CHAPTER II
THE MALGUDI MILIEU

From Swami and Friends to The Painter of Signs is a march along a historical time. With each of the novels of R.K.Narayan, Malgudi unfolds new vistas of life. A simple, innocent and conservative society undergoes fast changes because of the incursions of modern civilization. From a sleepy, silent and small town atmosphere on the bank of river Sarayu to a fast developing metropolitan ethos with modern streets, banking corporations, talkies and smugglers' den, Malgudi marks a movement in time. This movement not only affects the geography of the place, but also the social and cultural milieu. Innocence gradually gives way to experience and Malgudi begins to live up to the modern spirit. The various phenomena operating on the social and individual planes in the transitional phases of Malgudi's history contribute to the cosmic scenario of R.K.Narayan's world of fiction.

The Indo-Anglian novelist is confronted with a wide range of problems -- from freedom movement and racial relationship to hunger and starvation. Mulk Raj Anand and Bhavani Bhattacharya write with the avowed purpose of bringing about social change, and "Perhaps one of the drawbacks of Mulkraj Anand's novels arises from the missionary zeal with which he pleads in them for the amelioration of the lot of the have-nots."
Narayan’s Malgudi, as H. M. Williams rightly observes, is. "relatively free from the terrible privations and agonies, political conflicts and economic depression of Anand’s India." Against the background of a changing Indian society, which is faithfully reflected in the imaginary Malgudi, Narayan weaves his human comedy. Like Hardy’s Wessex and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha which experience the gradual decadence of the agricultural community of England and that of the Southern aristocracy of the United States respectively, Malgudi at different points of time experiences the swift changes, the innumerable contradictions that make a mark on the orthodox Indian society with its age-old culture, beliefs and superstitions. Characters caught up in various pulls and pressures of these changes are seen in various comic postures. Graham Greene in the introduction to The Financial Expert remarks, "...the life of Malgudi—never ruffled by politics proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries, and the juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character provides much of the comedy." Because of the apparent usurpation of the traditional values and the lifestyle by the New civilization, the various human situations portrayed in these novels border on pathos. But the old values eventually reign supreme; the Modern only touches the fringes of the society and never really penetrates to the core. After the storm is over, characters return to, what Chandran
calls in The Bachelor of Arts, 'a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics.' Sarayu still goes on flowing.

Malgudi in the 1930's is a small town across the river Sarayu with an officers' club and two schools, a municipality, a town hall. Towards the end of the town there is Nallappa's mango grove where Swami spends delightful hours with his friends; and farther down, there is the Hempi forest. The Malgudi scene, on the one hand, embraces mothers with their religious rituals and grandmothers with their stories, while, on the other hand, there are new extensions, cricket clubs, and various other features of Western influence. The hold of the traditional Indian values on Swami is as strong as the effect of modern civilization. Swami believes in the pebbles being converted into coins by the blessings of the gods, believes in the demons and ghosts that figure in any grandmother's story. On the other hand, he as much as Malgudi itself, is quite conscious of the modern political activities. Malgudi is very much in the national mainstream. The inhabitants of Malgudi demonstrate against the arrest of a political worker in Bombay by the British government; even the school children boycott their classes, burn their dresses that are foreign and break the glass windows of their schools. On the issue of using foreign goods, Swami's father boasts that he does not have a pie of his sent to the foreign countries. Malgudi in these years is at the cross-roads of Indian culture,
The old granny, 'the fire-eyed Vedanayagan, his class teacher; and the Headmaster with his thin long cane', river Sarayu and Nallappa's mango grove — all these constitute an intimate Indian childhood. Setting a hoop to malgudi cricket club not merely coincides with the growth of Swami's age and awareness, it suggests a definite advancement in the life of a small town that learns to reconcile with the need of modern living.

Malgudi is a small Indian town that is at once tied to its ancient moorings and yet submits to various compulsions of change. Geographical changes are easily perceived. A railway station has come up adding to the tourist attraction of the place. The Englandia Insurance Company, the Truth Printing Works, the Regal Haircutting Saloon, Anand Bhavan, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, the Sunrise Studio, Lawley Extension and many other modern institutions go to build up Malgudi's existence.

