CHAPTER IV
The Element Of Local Colour in Narayan's Fiction:

Local colour, as a matter of fact, is a faithful delineation of situations consisting of characteristic details of dress and dialect, customs and conventions, and manners and movements of the protagonists. The home-bred Narayan is frequently referred to as the Indian Faulkner because all his novels and short stories are set in one principal locality. The mythical town named as Malgudi is the unique creation of this novelist who is rooted in the Tamil- and Kanada- speaking South. Narayan was born in Madras and has spent most of his life in the Mysore area, he deals with his own province of South India where bizarre folk-types work and worry and where the cyclical view of life emerges with surprising uniformity. All this fairly accounts for the provincialism in his fiction. On the one hand, this provincialism is a good trait because it provides continuity and skilful handling of local colour. On the other hand, it is not so good in respect of limiting his subject-matter and eventually resulting in a circumscribed view of life. However, Narayan seems to insinuate that the life of the whole world is a compound of millions of little lives, and the death of the whole world is also a compound of the deaths of these millions of little beings. In other words, life in its essentials is the same everywhere inspite of outward differences of customs, traditions, conventions, rituals and rites. For example, Mulk Raj Anand tells the
stories of Punjabi-speaking people in his fiction and establishes their identity by translating their speeches into English. Narayan does not do so deliberately. He remains a regional writer in the sense that he seldom goes beyond his own region of South India represented by Malgudi.

It is a recurrent insinuation in Narayan's fiction that Malgudi is a town meant for tourists. It has got beautiful spots - hills and forests, groves and culverts, caves and shrines - which attract tourists and taxidermists to come over here and explore the town so as to make it more famous than it would have been before their arrival. For example, Marco in 'The Guide' comes to Malgudi as an archeologist and explores the caves and shrines. Vasu in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' focuses his attention on exploiting the wild life of the town. Narayan uses the element of local colour in asserting the scenic beauty of the town and exhibiting the heart of Mysore. Raju in 'The Guide' reveals this fact:

"Malgudi --- had manythings to offer, historically, scenically, from the point of view of modern developments --- if one came as a pilgrim I could take him to dozen temples all over a district with a radius of fifty miles. I could find holy waters for him to bathe in all along the course of the Sarayu, starting, of course, with its source of Kempi peaks."

Mysore is called Indrapuri of India on account of its historic and scenic beauty. Like Narayan's enchanting town of Malgudi, it has also manythings to offer both historically and
scenically - the river Cauveri, Chamundi Hill, temples, shrines, forests, gardens, culverts, fountains, tanks, circuses, and zoo- which find considerable reflection in Narayan's fiction with a deceptive simplicity.

Malgudi is famous like Narayan's native city Mysore. Its forests are fertile for teak, sandal wood, bamboos, birds and beasts, animals and fruits. Fields are full of paddy, sugarcane and coconut trees which are so common produces of South India. As Mysore is a city of beautiful gardens, Malgudi is also redolent with scents and flowers. Jasmine and sandal wood dominate the fragrant atmosphere of the town. The leit-motif is depicted with reference to jasmine in 'The English Teacher' when the bereaved Krishnan begins to establish contact with his deceased wife, Sushila:

"There was overwhelming fragrance of jasmine surrounding her, "still jasmine-scented", I commented."

South Indian Women are fond of bedecking their locks of hair with beautiful flowers - a peculiar fashion prevailing from time-immemorial in South India. In 'The English Teacher' Sushila and Jasmine are associated throughout the novel. (Pp= 18, 57, 64, 70).

The Kampil hills have deep ravines 'quite inaccessible to human beings'. (A Tiger For Malgudi' P.31). Malgudian forests can be identified with Karapur forest, situated at a distance of thirty-five miles in the Southern part of Mysore. This forest is well-known for beasts and elephants more particularly
as they are caught alive for Mysore Zoo and princes. The
tea-plantation is also done in Mempi forest of Malgudi. All
such details reflect South Indian colour in general. But as the
element of local colour cannot be limited to the geographical
condition of the place, Narayan comprises social and religious
conditions of South India, drawing the picture of economic
worries of his later protagonists appearing in the novels from
'Mr. Sampath' onward.

Thus, apart from establishing the identity of his
setting, background and atmosphere Narayan uses the element of
local colour in his characterization. All his protagonists hail
from South India. Narayan uses his subject-matter from his own
region of Tamil-spoken people who are also accustomed to speak
common English language. In 'The Guide' Rosie is asked by
Raju's mother:

"Do you understand Tamil?

She replies, "Yes. It's what we speak at home". (P.90).

