The Village as a Physical/Real Space

It may be said that the basic characteristics of all Indian villages are more or less the same. The houses, roads, rivers, wells, temples, land, hills, means of transport etc., all have somewhat the same character in whichever village they appear. If we examine a representative Indian village, we find that there is a network of narrow roads within the village and wider roads connecting the village with the nearby villages and also the nearby towns. They are often muddy during the rains and dusty in summer and winter. The roads are the lifelines of the villages. If we closely observe a village, we find its meandering, dusty, unpaved and rutted road runs from east to west. At the west end it turns south and joins with a provincial road, which was also dusty and unpaved in the past, but now properly made and tarred. From this main road branch out several lanes and by-lanes where two hundred and odd straw-thatched, mud-walled houses stand in single or double lines. About two thousand people belonging to different castes live there with their cattle and other domestic animals. Most of the families in the past were joint families of parents and several brothers not so long ago. Though things are different now and there are more unitary families, many families still maintain their joint nature.

The families, whether joint or unitary, live in permanent or temporary houses constructed in the village. Houses are often subdivided to accommodate separate families. Where sub-division is not possible, rooms within the same courtyard are allotted to different families. The houses are usually overcrowded with men, women and children. Each house unit has one or two courtyards. The front lane or by-lane is common to all the houses, each of which has a front verandah and an entrance to the house. Behind each row of houses are also lanes common to all the houses. Each house has a cow shed as a part of the house or as a separate construction, and an enclosed yard on a convenient side according to the location of the house for keeping reaped paddy, for its threshing, and for storing straw and farmyard manure throughout the year.
The design of the houses, the layout of the lanes, the system of drainage, the location of temples, cremation grounds, pastures, ponds, tanks and wells, both common and private, all follow certain age-old patterns. The houses appear either as single units or in clusters. Very often they are on both sides of the lanes or streets. There may be one, or more temples belonging to each caste. The temples may be situated at the centre of the village or at the different areas where the different castes live. The cremation grounds are found a little away from the village, often on the other side of the river, as in the case of Malgudi. In Malgudi the cremation ground is on the other side of the river Sarayu. While the pastures are outside the village and a little far away, the ponds, tanks and wells are situated at different places in the village. The wells are dug according to the convenience of the villagers.

The pastures and the agriculture lands are irrigated using canals. The lanes, community tanks, and pastures usually belong to the community and are used in common. Looking at the plan and pattern of housing, it appears to be the most suitable one for living with security and sharing of amenities. Living is not only secure but also quite economical, because except for the small portions of individual houses and yards, most of the space necessary for living is used in common. Different castes and sub-castes live in different lanes but the pattern of housing is the same. The villagers cultivate the land lying in open fields surrounding the village. Agriculture is the main occupation and source of income of the people. The population is divided into different castes, each rendering a specific service to the village community and carving a living out of the work. In the past, a single village or a contiguous group of villages was economically self-sufficient. In such village environment, people have lived for centuries, generation after generation. Even today many do not feel the necessity of going beyond five miles of the village. Living in such an environment produced the highest forms of fellow feeling, cooperation, and community life.

There are many facilities available in a village or in a close group of villages. Primary education facilities, post office, middle school, dispensary, canal irrigation, bus stand, bi-weekly market, panchayat office and so on are found in the villages now.
Within the last thirty years or so, a lot of facilities, even a railway station and college have been created within the village itself. The villages have now been electrified and its transport facilities have greatly improved. With the changing circumstances, the socio-economic life of the people of the village is undergoing an inevitable change.

The physical characteristics of the villages mentioned above can be seen in the novels of Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya. Most of their stories take place in villages. Anand, especially, had a first hand knowledge of the Indian villages. He had spent some of the happiest days of his childhood, boyhood and youth in his mother’s village in Central Punjab, among the tribesmen of the North-Western Frontier and in the Kangra Valley. The Punjabi poems, proverbs and folk tales had distilled into his consciousness through the recitals of his three maternal uncles. His fellow students at the Khalsa College, Amristar, who came mostly from the villages, talked of harvest and drinking lassi and sugarcane juice. These pleasant thoughts which got mixed up with his disgust with the ritual-ridden social life, religious fanaticism and superstitious belief of the villagers, and also his awareness of their painful life of toil from dawn to dusk only to pay back the claims of the money-lenders, the absentee landlords and the revenue hunting government made Anand a novelist of the downtrodden (Prasad, 2001:125).

Anand has drawn the picture of a pre-War Indian village in his novel The Village. In the opening chapter of the novel, a village atmosphere is created with remarkable skill. The singing of the robin, the twittering of sparrows, the chattering of crows, the flowering of the thorny bush, the paddy fields, the movement of domesticated donkeys, the village black dog named Kalu, the bullock cart whose driver everyone knows, the typical way people talk with blessings or curses, all make the reader feel that he is in a village in north India.

The village of Nandpur that Anand describes in the first novel of the trilogy -The Village - is symbolic of any Indian village in the early decades of the twentieth century. The village is inhabited by Sikhs. Anand depicts the life in the village and the changes that occur due to pressure from rapid modernisation. Anand’s village is a village of the time when the initial resistance to the entry of an alien power had weakened into a
passive acceptance of the presence of the British. The tremors of the new awakening of nationalism had not yet reached the village. The village had unscrupulous landlords, greedy moneylenders, fleecing lawyers, orthodox religion ossified through years into mere rituals, social life saturated with superstitious practices etc.

While Anand portrays the North Indian villages, Narayan, Markandaya and Rao depict the South Indian villages. Anand describes a number of villages such as Nandpur, Bulandshahr etc. in his novels but Narayan presents only a single village in his novels, namely Malgudi. The place mirrors the time and image of the whole of India. It is in a sense a microcosm of India, combining the old and the new, tradition and modernity, the mood of the novelist and that of the contemporary world. As Holstrom says: “What happens in India happens in Malgudi and whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere” (1973:89). Just as Wessex is the microcosm of the declining English agricultural community, “Malgudi is a small town and stands at the nicely calculated cosmic distance between East and West. The superficial influence of the western and modern force on it, does not destroy its basic character” (Prasad, 1994:141).

Malgudi was certainly, in the recent past, a small village on the bank of the river Sarayu, which gradually grew into a big village and later into a town. The first houses in Malgudi were built more than two centuries back. This points to an important conclusion that the change of Malgudi from a small village to a big town was very slow and gradual. It must have consisted of a few lanes and some houses on each side of the lane. The village must have had a temple, wells, and trees of banyan, peepal and tamarind, under the shade of which the villagers rested. As the village grew, there must have developed separate areas for the different castes. Some villages grow very quickly and transform themselves into small towns and then into big towns and cities. In spite of the quick growth of Malgudi, and the changes witnessed there, some landmarks such as the Sarayu, the Mempi hills, the jungles, the groves etc. remain without any change at all.

Unlike Malgudi, the South Indian village that is depicted by Markandaya in her novel Nectar in a Sieve is not modern. Though she has not named her village or given hints as to its location, the village certainly becomes a microcosm of rural India. The
novel very vividly presents the life of the simple, rural people of a representative South Indian village. The village is a group of huts and small houses with a *maidan* ‘field’ nearby where children play games. Electric lamps are seen nowhere in the village as electricity has not reached the village. For lighting, the village has wick lamps or oil-filled coconut shells used as lamps. The village that Markandaya has depicted in this novel has two facets: one the quiet village before the introduction of technology and the other after the starting of the tannery. The novelist has not given a description of the village when it was at the height of its glory but at its transitional period. The change was mainly due to the arrival of the tannery.