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, a most satisfactory outlook aesthetically, the corn fields, which were receding in the face of the buildings, waving in sunlight.

Streets and lanes like Kabir street, Vinayaka Budali street, Anderson lane and Ellamman street recur in each novel with all their particularities. Saffur, the taxi-driver also appears in many novels such as The Guide and The Painter of
Signs, as a distinct feature of Malgudi town, Mempi forest, another eternal presence in the life of the Malgudians, provides everything under the sun – tea, bamboo, medicinal herbs, teak wood for furniture, a glass house for tourists, best rose-wood plank to paint sign-boards.

Thus Malgudi exists on two dimensions simultaneously – the age-old values and beliefs that have gone deep down the Indian psyche shaping its cultural and emotional outlook, and the new way of living that the Western notions of economic progress have forged. Grandmothers, uncles and aunts with their rigid caste system, their innumerable religious rituals are finely counternpoised against the new generation represented by Mali, Balu, Dr. Pal and others. Malgudi emerges as a comic amalgamation of the old and the new, of ancient temples and modern hotels and becomes an image of the incongruities involved. "Malgudi is an Indian small town and stands at a nicely calculated comic distance between the East and the West .... Just as the true tragedy of colonialism lay in the culturally untouched but economically ravaged Indian countryside, the true comedy of this same historical fact was to be observed in the Indian small town."7 Behind the fact of this comedy, Narayan presents the poetry of the life of an entire community. He presents,
a considerable section of Indian society striving to live its daily life in a definite historical situation... that is not of a few intellectually or emotionally adventurous persons he is talking, but of a more sizable and static section of Indian society.3

Into this small South Indian town with its orthodox values, the modern civilization comes in all its manifestations raising a flutter here and there, disturbing the quiet waters of Malgudi life. Malgudi, as M.M. Williams points out, "gives Narayan the necessary fixity of background against which he can set a comedy of deviation and disturbance of-the-normal.... the comedy in the novels after 1946 depends very much on the abnormal outside influence with the placidity of the town."4 Even under colonial subjugation, the Malgudi of earlier years has not woken up to the sinful living of the modern civilization and like Swami, Malgudi is still in its adolescence. The smugglers' arcade that we notice down the Market Road in The Painter of Signs is not there in Swami and Friends. In the 1930's, Malgudi has not registered these drastic changes and except the peculiarities of the teachers, the funs and quarrels among children, the car ride and the cricket club, Malgudi presents no other visible features of Western influence. There is rather the inevitable presence of the grandmother:
After the nightmeal, with his head on his granny's lap, nestling close to her, Susmanathan felt very snug and safe, in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves. ( p.21 )

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

Malgudi awakening to the excitement of the new civilization and yet retaining its rigid caste divisions, its innumerable social taboos is vividly portrayed in The Bachelor of Arts. In a Malgudi with its compulsions of age-old customs and morality, Chandran's infatuation for Malathi can never fruition and is bound to be dismissed as adolescent. For a marriage, horoscopes must be consulted, castes must be considered. In such a context, there are the history association and the endless debates of the college union, Gajapathy's distaste for post-eighteenth century literature and his dismissal of Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy, Brown's humour and the English club, the second show cinema with coffee and cigarettes. Malgudi is suddenly lifted from the docility of a conventional life to the excitement of a new living. The new modes of living conspicuous in the younger generation of Malgudi are contrasted with the religious living of the mother of Chandran and the reverential silence of Chandran's father.
Towards the end of the novel, Chandran forsaking his adolescent fancies, makes a conventional marriage and is quite happy with his wife:

For the rest of the journey the music of the word 'Susila' rang in his ears. Susila, Susila, Susila. Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was divine. Susila, Susila-Malathi, not a spot beside Susila. (p.162)

This may suggest Narayan's affirmation of the old way of marriages decided by parents and horoscopes. Considering Chandran's attachment with Susila, the Malathi episode and his sanyasihood retrospectively seem merely adolescent and ludicrous.