There are only passing references to all such details
of dress and dialect. Narayan does not give the impression of
deliberate use. Since the honest and dedicated writer is bound
to exploit the possibilities of his own knowledge and experience,
Narayan does so authentically. He imparts South Indian hue to
his characters who are chosen to play the assigned roles in
the resolved limit of Malgudian atmosphere. These South Indian
characters are chosen from the Hindu middleclass families which
are rooted in Indian Hindu traditions and age-old customs,
beliefs and superstitions. Inspite of the pressure of modern western culture, the Indian traditions have got their own values to be granted. They are reflected through ceremonialis, festivals, fairs, customs and conventions, manners and mannerismS.

Festivals and ceremonialS

The Navaratri festival is celebrated in 'The Dark Room'. Savitri, the heroine of the novel has a stock of fine dolls and toys to be used on this festival. As it is traditional to invite neighbours and relatives to participate in the celebration, Narayan depicts this scene realistically and shows how such festivals are significant in uniting the whole community together. In 'The Guide' the Dushera and Diwali festivals are described in order to draw the picture of happy moments when anybody becomes of everybody. Raju, during the phase of sainthood is oblivious of the count of time, is reminded of these festivals by his disciples when they offer him gifts:

"When his disciples brought him sugar-cane and jaggery cooked with rice; when they brought him sweets and fruits, he knew that the Tamil year was on. When Dasara came they brought in extra lamps and lit them, and the women were busy all through nine days, decorating the pillared hall with coloured paper in tinsel; and for Deepavali they brought him new clothes and crackers and he invited the children to a special session and fired the crackers". (P. 90).
Narayan presents a factual criticism of life by showing how innocent villagers are being tempted by a false saint on the one hand. On the other, they themselves are prone to be victims of such a fraud. Their superstitions believe in the divineness of a saint and his mysterious powers has led them traditionally to rely on what he says. But the tradition of festivals in the society still continues to highlight the eternal values of Indian society. In 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi,' the temple function about which the fuss is created by Vasu also indicates the spirit of the people to believe that Unity is Strength. That is why, Natraj and his companions are able to stand together against the evil-doer Vasu who intends upto the last to disturb the normal order of the Malgudian society.

Clash of Cultures

In spite of the fact that Narayan has neither dealt in fashionable modes of fiction nor in the themes of eye-catching topicality, he has remained balanced in showing how individual and society are baffled by clash of cultures. Instead of criticizing the existing contradictions of present day society of South India, he has presented ironical view of the whole situation. The newly-adopted westernised system of education is also satirised in the first trilogy of his earlier novels - 'Swami & Friends', 'The Bachelor of Arts' and 'The English Teacher'. Besides the defective system of education, the biased attitude of teachers who are either fanatical or egocentric in their approach is depicted logically so as to arrive at the purposive conclusion. What happened in Christian schools and
colleges during the British Regime and the repercussions on the minds of Indian students and teachers are realistically presented through Albert Mission School and the College of the same name. The teacher like Monazar, Mr. Brown and Krishnan seem to represent the whole class of the profession. Since the environment of the institutions is unsuitable to students, they are at liberty to while away their time in endlessly nonsensical pursuits such as bundling up their opponents and throwing them into Sarayu as in 'Swami & Friends' is planned by Nani the Mighty-Good-for-nothing, or displaying a sense of total reluctance to learning as is done by students in 'The English Teacher'. The result is hopelessness among a large section of students.

Impact of Western Culture.

The western culture has played havoc in the South Indian society in respect of overwhelming the old social values. The result is that well-established old institutions of family and marriage are badly affected. In 'The Dark Room' the western values arise from an opposite source of a feeling of oppression. The natural sorrows and pains suffered by a tongueless creature as Savitri indicate how the housewife of a middleclass family is compelled to dream of freedom and die heart-stifled in her den. She is able to adjust with her bully and licentious husband only when a part of her is 'dead'. The western made of culture makes deep inroads in later novels which present the study of money-hunting men of the world. Narayan shows how Indian society has been considerably influenced by the western way of living and leading life in a similar way. In 'The Guide' Raju's
involvement with Rosie is the cause of his rising temptation to elevate his career by hook or by crook. His disregard for old-established order and belief that one should not develop relations with another man's wife results into a critical state of being imprisoned and disgraced. In "The Man Eater of Malgudi," Vasu's arrival becomes a threat to Malgudian culture and Natraj and his companions along with a large crowd have encounters with him till he is destroyed by his own ego. All this indicates that medium class society is still unable to overlook the self-styled man who ransacks their peace and freedom. So long as such a man as Vasu or Raju is working within undisturbable limit, the society does not bother at all. But when people find that personal freedom causes disruptive to impersonal freedom or freedom of masses, they are not supposed to revolt violently against the person concerned, something miraculous happens and the cursable person is destroyed by his own tempo. What Sastri speaks about Vasu is the revelation of people's faith:

"Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity?"  