Rao in his novel *Kanthapura* describes the accurate location of his village. The village is situated in the interior “with narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads”(7) that wind through the hills and connect this interior village with the outside world. A walk through the village will give one an idea of the village. If we follow Moorthy, when he goes to his mother, we can, to a certain extent, have an idea of the layout of the village:

He [Moorthy] skirted the temple, flower-garden and, hurrying round Boranna’s Toddy Booth and crossing the highway, he rushed up the village road to the panchayat mound, turned to the left, followed Bhatta’s Devil’s field, where Pariah Tippa was weeding, jumped across Seethamma’s stile and went straight through the backyard. He ran over the Temple Promontory and straight across the Brahmin Street Corner to Rangamma’s house, but seeing that Rangamma had not yet returned from the river he walked back to see his mother. (57)

*Kanthapura* is a village situated in the hilly region of Mysore towards the Malabar Coast. The village is located on the way to Karwar, Maddur and Rampur. Saturu, Maluru, Shantipura, and Kashipura and many more are the neighbouring villages. The whole region is located on the Sahyadri mountain range on the western coast of India. Full of woodland terrain, it has a lot of wetlands as well as dry lands growing rice as its staple food. In this small village there are people of all castes, crafts and ideologies. The geographical position of the village of Kanthapura, which is in the province of Kara, is as follows:
High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar Coast is it, up Manglore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. Roads narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads, wind through the forest of teak and jack, of sandal and of sal, and hanging over bellowing gorges and leaping over elephant-haunted valleys, they turn now to the left and now to the right and bring you through the Alambi and Champa and Mena and Kola passes into the great granaries of trade. (1)

The colonial village of Kanthapura is an individual village but it can be any village in India. Basically all villages have the same characteristics; the form and nature of villages remain the same. According to Narasimhaiah, “Kanthapura is India in microcosm: what happened there is what happened in many places during India’s fight for freedom” (1974: x). The village of Kanthapura with its own culture and history is like any other village in India. The selection of the village as the locale of the narrative suggests yet another dimension of the novel. It is a Gandhian novel and in Gandhi’s philosophy of the nation, the village acquired a significant position. He saw India not as a nation-state but as a vast network of villages because the soul of India lived in its villages. “I have believed and repeated times without number,” says Gandhi, “that India is not to be found in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages” (Gandhi, 1936:8).

Of the seven lakh villages, most of the villages are situated near a water source, which is very often a river. Villages always mushroomed on the banks of rivers, streams and lakes as water is essential for drinking, grazing cattle, cultivation, hygiene and transport. Wells were another source of water. There were one or more wells in a village. One of the important features of the Malgudi landscape is the river Sarayu. Like the villages of Anand and Rao, which are situated on the banks of different rivers, Malgudi is situated on the shore of river Sarayu. It is the lifeblood of Malgudi. The people of Malgudi believe that this river was born of a scratch made by Rama’s arrow when he was on his way to Lanka. The holy river is the pride of the town. With each new novel of Narayan, we advance in time by a few years, and Malgudi grows in importance. But the major landmarks remain the same: the river Sarayu that flows by the side of Malgudi, the
River Sarayu is an integral part of Malgudi and appears in all novels of Narayan. This river, which flows through the country of Kosala, is mentioned in the first stanza of Kamba’s *Ramayana*, which is retold by Narayan. Rama, Sita and Lakshman spent a night on its bank on their way to the forests. The river, especially as one associated with history and the epics, is the symbol of purification and transformation. Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath* wrote the imaginative history of Malgudi since the *puranic* ‘legendary’ times. According to him, perhaps Rama passed through Malgudi on his way to Lanka and made the river Sarayu flow and perhaps Buddha preached on the very spot where now the Lawley Extension is. Malgudi asserts itself, and continues to live, change and grow from a small village to a town.

River Sarayu was some ten minutes walk from Ellamman Street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by the oil mongers. Its sand banks were the evening resort of all the people of the town. The Municipal President took any distinguished visitor to the top of the Town Hall and proudly pointed to him the Sarayu in the moonlight, glistening like a silver belt across the North (*Swami and Friends*) and the “Albert Mission College hostel was not more than a couple of hundred yards from the river” (*The English Teacher*, 6). There were many villages on the other side of the river Sarayu. Some distance away on the other side of the river was the village of Mangala where Velan (*The Guide*) lived.

River Sarayu is intimately connected with the lives of the people of Malgudi. It is here that the bully Mani waits for Rajam to throw him into the river. (*Swami and Friends*). It is on the bank of the river that Chandran meets Malathi (*The Bachelor of Arts*). The people of Malgudi take leisurely strolls on its sandbanks. This river has been the site of historic events in the life of Malgudi. In *Swami and Friends* we see about two thousand citizens assembling on the bank of the river Sarayu to protest against the arrest of Gauri Shankar and it is here that the crowd waits for the Mahatma. The Sarayu plays a very important role in the lives of the Malgudi characters. Chandran falls in love with Malathi at the first sight on the bank of this river and Sushila in *The English Teacher* washes her feet in the river and purifies herself before she dies. It is here that Daisy in
The Painter of Signs reveals the secret of her life to Raman. Raju in The Guide spends his time with Rosie on the steps near the river. He also begins his life as a holy man on the bank of Sarayu and ends it on the riverbed. In summer, the river Sarayu dries up like the wells in Malgudi. As a result women have to carry water in pitchers from a long distance. Like Sarayu in Malgudi, Kanthapura also has a river—Himavathy, which is a holy river for the people of Kanthapura. In Nectar in a Sieve too we find that there is a stream near Nathan’s village where the women wash their clothes. In Coolie, Munoo’s village is situated on the bank of a river—river Beas:

And her [Gujri’s] gaze travelled beyond the mango-grove to the silver line of the river Beas, and roved angrily among the greenery of the ferns and weeds and bushes that spread on either side of the stream against the purple gleam of the low hills. (1)

The bank of the river provided green pastures where the cattle of the village were grazed: “He [Munoo] had been grazing cattle on the banks of the Beas and had begun to play while the buffaloes and cows in his charge had entered the low waters of the marsh where they now sat chewing the cud” (1). Similarly, in The Village Nihal Singh’s village was near the rivers Ravi and the Chenab: “The road [to Nihal Singh’s house] was narrowing ahead of him towards the pukka bridge of the new canal that had been opened to irrigate the region between the waters the Ravi and the Chanab” (14). There were ponds or tanks in the village, which the villagers used for all their needs:

Lalu went to the tank. Some of the women of the village were washing clothes as they couched on the steps, a short distance away from the professional washerwomen who hit the clothes on a slab of stone. And two girls were emerging after a dip. (38)

Bullock carts were the usual mode of conveyance in the villages in the past. In addition to this, some villages could boast of a number of buses and trains too. The trains had become a part of the village landscape in Anand’s novel, The Village. The village of Nandpur had a freshly painted railway station, the surroundings of which were kept neat
and tidy. Lalu’s father Nihal Singh who came by train to Nandpur got down at the railway station and walked home.

Nihal Singh came by the train from the district town of Manabad in a crowded third class carriage to Nandpur station. He emerged into the sun soaked compound, strewn with broken white pebbles and smelling of the fresh tar that was painted round the rim of the red-brick building. (5)

The train passes through the fields sending out huge curls of black smoke and carbon particles, which Nihal Singh, who is quite conservative at heart and hates modern innovations, considers very harmful to the crops. He says:

This machine [train] is like a devil ... and the smoke it belches is so bad for the fields. Just blights away the harvest. I am glad I have no fields near the railway. To think of our young corn blasted by the foul smoke and sparks of the stone coal, which these injans belch forth day and night, night and day. The age of darkness has come. (5)

The train has also brought a change in the geography of the village. The big fields are cut through the centre by the railway lines and it has heralded in the process of urbanisation too. Thus we see industrialisation and modernisation bringing change to the physical nature of the village. At the same time this mode of modern transport is faster and more efficient than the conventional mode of transport that exists in the villages. Lalu who is quite modern tells Nihal Singh:

Bapu, you know you wouldn’t like to be carrying all those stacks of grain to Manbad and Sherkot on your back. The bullock cart drivers stop twenty times to smoke and to feed the bullocks and often get drunk and take two days and a night sometimes. But you can send anything to town in an hour by the goods train. (6)

But many villages were not lucky enough to have a railway, and the age-old bullock cart moved in the midst of sights and sounds from nature. Roads were the chief
means of transport in villages. The roads in most of the villages were suitable only for bullock carts as they were dusty and narrow and it took a lot of time to travel from one place to another. The roads in the villages were mostly mud roads or sometimes paved with stones. There were also tarred roads. But these were found connected to the main roads or highways and went only for some distance into the village and were later continued by mud roads. In Nandpur also, the roads were unpaved, narrow, dusty and muddy:

Where the short, well paved stretch of the railway road ended, it gave place to the dusty, rutted open highway. Nihal Singh glanced at the profusion of dead leaves that lay in the pits of the road, covered with dust and bespattered with mud and at the ochre and golden and yellow colours of the hanging boughs of jamas and jacks and neem trees. (7)