Chandran's mother is a symbol of Indian womanhood:

...She sat in the back veranda, turning the prayer beads in her hand, looking at the coconut trees at the far end of the compound. As she turned the beads, her lips uttered the holy name of Sri Rama, part of her mind busied itself with thoughts of her husband, home, children and relatives, and her eyes took in the delicate beauty of coconut trees waving against a star-lit sky. (p.12)

Her commitment to traditional values is a challenge to the glitter of the new civilization:

But his mother replied that she at any rate belonged to a generation which was in no way worse than the present one for all its observances, and as long as she lived she would insist on respecting the old customs. (p.70)

Chandran's attempt to marry Malathi fails, because the horoscopes do not match and the elder people accept it since
"He on the Thirupathi Hills alone knows what is best for us." (p.96) Chandran's mother's anxiety over the girl's age being over sixteen, the endless astrological complications over the horoscopes, the interesting finale to the thief catching episode at the garden and many such incidents strike a sympathetic, yet funny note. The sanyasi episode in Part III of The Bachelor of Arts, that at once reminds us of Raju in The Guide, is another interesting facet of the religious India:

When he opened his eyes again he saw some villagers standing around him. 'May we know where our master is coming from?' Somebody asked.

Chandran was tired of inventing an answer to this question. On the flash of an idea he touched his mouth and shook his head. 'He is dumb.'

'No, he can hear us. Can you hear us?' Chandran shook his head in assent.

'Can you talk?' Chandran shook his head in assent, held up his ten fingers, touched his lips, locked heavenward, and shook his head. They understood. 'He is under a vow of silence of ten years or ten months or ten days.' A number of villagers stood around Chandran and gaped at him. Chandran felt rather embarrassed at being the target of the stare of crowd. He closed his eyes. This was taken by the others for meditation. (p.109)

Malgudi stands for the Real. Any deviation from it only results in a comic scene and characters, ordinary as they are, are bound to come back to the folds of Reality, that is Malgudi. Here love and romance, adolescent adventurism, do not sustain long. Chandran's infatuation for Malathi, his
frustrated escape into sanyasihood are all illusions, momentary fits of life which must be discarded. That is why at the end of Part III Chandran comes back to Malgudi accepting a practical view of life, rejecting the illusions and hysterics of earlier days. Malgudi remains the only truth. The proposal to go to England is dropped and Chandran confines himself to 'The Daily Messenger' and Malgudi. The illusions of the modern, the West, no more exist and Malgudi alone appears real with its traditional way of living. Even Veerswami's 'Resurrection Brigade' is heard no more. Malgudi is no place for revolution. The notions of revolution sound funny in the tradition-bound reality of Malgudi.

The movement from Swami and Friends to The English Teacher is a progress from the innocent pleasures of childhood to the wisdom of a mature adult. The comic note that is perceived in the Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts is markedly absent in The English Teacher. The Indian background in this novel is envisaged in terms of the grave and serious Hindu metaphysics. The novel confines itself to domestic and then later to a metaphysical plane, as a result of which the trivialities that go to make up the gay Malgudi life in all other novels, are conspicuously absent here. No one breaks the moral or the religious bonds of society; hence there is no scope for comic deviation. It becomes a
domestic drama bordering on tragedy, moving from the terrestrial to the transcendental.

In the traditional Indian domestic setting, woman has her well-defined place. Krishnan's mother says, "Unless I have cleaned the house, I can't go and bathe. After bathing, I've to worship, and only after that I can go near the cows." (p.29) As Krishnan recalls, "House Keeping was a grand affair for her. The essence of her existence consisted in the thrills and pangs and the satisfaction that she derived in running a well ordered household." (p.29) On every possible occasion, whether it is a birth or a home-coming, certain rituals are to be performed. The threshold has to be decorated with green mango leaves and the floor and the doorway with white flower designs, vermilion mark is to be put on the forehead and so on. Krishnan's mother attributes Susila's illness to the influence of the Evil Eye and this influence, she asserts, has to be warded off not by any doctor, but by a Swamiji. The Swamiji "felt her pulse. He uttered some mantras with closed eyes, took a pinch of sacred ash and rubbed it on her forehead, and tied to her arm a talisman strung in yellow thread." (p.93) The doctor, who too seems to believe in Swamiji's method, remarks, "Ah, no, don't belittle these people. There is a lot in him too, we don't know. When we understand it fully I am sure we doctors will be able to give more complete cures." (p.93)
On some occasions such beliefs give rise to comedy and seriousness at the same time, as in the case of the school teacher. The hermit astrologer, who has written a month-to-month report about the life of the school teacher according to which the latter's life 'has been going on in its details like a time table' (p.184) has failed to predict the latter's death. Whether it is an astrological hoax in a land of sadhus and sanyasis or a part of a greater design, is of course ambiguous. For the nonce, the reader can have a laugh at the failure of such grand prediction; but in quite another way it has a mystic ring of truth:

Let her cry till she brings down the sky. I am going to treat myself as dead and my life as a new birth. You will see—I don't know if that hermit might not have meant my death, after all, in that sense.... (p.190)

I tell you, friends, no more of this wife and family for me. You may treat me as dead or one who has taken Sanyasa Ashrama. (p.192)

Krishnan personally experiences the presence of 'strange spiritual forces':

Their delicate aroma filled every particle of the air, and as I let my mind float in the ecstasy, gradually perceptions and senses deepened. Oblivion crept over me like a cloud. The past, present and future welded into one. (p.212)

Krishnan's intense spiritual experiences remind us of the hermit astrologer 'who can see past, present and future as
one."

Possibly for this reason Krishnan has taken the vocation in the children's school, resigning his job in the college, very much in the manner of the school teacher who has renounced his family and enters a new 'janaa.'

The idea of 'The Age of Reason' that Raman advances in *The Painter of Signs* seems hardly tenable in the context of our awareness of the ancient beliefs and practices. In *The English Teacher*, one, of course, misses the fun and laughter typical of Narayanan's fiction. Yet it is not difficult to perceive the comic touch when Krishnan, towards the end of the novel, submits his resignation to work in the children's school. It is then that Mr. Brown, 'his western mind, classifying, labelling, departmentalizing.' (p. 207) asks in wonder, "But I didn't know you had primary school training..." (p. 207)

The economic progress and the various expansions and advancements of Malgudi in *The Dark Room* result in a corresponding erosion in traditional values and a fast adoption of the new style of living:

Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped theatre-

-Balace Talkies—which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed variety hall, which from time immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent films.

The Englandia Insurance Company, which was not transacting even ten rupees' worth of policies a year, now boasts of
'ten lakhs of business.' (p.15) Even women, forever confined to the family in an orthodox household now have learnt to be independent. Shanta Bai, the glamorous lady, says, "Oh, I love unconventional things, otherwise I shouldn't be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband." (p.54) Unconventional things happen now in Malgudi in the wake of an advancing civilization. Characters in this novel are strikingly different from those of the earlier novels. The orthodox Indian family, the mother and the children, are caught in a vicious juncture of the old and the new. No less also is the discomfiture of Ramani, who is caught between a family and a flirting mistress. This discomfiture is as much comic as Shanta Bai's ultramodern presence with her craze for English movies and Rubaiyat and her hedonistic philosophy of life, contrary to that of the orthodox society of Malgudi with its strong traditional ethics. But much of the comic effect is obliterated before the gloom and sufferings of Savitri that envelope the entire novel. Savitri's rejection of her home is as pathetic and defeatistic as her return. She realizes her place in the society, "What despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it." (p.123) The walls of the orthodox society close in on woman from all sides and Savitri like Nora tries to come out
of this doll's house. Savitri plans, if not for herself, but for her daughters: "Sukati and Kansia must study up to the B.A., and not depend for their salvation on marriage." (p.30)

In a novel of the 70's, The Painter of Signs, Daisy asserts that independent status for women. Savitri's return to her family is of course inevitable.

All the happenings in Mr. Sampath may be viewed as centering round the social changes of Salgudi:

...Salgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, with a sudden influx of population of all sorts. (p.26)

A bridge is to be shortly built across the river Sarayu which is 'going to transform our entire Salgudi district.' (p.79)

From the quiet small town of Swami and Friends or of the childhood years of Raju in The Guide, Salgudi swiftly changes into a commercial centre. "The Market Road was the lifeline of Salgudi." (p.5) -- a fact which clearly illustrates its commercial importance. This spurt in commercial transactions disturbs the serenity of Salgudi life. As Srinivas reflects philosophically, "Man has no significance except as a wage earner, as an economic unit." (pp.10-11) Slums have come up and also a studio. Labour gangs have come from other districts and have occupied the open spaces. The Englandia Banking Corporation is there with its European manager who is nothing but a 'compound of beef and whisky.' (p.104) The Truth
Printing Works, the Anand Bhavan and all the other visible manifestations of development are there.