Horoscopic agreement was necessary in terms of marriage in South India. The earlier novels, "The Bachelor of Arts"
and 'The English Teacher' have recurrent references to horoscopic solutions before a marriage takes place. In 'The English Teacher' Krishnan's wife dies because their horoscopes were not in agreement and their marriage took place inspite of disagreement and deadly forecast. But in 'The Financial Expert' Margayya is ready to bribe the astrologer who can distort the horoscopic reality and enable him to get his son Balu married with Brinda, the daughter of a well-off family. This indicates a speedy decline in astrological faith of South Indian society to a great extent and its growing reluctance to temples, rituals and prevalent social conventions.

Money, marriage and the tangle of human ties are the burning problems of human worries in India, especially in the middleclass society which find depiction in Narayan's fiction. Marriages are settled on the basis of dowry, so-called agreement in horoscopes and the maintenance of time-honoured customs. Narayan's earlier novels have detailed references of them. But the new wave of western culture brings a radical change in the dogmatic attitude to marriage so much so that Sriman in 'Waiting For the Mahatama' chooses a bridge for himself without in the least bothering about horoscopes and other prevailing formalities to be observed in marriage. He tries to win the heart of his lady-love even at the cost of surrendering his whole being on the feet of Mahatama Gandhi. Bharati is also prepared to marry Sriman provided she gets Mahatama Gandhi's blessings. This indicates how unusual change in matrimonial affairs was brought about by the arrival
of Gandhi on the stage of India. Individuals like Sriram and Bharati could muster courage to throw off social traditions to winds. 'The Guide' reflects a radical change in the outlook of the individual who can go to the extent of discarding marriage proper and involve with a married woman for the sake of society. To Vasu 'Only fools marry, and they deserve all the troubles they get'. (The Hanuman of Malgudi: P.38) There is no difference between drink and marriage; both are same. If people like it, it is their business and nobody else's. In 'The Vendor of Sweets' the issue of marriage is highlighted and Mali and Grace who live in sinful union before having been properly married are not only cursed but detested severely.

In his latest novel 'Second Opinion' Narayan tries to reflect the social curse of marriage in cradle. Sambu and his mother donot agree with each other in terms of marriage. The mother feels at a loss to see her son revolting against the orthodox agreement made in terms of marriage when he was hardly five years old. Narayan refers to the ills of child-marriage still prevailing in South Indian middleclass society. People are conservative, orthodox and have high respect for old values which have lost their validity in the present state of affairs. But they go on pleading that what is old is ever gold. The new generation of young boys represented by Balu (in 'The Financial Expert'), Mali (in 'The Vendor of Sweets') and Sambu in ('Second Opinion') is reckless, shameless and
feeble-minded. These young sons are the product of mid-twententieth century which has already witnessed the two world wars and the overwhelming partition. Old values have changed, yielding place to the new. Whether the whole picture of South Indian world is in consistent with that of Malgudian world or not, the fact is that the young generation of Narayan's world of fiction appears to be typical. Professor A.N. Kaul's views in this respect are agreeable when young men like Balu and Mali are taken into consideration. They represent

"... the whole new generation of scooter-riding, alcohol, smuggling boys committed to get-rich-at-all-costs philosophy."

Such young sons are the symbol of engaging problems to their parents. Both Margayya and Jagan feel worried for their sons. Jagan as a father is not a perfect example of parenthood and authority, so is Margayya. Both spoil their sons because they are over-indulgent and have got no sense of real upbringing. Margayya is ready to get Balu educated by hook or by crook. Jagan also ignores the growing reluctance of Mali towards education. Instead of being closely watched and instructed rightly, Mali is sent to America. It is here that he begins to take pride in everything imported and deride Indian way of life altogether. Except Indian money, nothing interests him. It would not be an exaggeration to say that after returning from America Mali emerges to be an embodiment of all that is un-Indian in all his attitudes and values. His sinful living with half-Korean and half-American
girl, - Grace symbolizes cultural topsy-turvyism, while his over-reaching project of producing a story-writing machine on a mass scale is an example of the absurd materialistic ambitions and the personal mechanizations of the west. The West has made deep inroads into Indian Hindu culture which is overwhelmed with unbearable threats to the institution of marriage on the one hand, and creative freedom on the other. Jagan is also a bundle of ends and self-contradictions in the way that he being a sweet-vendor advises to 'conquer taste' so as to cut the very branch on which he sits. Both Jagan and Mali are the symbol of several fathers and sons of middle class families which are being disturbed by too much of westernization. Human values are disregarded because people are oblivious of the great heritage of Indian culture. They try to become up-rooted and the conflicts arise. Their real nature is covered by pretentiousness, platitude and sentimentality. Narayan, in the portrayal of young generation of Balu, Mali, Raju, Sriman, Sambu and Raman, indicates that the duality of young men who are impractical in their attitude invites self-created troubles and disturbs normalcy and peace. These so-called westernized and self-styled young men are unable to cope with social conditions, existing from time-immortal. They are self-assertive because they have no sense of community which pleads for the reiterated slogan of Unity in Diversity. It is because they are acquainted with the life of the west where so much liberty exists and old ways are replaced by new ones, especially in terms of sex and sophistication. Without grasping the spirit
of the western culture they try to amass the raw materials of the western society and slip into slough of despond. Vasu in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' refuses completely to cope with the social traditions because he is a circus-man and endowed with a sense of opposing everything normal. Such self-assertive men are threats to all established order of Indian society. But as Indian people are deep-rooted in conviction and have faith in omnipotent God, such terrorizing people are not able to do much harm to society. They appear on the social plane like hurricane and meet well-anticipated fate.