The roads in the village of Nandpur were narrow like the roads in most of the villages. So when a cart passed, Nihal Singh “balanced himself precariously on a boulder, to let the cart pass without splashing mud or covering him with dust” (15). In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Nathan and Rukmani had to travel a long distance in a bullock cart to reach Nathan’s village. “For six hours we rode on and on along the dusty road, passing several villages on the way to ours, which was a good distance away. Halfway there we stopped and a good distance away” (3). Malgudi has many unpaved, rutted, dusty roads, which turn muddy in the rainy season. The adjoining villages are connected by such roads. Malgudi has some tarred roads too. One big road, which passes through Malgudi, is the Trunk Road from Madras to Trichy. Another important road in Malgudi is the Market Road, which is the lifeline of the place. “It had a tendency to take abrupt turns and disrupt itself into side streets, which wove a network of crazy lanes behind the façade of buildings on the main road” (*Mr. Sampath*, 5). It is a major business centre and hence is crowded, noisy and dirty. The ‘beauty’ of the place overwhelms Margayya in *The Financial Expert*. In *The Painter of Signs* we find the Market Road crowded and active as ever. “This was the hour at which the train arrived, and all kinds of barrels, packages and bags were unloaded at the railway station, and then piled up on the bullock carts, which
lumbered along to the godowns behind the market"(78). By nightfall Malgudi is quiet. The roads appear deserted. Only one or two shops are open. *In The Vendor of Sweets*, when Jagan walked back home:

... at a little past seven-thirty, a lull had fallen on Market Road. Only the Krishna Dispensary was open. An enormous shaft of blue light fell on the road from the Krishna Dispensary. He noticed Dr. Krishna at his table peering at the throat of a patient. A street dog lay snoring on a heap of stone on the road side kept there since the first body was elected in Free India in 1947. (63)

Roads were the life veins of transport in Kanthapura. This village was not as modern as Malgudi where there were cars, buses and even auto rickshaws. In Kanthapura the chief means of transport was bullock carts. The bullock carts carried men and goods. Subba Chetty had two strong bulls, which had cost him three hundred and fifty rupees:

Cart after cart groans through the roads of Kanthapura, and on many a night, before the eyes are shut, the last lights we see are those of the train of carts, and the last voice we hear is that of the cart-man who sings through the hollows of the night. The carts pass through the Main Street and the Potter’s Lane and then they turn by Chennayya’s Pond, and up they go, up the passes into the morning that will rise over the sea. Sometimes when Rama Chetty or Subba Chetty have merchandise, the carts stop and there are greetings, and in every house we can hear Subba Chetty’s 350 rupee bulls ringing their bells as they get under the yoke. (1-2)

All kinds of goods were taken into and out of the village in bullock carts:

Carts rolled on and on. Fair carts of the Kanthapura fair, those that came from Maddur and Tippur and Santur and Kuppur, with chillies and coconut, rice and ragi, cloth, *tamarind*, butter and oil, bangles and kumkum, little dolls, little kites etc. Carts rolled by the Sampur knoll and down into the valley of the Tippur stream, then rose again and groaned round the Kenchamma hill and going straight
into the temple grove, one by one, with lolling bells and muffled bells with horn-protectors in copper and back-protectors in lace. (56)

The surroundings of Malgudi present quite an interesting view. Fringing Malgudi or just beyond it is Nallappa’s Grove and the Mempi Forest, which could be reached by the Grove Street, and the Forest Road respectively. The river could be crossed near Nallappa’s Grove, a little downstream. Men and cattle crossed the stream there and went to other places. Country carts drawn by bullocks also crossed the river at this place. Raju with Gaffur crosses the river at Nallappa’s Grove and climbs the opposite bank, and goes to the village on the other side of the river to find a cobra for Rosie (The Guide, 59). Beyond the Sarayu on the other side of the river is a garden. Margayya in The Financial Expert collects the red lotus from the garden. The priest tells Margayya; “Beyond Sarayu, towards the North, there is a garden where there is a ruined temple with a pond. You will find red lotus there”(48). Jagan, in The Vendor of Sweets, establishes an ashram beyond the river. Krishna in The English Teacher goes to the garden house beyond the river to communicate with his dead wife. The garden, the lotus pond and the ruined temple on the other side of the river present a separate but not discontinuous world from that of Malgudi. The garden is not merely a cluster of trees. It is inhabited by a variety of creatures such as lizards, chameleons, birds, frogs and monkeys. In The English Teacher we get a description of the garden:

Over this little building loomed banyan, peepal and mango trees and beyond them stretched a grove of casurina, the wind blowing through their leaves creating a continuous murmur as of sea-waves. The surroundings were covered with vegetation of every type: bramble, thorn-bushes, lantana and oleander intertwined and choked each other. (115)

Just as we have the Nallappa’s Grove and the Mempi Forest near Malgudi, there was the Skeffington Coffee Plantation near the village of Kanthapura. While the coffee plantation is physically encircled by a fence and gate, keeping the coolies in and the others out, the village is represented as a closed and exclusive social order keeping the agents of the colonial matrix out. Thus Bade Khan, the policeman is not offered a home
in Kanthapura. The Skeffington Coffee Estate keeps on growing bigger and bigger. And, as it grows in size, coolies from far and wide reach there in search of work:

The Skeffington Coffee Estate rises beyond the Bebbur Mound over the Bear's Hill, and hanging over Tippur and Subbur and Kantur, it swings round the elephant valley, and, rising to shoulder the Snow Mountains and the Beda Ghats, it dips sheer into the Himavathy, and follows on from the Balepur Toll-gate Corner to the Kenchamma Hill, were it turns again and skirts Bhatta's Devil's fields and Range Gowda's coconut garden and at Tippur Stream it rises again and is lost amidst the jungle growths of the Horse-Head Hill. Nobody knows how large it is. It is at least ten thousand acres wide. Later the estate began to grow from the Bear's Hill to the Kantur Hill, and more and more coolies came from beneath the Ghats, and from the Bear's Hill and Kantur it touched the Snow Mountains, and still more and more coolies came and then it became bigger and bigger till touched all the hills around our village and still more and more coolies came—coolies from below the Ghats and talked Tamil or Telugu and who brought with them their old men and their children and their widowed women. (64)

On the outer boundary of the village were toddy booths, which were sponsored by the government. The poor villagers frequented these toddy shops and lost their hard earned daily earnings. Moorthy opposed this evil and felt that, "toddy trees are Government trees, and toddy booths are there to exploit the poor and the unhappy"(178).

In the villages a zoning was clearly visible. For example, Malgudi was divided into different areas. The rich inhabited certain areas and the middle class and the poor people other areas. Mostly the different castes lived at different places. The untouchables lived secluded and a little apart from the rest. The Lawley Extension was an important place in Malgudi, which had developed, much later. Rich and important people like Rajam's father, the superintendent of police lived there. In Swami and Friends:
Rajam's father lived in the Lawley Extension. The name Lawley was given in memory of the mighty engineer Sir Frederick Lawley, who was at one time the superintending engineer for Malgudi Circle. The extension consisted of about fifty neat bungalows, mostly occupied by government officials. The Trunk Road to Trichinopoly passed a few yards in front of these houses. (151)

The Lawley Extension, which was inhabited by the wealthy people once, formed the southernmost limit of Malgudi, but later it was extended further south. In *The English Teacher*:

Lawley Extension formed the southernmost portion of the town, and consisted of well laid-out residential buildings, lining the neat roads and cross roads. It was the very end of the town, beyond which passed the Trichy trunk road, shaded with trees. At one time, only those with very high incomes could have residences there, but about five years ago, under a new scheme, the extension developed farther south: even beyond the Trunk Road the town was extending. There was a general scramble for these sites and houses, which received an uninterrupted southern breeze blowing across the fields. (60)

The Anderson lane in Malgudi was a street within a street, and a lane tucked away into a lane. The families in Kabir Street and Ellamman Street were once very rich. They were the landlords who lived in big houses. Their descendants now lived there in all pomp and splendour. The narrator in *The Talkative Man* tells us:

I belonged to one of those Kabir Street families, which flourished on the labours of an earlier generation. We were about twenty unrelated families in Kabir Street, each having inherited a huge rambling house stretching from the street to the river at the back. All that one did was to lounge on the *pyol*, watch the street, and wait for the harvest from our village and cash from the tenants. We were a vanishing race, however, about twenty families in Kabir Street and equal number in Ellamman Street, two spots where the village landlords had settled and built houses nearly a century back in order to seek the comforts of urban life and to
educate their children at Albert Mission. Their descendants, so comfortably placed, were mainly occupied in eating, breeding, celebrating festivals, spending the afternoons in a prolonged siesta on the pyol and playing cards all evening. These women rarely came out, being most of the time in the kitchen or in the safe-room scrutinising their collection of diamonds and silks. (4)

The houses in Malgudi, at the time when it was a small village, were mostly built by the house owners themselves. Raju’s father had built the house himself. “He had dug the earth kneaded the mud with water from the well and built the walls, and roofed them with coconut thatch. At that time trains were not even thought of” (The Guide, 10). The streets were shabby and swarming. Jagan’s father lived in a hut, but when he had money he improved his house:

