the street bearing his name was changed, the municipality voted to remove the statue. The people also researched Lawley and found he had been a British tyrant over the Indians. When the city failed to find anyone to remove it within budget, the Talkative Man is offered the chance to take it for himself. He does and lodges it halfway inside his house with great difficulty. When he writes in the news how he got the statue, historical societies across India are outraged, as there are two Sir Lawleys, and the statue celebrated a kind man who founded Malgudi and even died to save Indians. The public protests the removal of the statue, but now neither the city nor the Talkative Man have funds to move it again. An election is coming, and if the statue problem is not returned to the city, the whole council will be voted out. The Chairman of Malgudi buys the Talkative Man's house with his private fund\\\

- "The Edge"
- "God and the Cobbler"
- "Hungry Child"
- "Emden"

Conclusions

It is South-Indian in costume, tone and content. Although the whole country is one, there are diversities, and one has to be faithful in delineating them. You have to stick to my geography and sociology. Although it is a world of fiction, there are certain inner veracities," RK Narayan had said. It was in Bengaluru that Narayan had conceived the idea of Malgudi and started writing the evergreen novel. "As I sat in a room nibbling at my pen and wondering what to write, Malgudi with its little railway station swam into view, all ready-made, with a character called Swaminathan running down the platform," he said.Many have reason to believe that Malgudi is inspired from two places in the old Bengaluru city—Malleswaram and Basavanagudi. "Mal" from the former place and "Gudi" from the latter together form the name of our favourite fictional town.Zac O'Yeah, writes in the Hindu Business Line, "And considering that of the two, Malleshwaram, founded as a model suburb in the 1890s, has a significant Tamil population, it does seem the likeliest candidate. Furthermore, Malleshwaram has a small railway station which was utterly charming back then, according to those who remember the original building, and would have inspired the initial scene Narayan wrote on

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that September day." The houses along the streets, that now have a modern look once used to have tiled roofs. One such house, according to Kiren Keswani, who teaches at the Azim Premji University, still stands to face the Tagore circle. Several more towns in South India have been often compared to Malgudi, suggesting that Malgudi could not be inspired by just one town or city. Agumbe, Mysuru and Krishnarajnagara (or KR Nagar) have shown some features very close to what Narayan had pictured for his novels.[7]

Mysuru is a favourite city of such theorists and for a good reason too. When Anita Rao Kashi, a journalist with the Economic Times visited the Railway station in the Karnataka city, she could see the Malgudi railway station flash in front of her eyes.It's not surprising actually. Narayan's home in Lakshmipuram is just 10-15 minutes away, and it is well known that he went on long walks every morning, sometimes traversing almost 12 km in the neighbourhood. The walks provided fodder for his work, and it is possible that the station could have been part of this routine," she was told. For Sunita Raghu, a writer at the New Indian Express, the town of Krishnarajnagara (or KR Nagar) is a shadow of Malgudi. "KR Nagar seemed to scream Malgudi ever since I first stepped foot here. For starters, river Kaveri which can be found just a few kilometres away from the town could be the river Sarayu. The ancient temple of Lord Arkeshwara (Shiva) forming a perfect backdrop and attracting devotees from far and near, could mirror the Sthala-Purana setting of many a temple in the novel," she writes. A "Bazaar road" in the middle of the town completes the picture for her. O'Yeah, when he reached Agumbe exclaimed saying, "Ah, finally I'm in Malgudi! Everything looks like the TV series but less crowded. There are barely any people. No cars." It was here that the TV series inspired by Narayan's novels was shot and everything, from people to the atmosphere, O'Yeah claims, reflects the energy of Malgudi.Such parallels suggest that Malgudi was not inspired by one place, and is instead a confluence of several cities and their individual factors. Narayan himself was not too fond of being asked about Malgudi and maybe rightly so. His Malgudi, featuring the iconic moments and stories, is perhaps, best located in our hearts and memories.[8]

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