Social Conditions
Condition of Women

The condition of South Indian women attracts Narayan's attention and he depicts several social ills which are still prevailing in society there. In 'The Dark Room' he shows how traditional Hindu housewife is tormented by a self-built husband who can go to the extent of gadding with other woman, throwing his whole commonsense to wind. The whole family is disturbed on account of Ramani's love-affair. The arrival of film-industry in Malgudi disturbs the normal life of people in 'Mr. Sampath' so much so that a balanced and more sagacious man like Srinivas also falls victim to easy temptation and writes the film-script. Sampath flirts with Shanti and comes to grief at last. Sense of proportion is the key-note in the presentation of women's conditions in Narayan's novels. There are traditional type of women who are the embodiment of piousness, submission to domestic affairs, and consistency of outlook in respect of
Old Hindu culture of Sita and Savitri. On the other hand, there are rootless butterflies who feel a sense of pride in moving on the line of ultra-modern women and have no hesitation in breaking the social norms. Savitri in *The Dark Room* is contrasted with Shantabai, Sanpath's wife with Shanti, and Rosie, Rangi and Daisy appear to be alienated from the traditional domestic norms. The Captain's wife in the recent novel is a close contrast to the hermit's wife. Narayan seems to insinuate that the Western way of living has changed the attitude of young women like Rosie, Daisy, Shantabai and Savitri. Nevertheless, women are seldom ridiculed by the novelist who seems to believe that sexual pessimism or vulgar display of passion cannot be the overall features of Indian women. Narayan's doctrinal resolve not to rely on man-woman relationship in his novels and short stories has remained as firm as a solemn pledge. He is very often compared with Jane Austen who with her two inches ivory¹, her pride and prejudice, her sense and sensibility, populate her novels with husband-hunting women. Narayan has got little of such problems to portray in his fiction. Hardy may have inspired him in regard to the portrayal of Malgudi but women in Wessex novels are too different to be compared with women of Malgudi novels. Hardy's attitude to life is also different in comparison to that of Narayan. Hardy prefaces his *Tess of Durbervilles* with the following lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

"Like flies to Wanton boys are we to the gods
They kill us for their sport".
and ends his "The Mayor of Casterbridge" with the following line:

"Happiness is an occasional episode in the general drama of pain."

Sex is a dominating influence in Hardy's philosophy of life and there are almost a dozen seductions in his novels. But barring "The Painter of Signs" in which Raman and Daisy lie together on a mat and perform the ritual willy-nilly, we have no seduction scene in the entire bulk of Narayan's fiction. Since Indian culture of the period of the "Ramayana and the Mahabharat does not allow the overt play of sex, Narayan signifies that child-bearing and child-rearing are the chief functions of women in his novels. Shanti, Shantabai and Daisy are certainly exceptions to be found in his fiction. Therefore, with a few exceptions, Narayan's women are not too innocent like Tess to yield to the sensuality of villainous people like Alec. Nor are they too ambitious, mature and determined to resist the nonsense of Angel Clare, the clergyman's son. They remain as they are as traditional Indian women appear to be. Virtue for them lies in the perfection with which they acquaint themselves in the role allotted to them in life. Savitri in "The Dark Room" returns home because she finds bonds of love stronger than her sense of revolt. She is in agreement with her destiny to live in the Dark Room both at home and outside. She deserts her husband without any qualms of her conscience and is persistent in following the philosophy of Omar Khayyam:
"Dead yesterday and Unborn tomorrow". As women in middle class families have a subsidiary role to play, Narayan presents them as they are. They have got no vital impact at least in matters of policies and programmes. In matters of choice Narayan is throughly Indian when he asserts:

"You can only marry the girl you are destined to marry". 5

Absence of Communal Animosity

Communal animosity is absent in South India while cultural differences are ubiquitous. This is why, Narayan's novels are free from the depiction of communal clashes which are so common in North India. It is only in a short story 'Another Community' that he portrays the scene of communal frenzy, which provokes the head-hunters to kill the innocent, nameless hero of this story. Professor K.R. Srinivas Iyengar has high admiration for this story as it is of national interest and wide public concern. 'It probes our endemic national disease, communal strife'. 6