Jagan’s father, as everyone knew, had lived at first in a thatched hut at the very back of this ground. Jagan remembered playing on a sand heap outside the hut; the floor of the hut was paved with cool clay and one could put one’s cheek to it on a warm day and feel heavenly. When he had money, Jagan’s father put up the walls of the bathroom laying the bricks with his own hands. His father expanded the house from the backyard to the front. (The Vendor of Sweets, 25)

Margayya, in The Financial Expert, lived in Vinayak Street. His father also had built the hut with his own hands:

No. 14 D, Vinayak Street had been a famous landmark, for it was the earliest house to be built in that area. Margayya’s father was considered a hero for settling there. It was a lonely place where there was supposed to be no security for life or property. The house was now divided into two; the other portion was occupied by his brother. But the houses had a common backyard. (98)

There were other houses also which the owners themselves had built. For example in Waiting for the Mahatma:
Sriram’s house, number ‘14’ in Kabir Street was very old and looked it. It was the last house in the street or “The First House” as his great grandfather used to say at the time he built it. From here one could see the back of market buildings and hear the sound of the crowd on the market road. (4)

All the streets in Malgudi were not alike. Some places in Malgudi like the Lawley Extension, Kabir Street and Ellamman Street were liked by all. But there were places, which were equally disliked by many. Vinayak Mudali Street was one. In The Guide, Vinayak Mudali Street is not a very comfortable place to live in, and in The Financial Expert, the priest complains to Margayya: “Our Vinayak Mudali Street! It’s like an oven in summer”. Margayya agrees, ‘What a lot of mosquitoes’” (24). There were other buildings like the Elementary School, the Fund Office and so on near Sriram’s house in Malgudi:

Next door to Sriram’s was a small printing press and next to it was another two-hundred year old house in which six noisy families lived, and beyond that was the Fund Office. A crooked street ran in front of the houses; their closeness to the market and to a Higher Elementary Town School, the Local Fund Dispensary and above all to the half-dozen benches around the market fountain, was said to give these houses in Kabir Street a unique value. (Waiting for the Mahatma, 4)

It is certain that the houses were the first buildings in Kabir Street. It was only after the houses that the other buildings and offices such as the Fund Office, The Dispensary, The Town School etc. were built. The houses were all alike—a large single roof sloping down to the slender rose-wood pillars with carvings and brass decorations on them, and a pyol, an open brick platform under the windows, on which the household slept in summer. The walls were two feet thick, the doors were made of century-old teak planks with bronze knobs, and the tiles were of burnt mud, which had weathered the storms and rains of centuries:

All these houses were alike. You could see end to end the slender pillars, sand tiles sloping down as if all of them belonged to a single house. Many changes had
occurred since they were built two centuries ago. Many of them had changed hands, the original owners having been lost in the toils of litigation, some were rented out to tradesmen, such as the Sun Press, the Butter Factory, or the Fund Office, while their owners retired to villages or built themselves modern villas in Lawley Extension. (*Waiting for the Mahatma*, 4)

The houses of ordinary people in Malgudi were not furnished properly. They were people of simple habits and tastes. The people sat mostly on the ground. They ate their food sitting on the floor. Houses were not electrified and the kerosene lamp was used to ward off darkness. In *The Guide*, we see Raju and his mother sitting on the floor side by side and eating their meal together from a rice pot within reach of both, by the sooty tin lamp stuck on a nail in the smoke-stained wall and after the meal the boy sleeps on a mat on the verandah while the mother waits for the return of her husband. Raju’s house did not have separate rooms for dining, sleeping, and so on. Raju and his family had got used to a common living in the hall:

> It had never occurred to us to be otherwise. We never wanted anything more than this. My father lived in his shop, I played under the tree, and we received male visitors on the outside *pyol* and left the inner for mother or any lady that might come. When we slept we went in. If it was warm, we slept on the *pyol*. The hall was passage, dressing room, a drawing room, a study, everything combined. My shaving mirror was on a nail; my finest clothes hung on peg. For a bath I dashed to a chamber on the backyard, half open to the sky, and poured water over my head, drawn straight from the well. (126)

But we find Raju living in a fine two-storeyed house once his financial condition has improved:

> 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. In the upper floor we had our bedrooms and a large hall where Nalini practiced her dances. It was carpeted. A bronze image of Natraja was fixed in one corner. (166)
Houses are also available for rent in Malgudi. People who do not have their own houses live in rented houses there. In *The English Teacher* Krishna and his wife, who are well-off search for a good house in Malgudi and are able to find a house to their liking:

At last we came to a house, which seemed attractive. It had a wide compound, broad windows, and a general appearance of spaciousness and taste. All the doors and the walls looked fresh with paint...a few steps led up to the veranda, a fairly deep, cool veranda, with a short parapet...a hall, four rooms in addition to the kitchen, a pleasing light blue paint and all the walls inside the house. It was really the very last house in the last crossroad of the New Extension. Fields of corn stretched away in front of the house and far beyond it a cluster of huts of the next village, and beyond it all stood up the blue outlines of Mempi Mountains. (64-65)

In Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, we find that Nathan’s house, like every poor farmer’s abode, is a small thatched mud hut near a paddy field in the vicinity of a couple of similar huts. A garland of mango leaves is hung across its doorway to herald happiness and good fortune. Nathans’s hut, like other huts, has two rooms, one of which is a kind of storehouse for grain, whereas the other is for virtually everything else. A third had been begun but was unfinished; the mud walls were not more than half a foot high. Nathan had built the hut with his own hands. Nathan did not own the land he cultivated like Rukmani’s father. But they had their own ploughing bullocks and kept a milk goat. Rukmani had a vegetable garden of her own and spent her time tending the plants when she did not work in the field. Near their paddy field there was a small brook. She could wash her clothes and bathe in the running water of the brook. At that time the concept of a nuclear family or a small family with two or three children had not evolved and so like every village family, Nathan’s family too had several children — one daughter and six sons.

There was a clear difference in the size and structure of the houses in which the rich and the poor lived. While the average villagers who always remained poor, lived in huts of one or two rooms, the rich and the wealthy lived in houses, which were bigger and had many rooms. In short, the size and structure of the houses depended on the
financial status of the villagers. In Malgudi there were even a few palatial bungalows belonging to very rich and influential people. One such house was the house of Mr. Natesh, the municipal chairman in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. He boasts of having spent two lakhs of rupees for his house:

I have spent two lakhs on the building. My garden and lawns alone have cost me twenty five thousand rupees so far... I can live in a hut... but this is to receive the Mahatma. This is the biggest and the best-furnished house in Malgudi. (24)

In his novels Anand depicts the villages and houses of the higher castes. In some villages, the upper castes lived in better surroundings. Their houses were better than the houses of the poor peasants. In *Coolie*, we have a picture of the village home of Munoo. Here we find the surroundings and home in a better condition. The roads leading to these villages were also slightly better:

“Munoo ohe, Munooa oh Mundu”, shouted Gujri from the veranda of a squat, sequestered, little mud hut thatched with straw, which stood upon the edge of a hill about a hundred yards away from the village in the valley. And her eagle eyes explored the track of gold dust, which worked its zigzag course through rough scrub, beyond the flat roofs of the village houses under the relentless haze of the Kangra sun. (1)

While the peasants lived in a pitiable condition, the landlords and the high castes lived luxuriously. Lal Singh in *The Village* speaks about this state to his beloved Maya:

There has been no time like the present, my darling. No such unrighteousness—that hundreds and thousands of men in our land should be mortgaged up to their loincloths. That almost every mud-hut, every fruit tree, every bedstead and every bullock should be mortgaged, while in the houses of landlords stand milch cow, fine bulls, white horses and granaries well stocked. (358)
The landlords and a few rich people in the village had big houses like that of the municipal chairman in Narayan's novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*. On his way home from Manabad, Nihal Singh in *The Village* saw that: "...it was the new-fashioned three and four storeyed big brick house of the landlord, the sahukar, the confectioner and the other shop keeper that spoilt the contours of the township for him" (18).