The transformation of a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, the emergence of The Banner and The Sunrise studio and various other things speak of an awakening in the economic and cultural areas of the Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi has been caught up in a frenzy in response to such awakening. Sampath's rapid changeover of roles from a painter to a film director to Siva and to many other unknown possibilities not only speaks of a dynamic personality, but of an elastic society that can offer many avenues to display one's potentialities. 'The Burning of Kamala', the sophisticated technician De Nelle from Hollywood, the vision of Ravi and various such episodes show that Malgudi has reconciled to a changing socio-cultural order. But despite all this, the old ways continue to affect the life of Malgudi. Srinivas's wife is not prepared to go to the market without an escort. Ravi's mother thinks that her child is possessed and he can be restored to normalcy only through exorcism. If exorcism fails, then there is the temple at Sailas where hundreds of people are living and in whose portals Ravi can be kept for a week. The orthodox inhibitions with regard to dancing still remains. Ravi's father, very much like Raju's mother in The Guide, opposes any kind of connection with dancing girls.
In such a critical juncture of the historical process, Srinivas stands bewildered. Inevitable as it is to a comic vision, the characters move a full circle, realize their follies and come back to the fold of traditional Malgudi life. Shanti returns to her son rejecting the illusions of a film career and would not hesitate to shave off her head, fling her jewellery and wear a white saree. The women return to their well-defined places in the society. Ravi's madness has subsided and one may expect things to be better for him in the temple at Sailam. The storm has subsided and Srinivas now realizes the absurdity of all that have happened. The frenzy and madness that heighten the human comedy in Sampoorth are, of course, a part of the essential spirit of Malgudi, where "Even madness passes. Only existence asserts itself." (p.209)

Malgudi experiences fast changes. Its simple economy is progressively replaced by a complex economy with banks and business concerns. The Second World War has also affected the economy of Malgudi. In such a situation the role of a financial expert can never be ignored. Margayya's promotion from an ordinary money-lender transacting under a banyan tree to a financial wizard is spectacular and it also tells of Malgudi's potentiality to grow and change. Margayya's tragic-comic posture emerges from a queer combination of the traditional
and the commercial. On the one hand he religiously undertakes the rituals for forty days; on the other hand he does not hesitate to take all the advantages of the war situation to suit to his purpose. He worships goddess Laxmi; and for his son he hangs a picture of goddess Saraswati in his study room. His publication of the book 'The Bed life' or 'Domestic Harmony' to which his wife makes violent objection is a gross violation of the orthodox Indian values. This brings him immediate success, but in the long run it becomes the cause of his undoing. Thus the forty days' ritual bears fruit which may suggest the efficacy of the Indian beliefs. But at the same time, the rituals ultimately result in Margayya's disaster, because of his impure ambitions.

Margayya's phenomenal rise ultimately ends in his downfall. The satanic forces of the modern civilization are far stronger than traditional morality, and in the current not only he, but his entire family are led along a path of self destruction. Ironically the book 'Domestic Harmony' which is the first spur towards financial success brings only domestic disharmony to Margayya. Balu's abscording to Madras is a symbolic journey to the Western civilization. There he learns womanizing and drinking. Margayya does not approve of such a civilization; yet he carries the seed of this new civilization—money. Margayya and Dr. Pal are the two champions of modern civilization, one of money and the other of sex. It is thus no
wonder that Balu comes late at night drunk and beats Brinda.
To add to this, Balu demands his share of the paternal property.