In 'The Financial Expert' the central problem of cultural differences is stated, "why should we criticize what our ancestors have brought into existence? someone asked" (P.5). No change can be tolerated in regard to food taboos, caste privileges, and whenever it occurs it tends to implied criticism of existing traditions. Malgudi's citizens are reluctant to understand change and this rigidity is the root of hostility
to the change-dominated West. Margayya in 'The Financial
Expert' finds himself unable to dangle his legs from his indoor
office chair because such furniture may cause nervous dis-
order. In 'The Vendor of Sweets' Jagan has partially accepted
Grace as his daughter in law, though a sort of mental conflict
is always there in the bottom of his mind. This conflict is
intensified by the revelation that Grace is not properly
married to Muli and both are living in sinful union. From the
standpoint of Western culture no question may arise to object
this sinful union of Muli and Grace but Eastern culture pre-
availing from time immemorial in Malgudiyan society is unable to
tolerate it. Such aspects of Western culture in the matter of
sex are humorous embodiments of the more penetrating questions
that have considerably perplexed the Indians trying to adjust
to the modern world.

The Problem of Devadasis.

In 'The Guide' and 'The Man Eater of Malgudi' Narayan
depicts Rosie and Rangi - the former as an educated who has
succeeded in rising above from the wretched state of a tradi-
tional devadasi and her marriage with an archeologist has
changed her misfortune while the latter is still a temple woman
leading the life of a prostitute. In South India, especially
in Karnataka this social ill is still existing and devadasis
are very common in the name of traditional religion. The
presentation of the problem of devadasis is not only realistic
but also indicative of the fact how this social evil has been
existing in Indian society from time immemorial.
"The so-called sacred prostitution of devadasi has been referred to by Alberuni. It was a very ancient institution -- Medieval literature -- refers to the institution of devadasi, but these sources scarcely attach any sacred character to the devadasi system -- it is mentioned that the devadasis earned their livelihood from the temple -- and that the profession and income accruing from it way hereditary -- the temples employed more than one devadasi who took their turn while performing before the god".  

In Karnataka the practice of devadasi has proved a burning problem and our government has shown deep concern to exterminate it from its very root. In Belgaon district the village Sandautti is still the very centre of devadasis who earn their livelihood by means of prostitution and run the practice with a strange zeal. They are, as they are destined to be, the devotees of Goddess Yallamma. In his novels Narayan does not give detailed references to the practice of devadasis. Rosie only mentions that she belongs to the family of a temple woman while Rangi is presented serving as devadasi in the temple and tempting people to continue the practice of prostitution. The most important victim of her temptation is Vasu who is himself a devil-incarnate. Even Natraj fails to resist the temptation of Rangi's charm as he points out (The Man-Eater of Malgudi).

"She was dark, squat, seductive, overloaded with jewellery; the flowers in her hair were crushed, and her clothes rumpled, she had big round arms and fat legs and wore a pink
sari — Anyways, whatever may be the hour, every inch of her proclaimed her what she was, a perfect female animal.

But Natraj’s views are personal. Rangi is shot into life and ennobled in such a way as to present herself as a faithful devadasi to her profession. It is nobody else but Rangi who discloses the secret of Vasu’s intention to shoot the temple-elephant, Kumar. This disclosure is enough to warn Natraj and his companions to save Kumar and cope with the nefarious design of the man-eater. But side by side Rangi is shown to have growing reluctance towards the practice of prostitution. She would like to be the life-long mistress of Vasu better than to continue as a devadasi. It shows how a devadasi is fed up with the practice of prostitution and willing to get rid of her present hell. But alas. Nothing comes out of such a fictitious hope. Her hope is sacrificed on the altar of her professional duty. She cannot allow Vasu to shoot the temple-elephant.

In ‘The Guide’ Rosie is presented as a developed character who has risen above from the status of a devadasi. She herself tells Raju that she belongs

"— to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl I danced in our village temple — we are viewed as public women — We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized."
Rosie's mother planned a different life for her. She provided her education up to a post-graduation level because she had realized that it would enable Rosie to rise above the wretched state of a devadasi and get married with a man of status. The cherished hope of Rosie's mother was translated into a reality and Marco came forth as a man of status to marry Rosie. But, as it is usual Marco was induced to marry the daughter of a devadasi, but he failed to give her his whole heart as a husband. His intense attention towards paintings, ruins and old art prevented him from adjusting to a proper married state. He began to ignore a full-blooded wife, who easily fell a victim to Raju well-versed in the art of exploiting the situation in accordance with his choice and opportunity. The indication of the novelist is clear that such a man as Marco may show his sympathy and marry an educated devadasi but will not be able to adjust with her in domestic life. The adjustment requires a sense of balance between thought and practice. Marco who is devoted to lifeless images, stones, shrines and ruins and detached from conjugal pleasure is certainly bound to pay the unexpected penalty for his imbalance.