The village expands with the coming of new houses. Invariably, the land in the possession of a family gets further divided into smaller pieces as time passes. When sons get married, new houses are built for them and they move into them and thus a new family is born. When the land is divided among the sons there occurs a decrease in the area of the land possessed by the family. In *The Village*, Lalu's mother Gujri is anxious about the marriage of her sons. She says: "The younger boys will marry and they will go with their wives and divide the land that remains, and I will have to sit at the doorsteps of their houses" (121). She wants to build new houses for her sons, but at the same time she wants to keep some of the ancient structure intact:

She would have three new brick houses built in the corners of the courtyard for the boys. But the old barn she must keep intact. The ancients had built it themselves, built it strong against enemies, of mud, so that it might look humble and not excite the envy of the neighbours and authorities. (123)

She does not want the new houses to be flimsy but wants them to be big and beautiful:

The other two boys--they should not have flimsy mud huts or cottages of twigs and leaves like those of the paupers of the village and the menials. The family had not descended so low. She would have two storeyed houses built for them with blue flowerpots on the terraces. (124)

It has been illustrated that there existed a zoning in the villages. In Narayan's novels, we are able to see this zoning. The rich landlords, as already mentioned, lived in Kabir Lane and Ellamman Street and the affluent and the influential ones in Lawley
Extension. The lower caste people were not allowed to mix with the higher castes and had to live in a separate place far away from the living area of the upper class. Hence, we find the sweepers' huts beyond Nallappa's Grove. In the unnamed lanes behind the market lived a class of handloom weavers. All along the lane they had set up weaving frames with yarns dyed in blue, and hung out to dry on frames. Similarly, near Ellamman Street lived a group of oil mongers. The untouchables lived in huts made with torn cloth, tin sheets and coconut matting. The tiny huts were overcrowded, and did not give them much protection from the vagaries of nature. Rain and sun found no difficulty in entering their huts. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, we find Gandhi visiting the hut of an untouchable:

The Mahatma entered the hut of a sweeper. This was one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived on the banks of the river. It was probably the worst area in the town, and an exaggeration 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. The municipal services were neither extended here nor missed, although the people living in the hovels were employed by the municipality for scavenging work in the town. (23)

Quite different from Malgudi, the social stratification was very strong in the village of Kanthapura. Every caste had its own space of living. Of all the castes, the Brahmins were the supreme inhabitants of the village. As in other Indian villages, due to social stratification, the houses were constructed in caste-wise clusters. There was a separate living space for the Brahmins and also different quarters for the pariahs, potters, weavers and the sudras. The entire village seemed to be divided into several caste and class segments, which was, of course, a common social problem of the Indian society. Moorthy’s village had four hundred and twenty houses, but all the houses were not big like the house of Postmaster Suryanarayana, situated by the temple corner. The Potter’s Street was the smallest of the streets. It had only five houses. There were Lingayya, Ramayya, Subbayya and Chandrayya of the potters’ street who had owned big houses
and had been quite well off previously, but now on account of the modern Mangalore tiles, had to turn to land. Industrialisation had affected them adversely. Old Kamalamma had a little broken house at the end of the street. Formerly, the Potter’s Street had been a flourishing place. Chandrayya made festival pots and the rest of the potters were a simple lot, who tilled their lands, and now and then, went out to neighbouring villages to help people to make bricks. When one turned round the Potters’ Street and walked across the Temple Square, the first house one saw was the nine-beamed house of Patel Range Gowda. About the number of houses the narrator in Kanthapura observes:

Till now I’ve spoken only of the Brahmin quarter. Our village had a Pariah quarter too, a Potters’ quarter, a Weavers’ quarter, and a Sudra quarter. How many huts had we there? I do not know. There may have been ninety or a hundred—though a hundred may be the right number of course you wouldn’t expect me to go to the Pariah quarter, but I have seen from the street-corner Beadle Timmayya’s hut. It was in the middle, so—let me see—if there were four on this side and about six, seven, eight that side, that makes some fifteen or twenty huts in all. Pock-marked Sidda had a real *thothi* (inner courtyard) house, with a big veranda and a large roof, and there must have been a big granary somewhere inside, for he owned as much land as Patwari Nanjundia or Shopkeeper Subba Chetty. (7)

All the houses in the villages were not of the same size. In many villages there were big houses and small houses. In Kanthapura too, there were a few big houses. The narrator in *Kanthapura* describes the houses there in the village:

Our village had four and twenty houses. Not all were big like Postmaster Suryanarayana’s double storied house by the Temple Corner. But some were really not bad to look at. Our Patwaari Nanjundia had a veranda with two rooms built on to the old house. He had even put glass panes to the windows, which even Postmaster Suryanarayana could not boast of. Then there were the Kannayya-House people, who had a high veranda and though the house was I know not how many generations old, it was still as fresh and new as though it had been built
yesterday. No wonder that Waterfall Venkamma roared day and night against Rangamma. (4-5)

The way of identifying the people who lived in different houses was also very peculiar. The owners were identified by their houses as Moorthy was called ‘Corner House Moorthy’ and another family was identified as ‘Kannya-House’ people and yet another as ‘Fig-tree House’ people. Although in Kanthapura there were no buildings of public importance, in Malgudi there were a few buildings, which were of importance to the public. The Malgudians were very proud of The Co-operative Bank and The Circuit House in Malgudi. There were also schools, college, shops and other establishments in Malgudi:

One of the proudest buildings in Malgudi was the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, which was built in the year 1941. The Circuit House on the edge of the town was an old East India Company building on an acre of land on the Trunk Road. Robert Clive was supposed to have halted there while marching to relieve the siege of Trichinopoly. The citizens of Malgudi were very proud of this building. (Waiting for the Mahatma, 24)

Malgudi had a number of shops. The shops were at first crude structures made of deal wood. Many tiny shops were seen about Malgudi with the shopkeepers hunched on the counters selling plantains, betel leaves, snuff and English biscuits. Raju’s father too kept such a shop; it was built of deal planks and gunnysacks. His father sat in the shop selling peppermints, fruits, sweets, tobacco betel leaf, and parched gram measured out in tiny bamboo cylinders. The wayfarers on the Trunk Road came to this shop, which was known as the ‘Hut Shop’. Very often a crowd of peasants and drivers of bullock wagons were seen gathered in front of this shop. Sometime after the coming of the railway, Raju’s father was given the charge of the stall on the railway platform. With the passage of time, the idea of a shop also underwent a change. The shop on the platform was more spacious, and paved with cement and fitted with a number of shelves. The articles exhibited also underwent a change. The new shop was filled with bunches of bananas, troughs of fried stuff, bread, buns, cigarettes etc. Raju’s father, who could not adapt
himself to the change, soon moved to the old shop where he was more comfortable, and entrusted the care of the railway shop to Raju. Malgudi had its common tea-stall, Muthu’s tea stall, which sold tea in unwashed tumblers.

In the early days, a *pyol* school also existed in Malgudi. Such schools were common in the villages. The *pyol School* was conducted on the broad verandah of the village headman’s house, where all the classes were held at the same time. The schoolmaster “addressed his pupils as donkeys and traced their genealogy on either side with thoroughness” (*The Guide*, 24). The other important places in Malgudi included Anderson Lane, where editor Srinivas lived, the Vinayak Mudaliyar Street, the Kabir Lane where Sampath had his establishment – The Truth Printing Works, etc. Malgudi also had a cricket ground and a market place. As time passed the place soon achieved a college and a film studio and a bridge across the river. Looking around Malgudi one could see a number of other villages. One such village was Kuppam. Jagan went to Kuppam in order to take a look at the bride proposed for him. When Jagan went to Badri Hill, with his family:

... the bus deposited them in a village at the foot of the hill. It was probably the smallest village on any map, consisting of two rows of huts and a couple of wooden stands made of packing cases on which a little merchandise was displayed for the convenience of pilgrims going uphill—coconuts, bananas, betal leaves and flowers. (115)

Another village was Solur, described in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. It was a small one with about fifty houses on a hill slope. Often, the villages did not have a definite form. It was even doubtful if they could be considered villages. For instance:

Sriram, whenever he heard the word ‘villages’, his mental picture was always one of green coconut groves, long and numerous steps leading down to the large tank, with elegant village women coming up bearing pitchers, the low roofed houses with broad pyols, and mat covered wagons moving about dragged by bulls with tinkling bells around their necks. He owed his idea to all the various Tamil films,
which he had seen. But reality was different. Some villages were hardly a cluster of huts. The first time he saw an actual village he could not recognise it and asked Bharati where the village was. (58)

The Indian villages did not meet up to Sriram’s expectations, because the real Indian village was totally different from his idealised notion of villages. The villages he saw came nowhere near his mental conception:

Sriram’s vision of a village was nowhere to be seen. Hungry parched men and women with skin stretched over their bones, bare earth, dry ponds and miserable tattered, thatched roofing over crumbling mud walls, streets full of pits and loose sand, unattractive dry fields—that was a village. Here pigs and dogs lounged in dry gutters. Sriram wondered how people ever managed to go on living in such places. (59-60)

The villages were not so beautiful, clean and fresh as one might suppose. Most of the villagers did not pay heed to cleanliness and had little sense of hygiene. Nandpur in the novel *The Village* has all the basic characteristics of a representative village. It was also dirty, unclean and unhygienic. Nihal Singh who comes from Manabad to Nandpur by train, “left the main path, and took a short-cut full puddles across the fields scattered with drying and decaying dung, broken pitchers, ashes, rags and bits of iron” (12). Lalu had to cover his nose when he passed through some spots in the village. He hurried:

...through the parts where the stink was most offensive, the loose end of his turban lifted to his nose and the folds of his *tehmet* in his hand. But the sickening smell of the stale lentils, wet crumbs, torn rags, mud refuse and garbage, which choked the drain, still lingered. For the wind seemed to be blowing toward the bazaar way and filled the nostrils with a stench that was enough to make the shop of Mota Singh, the perfumer and sherbet vendor, smell like a sewage farm. (16)

Again the picture of a dirty village is presented when Lalu observes the houses of the cowherds in the village:
Lalu sat down to rest on a boulder halfway down the hill, which overlooked the houses of the village menials, ruminating on the bare, rugged contours of the familiar landscape. In the dirty courtyard of the cowherds' lightless, lousy, pest-ridden houses, by the mounds of dry cow-dung cakes, some children were dragging the life out of a calf, pushing her, pulling her and mauling her about. (61)

The villages were sometimes storehouses of diseases. Mr. Long, the government representative, came to inspect the village of Nandpur and spoke to the villagers in explicit terms, throwing much light on their deplorable condition:

I have inspected its different parts, and I think it is an awful place to live in. It is unhealthy. That is why you are always ill half of the year, and why your women die in childbirth and your children are either still born or have sores all over their bodies. I have counted fourteen rubbish heaps in the vicinity of your village and three big and small dirty tanks, all of which receive their water from the black, smelling sewers, which flow down from your lanes and alleys. Your overcrowded mud houses are crumbling to pieces your wells are dangerously near the drains and must receive all the mud and slush of your narrow streets when the rain falls. You have no open spaces outside your village for you to take the air or for your children to play in. Your village then is a place fit only for animals to live in, and if that be so, since you live here in this dirt, you are all animals, and not men. (160-61)

Quite different from Nandpur is the pre-independence village of Bulandshahr, which Anand describes, in his first novel Untouchable. In this novel, Anand gives a vivid picture of the colony of the untouchables, which is, in fact, a rudimentary village. Many towns and villages had an outcastes' colony, which was itself a small village by all means. The outcastes or the Panchamas were forced to live away from the main village. They were not allowed to use the wells in the village as caste Hindus thought that their mere touch polluted it. The Panchama men and women had to wait at the well for a long time until a caste Hindu poured water to them. The outcastes' colony or their village
consisted of a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, outside
the boundaries of the towns and separate from them. In the colony lived the scavengers,
the leather workers, the washer-men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters, and
the outcastes from Hindu society. The condition of their village was very pathetic. There
were no drains, no light, no water; people lived in the marshland among the latrines of the
townsmen and in the stench of their own dung scattered about everywhere. The children
wallowed in the mire, bathed in the marshes and played among its rubbish heaps. In the
novel, Anand describes the filthy condition of the outcastes' colony:

A brook ran near the land, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt
and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and shines
of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cow
and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. The absence of the drainage
system had, through the rains of various seasons, made the quarter a marsh, which
gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and
animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the
squalor and the misery, which lay within it, made it an uncongenial place to live
in. (11)

The village of the untouchables was the same everywhere. The houses, the
people, the surroundings and the habits all remained almost the same. Anand in *The
Village* describes another village of the untouchables. Here too the conditions were the
same. The place appeared extremely dirty and nauseating:

Lalu darted across the breadth of the bazaar towards the cobbler's lane frightening
the hens and cocks into cluck clucking as he slipped on the mouldy soil around
the drains. He jumped into a ravine beyond which stood the sweeper's straw huts,
winking with distended eyes at the village from which they were segregated by
the filthiest, most foully odorous pond in the village, from which outcastes drew
their water and where they and their cattle bathed. The elders among the high
castes told the children that it was part of the kingdom of *yama* in hell, to which it
was connected by a subterranean passage. (102)
The untouchables were never allowed to possess any land. They built their huts and lived on the land of the landlord and could be evacuated at the whim and fancy of the latter. As Thakur Singh, the landlord tells Suraj Mani and Panditji in *The Village*, “And, as for those chamars, they are living in huts built on a plot which our family has given them in this village. They can be asked to go” (39). In Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya the houses of the untouchables were crude structures with four walls made of mud or with a mixture of bamboo and mud. The thatching was also very weak and it could not keep out the rainwater. The houses mostly had only a single room and sometimes they were partitioned into two. As to the furniture there were none except one or two cots. Bakha’s (*Untouchable*) home was a one-roomed mud house where the whole family lived. In his home Bakha lay:

... covered by a worn-out, greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet, which was spread on the floor in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dank, one-roomed mud-house. His sister slept on a cot next to him and his father and brother snored from under a patched, ochre-coloured quilt, on a broken string bed, on the other side. (12)

Laxmi, Bhikku’s mother also had a one-room hut with thatched roof like the rest. Her hut stood by the six other tumbledown homesteads of the brotherhood of the Chamar untouchables. Ghulum, the weaver boy in *The Village*, also lived in a dirty one-roomed hut:

Ghulam, the weaver boy, lived with his mother in a small hovel. It was a filthy room, cramped with a loom in the middle, an oven on one side and a huge bedstead on the other on which the whole family slept. And sheep, hens and cocks revelled among their droppings all over the place, reeking with several varieties of smell, and slimy with dirt. (61)

Since the huts had only one room, they had to be used the same place for sleeping, eating, cooking food etc. As cooking food inside the hut was very uncomfortable, many people cooked food outside. Thus Bakha’s sister had her kitchen outside:
Sohini had kept up the outdoor kitchen, which her mother had made, adjoining the door of her house. It was not strictly a kitchen in the Hindu manner, for there were no four lines defining its limits, according to those laws of hygiene, which are the basis of Hindu piety. A couple of brooms stood out next to the fire-place, an empty refuse basket, a can, two earthen pitchers and a chipped enamelled jug lay scattered about. Most of the utensils were of clay, darkened by the soot of many fires, and never washed since Bakha’s mother had died. (85)

Although not an outcaste, in Nihal Singh’s house too, food was prepared in the kitchen made outside: “Nihal Singh passed through the large sun baked courtyard by the open-air kitchen to the barn where the family of six lived. The smoke of cow-dung cakes from the hearth-fires of peasant homes choked the alleyways” (The Village, 20).

The marginalised outcastes had to depend on wells or tanks for their needs of water. But they were prohibited from drawing water from wells, as it was believed that their touch would pollute the water. They were very poor and had no money to dig a well and had to collect water from the common well. In Untouchable Anand Presents how the low caste women had to cringe for water:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook, as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own because it cost a lot of money to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulandshahr. Perforce they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindu’s well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitcher. (26)

The villagers were strong believers and so, very often, there was at least one temple in every village. Sometimes the temple or the place of worship would be an idol placed under a peepal or a banyan tree. There were also different temples belonging to different castes. The untouchables were not allowed to come anywhere near the temple.
Their entry would ‘pollute’ the temple and it had to be cleansed and purified. In the vicinity of the temples trees like *peepal* and *banyan* were seen. These trees were common in the villages and they provided shade and a resting place to the villagers. It gave them physical and mental comfort. Meetings were convened under the shade of these colossal trees. They were also a religious symbol. Sometimes the base of the trees served as the altar of a small temple with the idols of gods. The *peepal* tree is mentioned in *Untouchable*:

He [Bakha] threw the basket and the broom he had in his hand on the ground and girt up his loins to attack his job as he stood in the shadow of a *banyan* tree that spread its dense foliage over the temple courtyard. A brass cage of a miniature temple with the beautifully polished image of a snake enclosed in it, lay on a small stone structure which surrounded the giant trunk of the *banyan* tree....He saw a regular stream of people pass through the courtyard after touching the foot of the altar on the miniature temple, by the *banyan* tree. (64-65)