As the recent programme has brought to light the Karnataka government has started attracting the young men to come and marry the devadasis. Those who are unemployed are paid rupees three thousand in order to establish their families. Something better is likely to happen to devadasis.

Caste - System - As caste-system has been prevailing in
India, Malgudi's citizens are shown caste-conscious. South Indians are also caste conscious and the middle class people of caste-Hindu prefer to be vegetarian so as to follow the tradition of their past. They are distinguished from people belonging to other sects in the way of their special preference to lead a conventional life. Since Narayan's range is limited and he presents in his novels a cross-section of varied humanity, preferably of Hindu middle class, he shows his characteristic concern to present the problems and predicament of people tormented by the flux of cultures. Caste-system in the past had resulted into a beneficial experience because people had concentrated to their particular duties graded by the system. But with the passage of time, as other cultures invaded the old Hindu culture of the Ramayana and the Mahabharat, a considerable change began to appear in the social set-up of India. Since the wake of independence the rigidity of caste-system has been extenuated by and by. Narayan's later novels - "Waiting For the Mahatama", 'The Guide', 'Second Opinion', 'The Vendor of Sweets' indicate that the consciousness of the caste-system has lost its vitality. Sirem in "Waiting For the Mahatama" prefers to marry a girl irrespective of caste and creed. Her beautiful figure blossomed with prime youth and noble character is a sufficient proof of her matrimonial qualification. The advent of Gandhiji on the Indian stage proved an overwhelming menace to the rigidity of caste-system. Nevertheless, caste has lost no identity. It is there, very much there in Indian Hindu society. It is only spiritually that the distinction of caste is not made.
The faith of common people who appear in Narayan's fiction is filtered through the conviction in traditional gods and goddesses, saints and seers, temples and shrines, priests and prophets. Even children are conscious of this faith. They are God-fearing as almost a large section of middle class Hindus is, throughout India. Narayan uses symbols to present the India of his own viewpoint. For example, the temple is the symbol of peace and serenity. Shrines and caves, rivers and pilgrimages help Hindu people to come together as a community and survive the old cultural past of India. People of towns are less credulous and orthodox than villagers who are easily befooled by fake saints and fraud priests, certain typically Indian traits, such as showing hospitality to the extent of inconvenienceing the host as in 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi', 'The Guide' - Vasu is offered a free living in the attic of his press by Natraj and Raju greets Rosie warmly when she comes to him bag and baggage after having been abandoned by her husband, Marco, and the astonishingly affectionate reception of Raju by villagers of Mangal signify the richness and distinctness of Indian Hindu culture.

Thus in spite of caste and culture people have close kinship with one another. They are selfish because their personal interests collide with the impersonal ones. As human nature is varied and man is said to possess double nature, he is bound to be at conflicting state of affair. Those who don't uproot themselves from the old links of the past lead a better life than that of rootless people who sink deeper and deeper into the mud of confusion and perplexity. This is not only
the condition of South Indian middle class men depicted
in his fiction by Narayan but middle class society as a
whole in India. Man is torn within when he is uprooted; he
comes to grief when he, separated at all from his kith and
kins, moves to a new world of experience and endurance. So
long as the protagonists of Narayan's novels are South Indian
and corresponding with their roots, they are free from mental
aberrations pant-up hearts, and unnecessary worries of life.
The moment they begin to abandon their normal way of living
and looking at the world reality, they are nowhere. This
is what is happening in India on account of muddle of several
cultures into one.

Every-Day problems of Common people.

Problems of Common people — Narayan presents situations to
raise the problems of everyday life of common people. He
refers to the problems of tenants and house owners in "Mr.
Sampath" and "The English Teacher" and "The Man-Eater of
Malgudi". He presents a sagacious house owner in "Mr. Sampath"
who wears ochre robes and poses himself to be a sanyasi, living
in a small room himself, troubling his tenants and street-
people by occupying the water tap situated in the street.
In "The Man-Eater of Malgudi" Natraj the hospitable owner
of the press. attic is awfully terrorised by the so-called
tenant as Vasu, Krishnan in "The English Teacher" feels at a
loss to contact the house owner. Such problems are not only
prevailing in South Indian society but also are very common
in the rest of India emerging as a financially better country
than she was before independence. People are considerably troubled by the problem of a suitable-rented house. Those who are professional owners have made it a sort of business of bargaining. In 'Mr. Sampath' when Srinivas comes to Malgudi and makes contact with this deceptively cunning owner, he bluntly asks him,

"Tell me what you will pay. I have one for seventy-five, one for thirty, fifty, ten five, one. What's it you want".10