In *The Road Saunu*, son of the land lord Thakur Singh, fox-face Daya Ram, cow-herd Mahesh and cock-eye Ram Nivas, “were seated on the plinth under the *peepal* tree”(2). The *banyan* or *peepal* trees were sometimes the centre of the village itself. In *The Village Nihal Singh* on his return from the town, “rushed by the porch under the bearded *banyan* tree which was the village centre and took a short cut through gulley to avoid passing through the bazaar”(19). Trees such as *peepal*, *banyan* and *tamarind* are deeply rooted in the life of the people of the village that it is impossible to think of a village without any one of these trees. People take rest, converse, and sleep under the cool shade of these colossal trees which are also considered sacred. Wherever there is a temple or a shrine or any other religious or sacred spot, the *peepal* tree is invariably found. The tree, which spreads over a large area, gives shade to man and beast. In *The Guide*, in Mangala village there is a large platform under a *peepal* tree at whose root a number of stone figures are embedded, which are often anointed with oil and worshipped. It is shady, cool and spacious. It is a town hall platform for Mangala:
He [Velan’s brother] was panting when he ran into the assembly of his village elders. They were sitting solemnly around a platform in the centre of the village, discussing the rains. There was a brick platform built round an ancient peepal tree, at whose root a number of stone figures were embedded, which were often anointed with oil and worshipped. This was a sort of town hall platform for Mangala. It was shady and cool and spacious; there always was a gathering of men on one side conferring on local problems, and on the other women who carried loaded baskets on their heads and rested; children chased each other; and the village dogs slumbered. Here were sitting the elders of the village discussing the rain, the fight tonight and all the strategies connected with it. (88)

In The Vendor of Sweets, Jagan’s Gayatri temple is also surrounded by peepal and other trees. There were peepal trees on the banks of the river Sarayu too. “The peepal branches overhanging the river rustled in the breeze and scattered the leaves on the stream below” (Swami and Friends, 46). Malgudi can be seen as a true homogenous community where corporate living is possible around the village peepal tree, the spacious brick platform round it, the stone figures anointed with oil and worshipped by women, and on the other side of the spacious platform, the village elders sitting, conferring on local problems, children chasing each other and dogs slumbering. The shade of the banyan tree is always comforting. When Chandran, in The Bachelor of Arts, reaches Koopal village after wandering for eight months he goes to a banyan tree and sits in its soothing shade. Again the English teacher waiting for the bus from Trichinopoly finds three women, a coolie and an ass waiting under a tamarind tree with sparse leaves in order to escape from the tremendous heat of the day (196). Margayya in The Financial Expert sits under the Banyan tree in front of The Central Co-operative Bank with his old tin box (2). During Raju’s childhood, the village cartmen used to rest under the tree and they unyoked their bullocks for the night there (18). The tamarind tree was the seat of his childhood activities. Raju and his friends played under the tree and enjoyed themselves to their fill:
Raju played under the shade of a tamarind tree across the road. It was an ancient, spreading tree, dense with leaves, amidst which monkeys and birds lived, bred, and chattered incessantly, feeding on the tender leaves and fruits. Pigs and piglets came from somewhere and nosed about the ground thick with fallen leaves. (12)

Most villages in India have a *sthala purana* or a legendary history of their own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village—Rama might have rested under the *peepal* tree, Sita might have dried her clothes after her bath, on the yellow tree or the Mahatma himself on one of his many pilgrimages through the country might have slept in the hut, the one by the village gate. In the temples attached to the villages, the villagers observe religious festivals where religious scriptures are read out, explained, and heard with reverence. But with the coming of Gandhi and the freedom movement, along with such regular functions, gradually came the Gandhi bhajans.

In the centre of the village of Kanthapura stood the Kenchamma’s temple. Along the river, there were other temples also like Kanthapurishwari’s, Ishwars and so on. The presiding deity was the Goddess Kenchamma. She protected them from all famines and diseases. As Kenchamma was a powerful goddess people from far and wide came to the temple to pray to her:

When the sun rises over the Bebbur Mount, people come from Santur and Kuppur, people come from the Santur Coffee Estate and the Kuppur Cardamom Estate, from coconut gardens and sugarcane fields, and they bring flowers and fruit and rice and *dal* and sugar-candy and perfumed sweet meats. (4)

Kechamma was the patron saint of the village. She was their protector. The devotees would prostrate at her feet and cry: “O! Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease, death and despair. O most high and Bounteous! We shall offer you our first rice and our first fruit and we shall offer you saris and bodice cloth” (9-10).
The villagers also worshipped Himavathy, the river goddess who was the child of the hill goddess Kenchamma. Towards the end of the novel, Range Gowda says: “I drank three handfuls of Himavathy water, and I said, “Protect us Mother” (258). It is also interesting to note the origin of a village temple. It might be due to the accidental discovery of an idol or a relic at a particular place. In Kanthapura, the Kanthapurishwari’s temple came into being when Moorthy, while passing through a backyard happened to see a lingam lying half buried in the soil. Soon a tiny temple was built to protect it. The narrator of the story tells us:

Between my house and Subba Chetty’s shop, on the Karwar Road was the little Kanthapurishwari’s temple. It was on the Main Street Promontory, as we called it, and became the centre of our life. In fact it did not exist more than three years ago, and to tell you the truth, that’s where all the trouble began. Corner House Narasamma’s son, Moorthy—our Moorthy as we always called him—was going through our backyard one day and, seeing a half sunk lingam, said “Why not unearth it and wash it and consecrate it?” “Why not!”, said we all, and as it was the holidays and all the city boys were in the village, they began to put up a little wall and a tile roof to protect the god. (15)

Most of the changes in the villages were brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation. In the novels of all the writers under consideration the impact of industrialisation and modernisation on the villages is seen. The villagers depended on agriculture or cottage industries for their livelihood, but the arrival of industries changed not only the occupation of the villagers but also the layout of the villages, their economy and also the social relationships. The Big Heart shows how the starting of factories have made the thathiar community of Amristar jobless and how, therefore many of them have become poor. Their social and personal relationships have likewise taken a bad turn. In Nectar in a Sieve, the tannery causes a sea change in the village.

Anand’s villages are slow changing. For example in the novel The Village, when Lalu returns briefly to the village to see his ailing father, he finds the entire village disintegrating on account of unreasonable taxation, land mortgages and appropriation of
the small peasants' lands by the landlord and the money lender. As uncle Harnam Sigh tells him: "I am not the only one, almost the whole village is ruined" (236). The village bears the unmistakable marks of suffering it has lived through during the long drawn out World War. The War has had disastrous effects on the entire peasantry. As the government "took away crores of rupees as free gifts and loans from the county to support their war" (The Sword and the Sickle, 63) the village economy was left in ruins. Several villagers were rendered homeless and some turned into refugees and migrated to towns while others lived in abject poverty. The loss of their homes and work compels the villagers to migrate to towns seeking better opportunities. In The Village even Lalu, when he is about to launch on a voyage away from home, realises that the village of Nandpur "with the broken walls of its decrepit houses pasted with cow-dung cakes on which the crows pecked as they cawed" (285) is dearest to him.

The village of Malgudi is also a growing one. From a small village consisting of a few houses and a few lanes, and housing a population of a few hundreds, Malgudi develops into a big village and then into a town having many facilities. But it has to be noted that it took Malgudi a long time – more than two hundred years – to develop into its present state. In Waiting for the Mahatma, there are houses in Malgudi, which are more than two centuries old (4). The first four Malgudi novels trace the gradual development of the village. From Swami and Friends to The English Teacher Malgudi remains almost without any change. The first hint of its development is seen in Mr.Sampath. In this novel Srinivas, the editor of The Banner, begins to focus on the problems of the town in his issues and the chairman of the municipality feels helpless and revives the shelved Malgudi extension schemes. Also Mr.Sampath tells Srinivas that Mr. Somu, the District Board President is going to open a bridge. "He is opening a bridge, five miles from here across the Sarayu – a grand function. Do you know that it is going to transform our entire Malgudi district?" (70).

When Narayan introduces Malgudi in his first novel Swami and Friends it has two schools–The Albert Mission School and the Board School, a Town Hall and a club. Motorcars seldom pass along the roads. Malgudi had a theatre, which from time
immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered, silent films. This old kind of corrugated-sheet-roofed hall was dismantled and “Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped theatre ‘The Palace Talkies’” (The Dark Room. 20). The growth of Malgudi from a village to a town was slow and gradual. The new land marks of Malgudi which soon evolved are the Malgudi Railway Station, the Central Cooperative Land Mortgage Bank, The Bombay Anand Bhavan, Kabir Street, Abu Lane, Star Studios, Lotus Club, North End, Lawley Extension, The Regal Hair-cutting Saloon, the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley, Ellamman Street, Nalli’s Hardware, the office of ‘The Banner’ etc. Malgudi had grown from a big agricultural village to a town. The Malgudi of Swami and Friends is different from the Malgudi of The Vendor of Sweets. In some novels like The Guide one finds Malgudi growing. Raju shows Rosie the town, which includes the ‘Town Hall Tower’. They dine on the terrace of the Taj from where Sarayu is easily visible. Scientific and technological progress is responsible for topographical transformation. The bullock carts are replaced by auto rickshaws. In The Talkative Man the author takes Rann in an auto rickshaw through Malgudi (21).

Malgudi was always growing. As Malgudi grew, more and more hands were needed to complete the construction. Several works started there and so workers were brought from other places to work in Malgudi. This migratory population formed a colony of their own within Malgudi:

The District Board and the Municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building, and three of four cotton mills had suddenly sprang into existence. The labour gangs brought in from other districts, spread themselves out in open spaces. Babies sleeping in hammocks made of odd pieces of cloth, looped over tree branches, women cooking food on the roadside, men sleeping on pavements—these became common sights in all parts of Malgudi. The place was beginning to look more and more like a gipsy camp. (Mr. Sampath 26)
In *The Guide* the Malgudi had grown further. As time passed and more water flowed in the Sarayu, Malgudi also expanded. At one time the Lawley Extension was the limit of Malgudi, but later the South Extension and the New Extension all stretched out beyond the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. Jagan’s ancestral home, which had been the last house out skirting Malgudi, became the first one for all the newer colonies:

Speaking from the topographical point of view, the Albert Mission College headed by Principal Brown, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with its imposing structure, the newly-built bungalows in the Lawley Extension, The Englandia Banking Corporation, The Sunrise Pictures — all speak emphatically of the story of the growth of the town. (Mukherjee, 1969:77)

Narayan also wrote about the change of Malgudi: “Malgudi was changing in 1972. It was the base for the hydroelectric project, somewhere on the Mempi Hills. Jeeps and lorries passed through the Market Road all day” (124). Traffic had also increased through the Trunk Road, which runs from Madras to Trichy through Malgudi. The railway meant the ruin of Raju—he becomes a guide and soon gets emotionally entangled with a married woman—Rosie—and brings ruin upon himself and Rosie. The novel presents a complete picture of Malgudi, of its emergence from the peace and self-assurance of the thirties to the more eventful and turbulent years of the Gandhian and Post-Independence period.

In spite of all the changes that Malgudi has undergone, it remains fundamentally the same, in the sense that the basic form and nature of the village is still visible under the thin crust of modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation. Malgudi has been more or less the same not only during the past decades of seeming topographical and technological change, but also during the long vistas of the past. The changes, which Malgudi undergoes, are only like the change of costumes. The changes do not affect the personality. Hence, in spite of the apparent changes and the human drama enacted, the soul of the place defies all changes and is victoriously and unalterably itself. All things pass and change, names change, fashions change, men fade away but the old landmarks— the Sarayu, the Hills, the Jungles, and the Groves — remain.
Kanthapura remains a village to its last breath. Unlike Malgudi, Nandpur and the village of Nathan and Rukmani, the effects of industrialisation and modernisation do not affect the village at all. In this respect it remains a virgin till its last moment. Kanthapura is perhaps one of the few villages that have been spared by industrialisation and urbanisation. The resistance offered by the villagers of Kanthapura to the foreign rule destroys their village. Their huts are set on fire and the people flee to save their lives. The villagers who have run away from Kanthapura, which has been destroyed, settle down in another village called Kashipura and start a new life again. When Range Gowda goes back to Kanthapura he sees the houses destroyed:

The Corner House was all but fallen except for the byre, and Rangamma’s house was tileless over the veranda, and Nanjamma’s house doorless and roofless and the hearthstones in every corner. There was neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura, for the men from Bombay had built houses on the Bebbur Mount, houses like in the city for coolies, and they own this land and that and even Bhatta had sold all his lands to the Bombay men and had gone to Kasi. (259)

In Nectar in a Sieve, the village remains a peaceful one till the arrival of the townsmen to build a tannery in the village. The evils of industrialisation create havoc in the village. This is one of the villages that has been most affected by the onslaughts of industrialisation and urbanisation. Abbas presents this picture in Inquilab:

Village industries, such as hand spinning have been destroyed leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, ruining their talents and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the talents thus destroyed ... British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. (239)

A slow change was coming over the village where, Iyengar feels, “life has apparently not changed for a thousand years,” but now with the invasion of industry and modern technology “sinister consequences issue” (438). The village seems to have lost its calm and peace. Rukmani complains that the industry invaded their village “with clatter and din, had taken from us the maidan where our children played and had made the
bazaar prices too high for us” (42). She dislikes the change that has come over their village because of its stinking smells and crowds. The birds seem to have forgotten to sing or the noise drowns their melodious calls. The quietness of the village is more and the village now has “all noise and crowds every where and rude young hooligans idling in the street and dirty bazaars and uncouth behaviour and no man thinks of another but schemes only for his money”(66). There is nothing but the smell of tannery, the crowds shouting and the incessant disturbance. Ira turns to prostitution. The moral values are lost and money is what everybody is interested in.

When the tannery arrives Kunti is happy that their “village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town”(29). She also visualises having shops, tea stalls and a bioscope. The tannery becomes an integral part of the village and her sons fetch a good salary from the tannery. She is happy that the village has become a growing town. Everyday for two months the line of bullock carts came in laden with bricks, stones and cement, sheets of tin and corrugated iron, coils of rope and hemp. The kilns of the neighbouring villages were kept busy firing the bricks, but their output was insufficient, and the carts had to go further, returning dusty and brick-filled. Day and night women twisted rope, since they could sell as much as they made and traders waxed prosperous selling their goods to the workmen. They were well paid; the men bought lavishly rice and vegetables and dal, sweetmeats and fruits. Around the maidan they built their huts for there was no other place for them and into these brought their wives and children, making a community of their own. Thus a new community was established. The building was completed one day and the workers departed leaving the empty huts behind. Rukmani was happy that they had gone. It grew and flourished and spread. Not a month went by but somebody’s land was swallowed up. Another building appeared and thus the industrialisation changed the layout and geography of the village.

Day and night the tanning went on, the never-ending line of carts brought the raw material—thousands of skins—and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such quantities. In a further construction, a water reservoir was built for the tannery workers and their families, but
others were also allowed to take a little water. Very often there were storms in the
villages. The storm, which raged through the village, created havoc and destroyed the
crops and the mud huts of the villagers. The shacks in which some of the men lived were
no more. But the tannery stood. The officials of the tannery lived in new colonies; in
brick cottages with white washed walls and red-tiled roofs. Their way of life was quite
different from that of the villagers. The tannery changed the face of the village beyond
recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways. A few were raised
up, many others cast down. Rukmani thinks: "The tannery cannot be blamed for every
misfortune we suffered" (113). Tannery or not, the land might have been taken from them.
It had never belonged to them.

Thus a close reading of the novels of Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya
reveal that the village in India is basically the same everywhere. There might be regional
or other differences. For example, certain villages may not contain all the different castes,
or agriculture may not be the occupation of the villagers, or temples may be present only
in the neighbouring village. Often one village may differ from another in certain respects.
But still the fundamental characteristics are generally similar. The characteristics of the
villages of all these writers mostly agree with the characteristics of the villages, as seen in
the sociological study made in the first part of this work.

The village can thus be seen as a group of houses situated near a river or other
source of water such as a lake or pond or stream. It is divided into different zones where
people belonging to different castes live. Agriculture or cattle rearing is the main
occupation. In coastal villages fishing may be the main occupation. Very often the
workers do not own the land. The land belongs to the landlords. All the villagers visit the
temples for worship. But the lower castes and the untouchables are not allowed entry into
the temple. Trees such as peepal, banyan, tamarind are important in any village and the
villagers have a variety of uses for them. The houses are simple, permanent or temporary
structures with one or two rooms. They may appear as single units or as a group. The
roads are often untarred, narrow and dusty. The Bullock cart is the chief mode of travel in
the villages. But buses have become common in many villages and in rare cases trains are
also seen passing through the villages. The village and its surroundings are often dirty. Every village has a history or a myth connected with the place. The urban areas very often encroach into the village premises. The onslaught of industrialisation and globalisation has changed the face of the villages and has converted villages into urban pockets. Thus the villages have shrunk and the towns have grown.

Villages do not remain villages forever. The transformation or the development of the villages is very quick in some cases, and slow and gradual in some other cases. New roads, railways, factories, modern transport, schools, colleges and other features of modern life and urbanisation have already reached the villages. All the villages have the same form and nature. All the villages studied except Malgudi are in their very initial stage of development and are cent percent villages. Malgudi is in the process of transforming itself into a town, but still shows all the basic characteristics of a village. The essential features of a village such as the river, temple, banyan and peepal trees still exist in Malgudi. But one cannot be an adult without being a child and so it is not difficult to imagine Malgudi as a perfect village.