The houseowner is a cunning shark, a miserly fellow who would not afford to buy even a mat. To take bath at a public tap around which people including women and children wait for their turn suits to this owner more. He is not in the habit of paying attention to the genuine needs of his tenants. One of the tenants living in his huge house holds him by elbow and reminds him of his constantly engaging demand for another water tap. He is curtly told to quit the house. Thus there is the endless strife between the owner and the tenant, closely watched and experienced by Narayan himself before 1953 when he entered for the first time in his own house. Therefore, the problem of rented-houses and the position of a tenant and his relation with the owner - all are first-hand experiences of the novelist who indicates how South India is in no way different from the rest of India. Middle class people are always haunted by such problems and have to cope with their destined position in society. Even the small towns like Malgudi have become overcrowded with outsiders who shift from other places and settle therein. The problem indicates
how middleclass people have limited incomes and means and find themselves unable to afford costly living in colonies and extensions. Therefore, the problem of living to them is the outcome of their limited economic means at their disposal. In 'The Guide' Raju and Rosie live in a mansion like house in Lawley Extension only when they have amassed enough wealth. Now their social position does not allow them to live in a poor old house. Raju is aware of the rising status he has acquired in course of time, and he can not afford to live in a house having been designed for a shopkeeper; He points out:

"My father had designed this house for a shopkeeper, not for a man of consequence and status who had a charge of growing celebrity".12

This is why, they move to New Extension where the two-storied house, with a large compound, lawns and garage proves suitable in keeping with their elevated status.

The vagaries of private bus are significantly dealt with both in 'Waiting For the Mahatama' and 'The Man Eater of Malgudi', Natraj's returning journey from Kempi tea-shop of Muthu to Malgudi gives a glimpse of the whole picture and indicates how buses are overloaded with passengers and how conductors extort money in the process.

ills of Dowry: The birth of a daughter is hardly rejoiced in the middle class family. The reason for this reluctant
attitude towards the daughter is obvious. Parents are supposed to bring her up with a haunting desire to face the unbearable demand of dowry from bridegroom's side. The stock of the bridegroom is to rise in accordance with inflation and the advancement of New civilization. How an optimistic father of a bridegroom is to declare that new in investment in housing, whose value can never come down, the most secure 'gilt-edge' is an unmarried son. Things are contrary to those who happen to be unfortunately the people from bride's side. The father of a son in this way appears to be a seller and that of the daughter a buyer. Undoubtedly, matrimony in Hindus more particularly has become a seller's market. An enthusiastic father like Narayan himself who had only daughter, Hema Narayan to marry, could have easily expressed his chagrin before the seller of a son:

"My daughter is a priceless possession. I have had her for sixteen years now, I don't know how I am going to be without her. She is valuable as far as I am concerned and even if you pay me a price of ten lakhs, I would still feel unhappy to part with her, and so I am not selling her; I shall give her away provided you satisfy these two conditions: I must have a confidential report from one of the daughter-in-law in your house, on the outlook and conduct of the elders at home, and I want a psychologist to examine your son and give him a certificate of soundness".13

But it is hardly possible for a middle-class Indian father of a daughter to open his mind so freely before the
parent who has groomed a son properly to the extent of sweeping the honours in all examinations. One who is selected for an administrative career is the actual dictator of the prices these days.

Dowry has proved a curse in society. Innocent daughters of poor fathers who are not able to concede the surmountable demands of the bridegroom’s parents fall victim to murders, brutal attacks, and constant retribution. Narayan suggests that there is hardly any way to abolish dowry because the victim himself being an abettor. If it is made illegal, a blackmarket is bound to evoke from repression. If sell-tax is levied on the transactions involving a bridegroom, it may again presumably shifted on to an already overburdened father of a girl. Therefore, it is worthwhile to recognize the institution and workout a table of payments and presents in order to provide at a glance the liabilities to be incurred by a would-be Sambandhi:

"First class in competitive examinations:
Rs. 45000 plus a 20 H.P. motor-car, model not earlier than October 1953; engineering graduate: Rs. 15000, jeep, plus a miniature locomotive in solid gold; M.Sc. (Nuclear Physics): Rs. 15000, plus five acres of land containing thorium, lignite etc; pilot with "A" certificate; Cash, plus a helicopter for private use; third class B.A., without any property; Rs. 5000, plus a bycycle or an autorickshaw (if he chooses to make a living out of it)".14
There may be some degree of difference between conditions in South India and in the rest of the country, but there can be no denying the fact that the middle class people are in the tight grip of this dreadful monster of dowry. Married girls, particularly those whose parents are unable to afford the desired dowry are not only belaboured inhumanly but also ought to face the ordeal of being burnt alive. Such incidents of dowry-cases have become voracious news in magazines and newspapers these days. How painful and ironical is it to imagine.

"Marriages are, of course, made in heaven but they are a business in our part of universe," 15

South Indian Food, and Manners.

South Indian people are fond of special type of food in their dishes that they differ in this particular mode from their fellow-brothers in other provinces of the country. Almost all protagonists along with minor characters of Narayan's fiction retain their South-Indianness intact in the matter of food. For instance tiffin is a special kind of food taken by South Indians. It includes rice, a few chhapatis, Sambhar, curd and a fried vegetable. In other provinces of the country where Hindi is the first language to be spoken of the tiffin is the food container. Narayan's Malagadians depend on edibles which are primarily produced in South India, and in this way, they are easily distinguished from other people of the country. Coconut, masal dosai,
pickles, idli, bonda, rice are very common produce in South India while they are alien to other provinces of the country. As South Indian Hindus are generally vegetarians, having little preference to wine, meat and non-vegetarian diets, characters of Narayan fiction seldom use them. There are only three characters, in the entire bulk of Narayan's fiction, who are fond of alcohol, prostitution and what not. Raju in 'The Guide' indulges in drink and gamble, Kailesh in 'The Bachelor of Arts' finds no objection to a life of eat, drink and be merry. The dismissed engineer appearing in the recent short story: 'You had no business to pawn my scalp' is also depicted as a drunkard and dabauch frequently abusing his neighbours for not sharing their conjugal pleasures with him. But they are exceptions, the majority of his Malgudiens is non-vegetarian, god-fearing and altogether the people of South India. Frequent references to Madras, Coimbatore, Mangalore, Mangalore and nearby villages, such as Kalapura, Mangal, Sukkur, (appearing in 'Mr. Sampath', 'The Guide', 'The Dark Room') etc. draw the picture of South Indian Society and display how religions and make-believe culture has been dominating the people living therein.

South Indians have a special taste for coffee.

Coffee helps according to them, in concentrating the mind.

In 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' Narayan introduces Shanti, the tea-shop keeper, with a view to giving the glimpse of an important South Indian produce. It is considered very important in social life. Narayan points out:
Coffee in South India (in the North they favour tea), its place in our social life, would be the warning uttered at their back, "Their coffee is awful", how at wedding parties it was the responsibility of the bride's father to produce the best coffee and keep it flowing all day for five hundred at a time; how decoction drawn at the right density, on the addition of fresh warm milk turned from black to sepia, from which ultimately emerged a brown akin to the foaming edge of a river in flood. — Coffee making is a task of precision at every stage."

In "The Dark Room" a picture of house kitchen is drawn, showing how the hero, Ramani feels embarrassed for having been provided

"Brinjals, cucumber, radish and greens, all the twelve months in the year and all the thirty days in the month."

He snubs Savitri for having "tormented him with this cucumber for the dozenth time." Ramani is "eccentric" and "lawless" in his taste. It is not the repetition of cucumber which irritates him so much but because it is the 'cheapest trash in the market' (P.6).

The supremacy and the tranquilizing qualities of South Indian food can be discernible when one finds the opportunity to have a dinner in South India. The most important varieties of South Indian food are:

"— — — Rasam, Sambar, Masal Dosai, idli, bonda, pickles and plaintain leaf and so forth."
Narayan points out:

"I'm more than ever convinced that the South Indian diet marks the peak in the evolution of culinary art and that the South Indian, however well he may be received, will never feel really at home anywhere in the world unless he can have his spices too within reach."

Himself a vegetarian at all, Narayan suggests,

"- - - the eating of beef may not sound abnormal in most part of the world, but in India where the cow is a sacred object, beef cannot be eaten, no rationalization is ever possible on this subject."

Inspite of all such details as mentioned already, Narayan does not give the impression that he has used them in his fiction in a parochial mood. They all indicate how sincere and devoted he has remained on his background, atmosphere and has relied tremendously to the first-hand knowledge. His broad humanity, magnanimous attitude, detachment to all that which is conducive to disturb the traditional way of living and looking at the world reality, sympathetic yet penetrative eye to distinguish between the virtuous and the vicious, and his ironical humour with a profound comical vision have helped him in emphasizing the unique features of South Indian locality symbolized by Malgudi.

David Cecil is right in stating that

"- - - A novel is a work of art in so far as it introduces us into a living world; in some respects resembling
the world we live in, but with an individually of its own. Now this world owes its character to the fact that it is begotten by the artist's creative faculty on his experience. His imagination apprehends reality in such a way as to present us with a new vision of it.\textsuperscript{20}

R.K. Narayan is a superb artist whose some aspects of rare experience fertilize his imagination, with the intention of striking sufficiently deep down into the fundamentals of his personality in order to kindle his creative spark. That is why, Narayan's achievement is limited to that part of his work which deals with the aspects of his experience. However, the problems of the South Indian society in respect of social, political and economical spheres are touched upon incidently, indirectly and within the framework of Malgudi.

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