The financial expert records the changes in Malgudi life in terms of Margayya’s phenomenal rise from a small financial adviser working under the Banyan tree to a financial wizard of ample means. Margayya’s adventures are of course comic, for his downfall restores him back to the reality of his position in a hierarchical social order. The cleavage in the family which grows with Margayya’s rise in status is eventually bridged as Margayya comes back to the fold of a traditional social order. Margayya’s passion for money is the source of his deviation from the traditional norms of social conduct. Margayya piles up money with a feverish zeal which leads to a gradual constriction of physical space;

In his home the large safe was filled up and its door had to be forced in, and then the cupboards, the benches and tables, the space under the cot, and the corners. His wife could hardly pass into the small room to pick up a saroo or towel....

Obviously, this gradual constriction of space becomes a symbol of Margayya’s fall into the dark pit of sin and hypocrisy.

The fall is inevitable because Malgudi cannot for long continue with any perversion or craze. The fall, by a fine coincidence, is similar in most novels. Balu’s nocturnal
association with the girls of the theatrical agent reminds us of Sampath’s association with the actress Shanti, and Raju’s association with Rosie, a dancer. Balu’s relationship with his father on the one hand and with Dr. Pal on the other makes him a character in whom money and sex, the two central features of this crazy civilization, combine. And justifiably, Balu is chosen to move the process of ultimate destruction. When Margsayya’s palace of cards, built on perversion are razed to the ground and ambitions and hysterics have been humbled, the original, inevitable life of Malgudi immediately returns. Margsayya’s brother rushes to his help and the strong bond which is characteristic of the Indian joint family appears restored. Balu returns with Brinda and the child, much sobered. Now with all illusions gone, Margyayya is prepared to start his life afresh under the banyan tree. He is prepared to return to that banyan tree, to that box with a pen and an ink bottle, which are the only realities in his life. Realizing that this adult world of Malgudi is nothing but make-belief, much in the manner of Srinivas in Mr. Sampath, he moves to play with the child of Balu, much in the manner of Krishnan in The English Teacher. Once again the innocent world of children returns to Malgudi. Margayya has taken a new ‘janna.’

The strong Indian tradition with its religious moorings has been brilliantly analysed by John B. Alphonso Karkala in his essay ‘Symbolism in The Financial Expert.’ Symbols such
as Fire, Silk, Lotus, the Banyan tree, the two contrasting symbols in Laxmi and Saraswati with their respective devotees in Nargayya and Dr. Pal, offer us a religious Indian situation into which modern civilization seems to be an intruder that must leave. True to the spirit of our scriptures, "at the end of the book, he is not destroyed in a disastrous tragedy, but only suffers a calamity which reduces him to the position he had at the beginning, so that he is willing to start all over again, as if in a new life, another existence, since the spirit of life is basically endless, and beginningless, while existence is only cyclical." 14

A political theme blended with a romantic one characterizes Waiting for the Mahatma. Malgudi is caught in the political current of the country; but what we find here is very much a tame Malgudi with its usual fervour and gaiety conspicuously absent. This prompts K.R.S. Iyengar to comment, Waiting for the Mahatma is an ambitious effort, and an impressive feat; but one also feels that Narayan's art now denied the security of Malgudi and catapulted into Gandhian or terrorist political action—betrays unsureness and perplexity. 15

The novel operates on two planes — the political and the romantic. Malgudi, as our experience has proved it, is no field for any of these passions. That is why, the action instead of confining itself to Malgudi alone, stretches far beyond to the villages and to Delhi. Malgudians show little
political enthusiasm. Unlike in Roja Rao's *Kanthapura* where the freedom movement becomes a passionate involvement of an entire community, the movement here touches only the fringes of the society. What becomes the theme of the novel is Sriram's involvement in politics that even helps him to find consummation in his love.

Swaroop as a character has tremendous influence on the development of the plot. He has definitely caused a stir in some orthodox quarters of Malgudi. For Sriram's Granny, "the Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into the temples, and who involved people in difficulties with police." Yet, notwithstanding these grumblings, the entire Malgudi is ready to receive Gandhi. Malgudi has positively waken up to catch the political tempo of the country. Side by side, the hypocrisy of the municipality Chairman is exposed, rendering the picture of pre-independence India true and complete.

The Sriram-Swaroop romance cannot function in the normal course of events, partly because of the orthodox barriers of Malgudi and partly because the 'ideals' dominate the character of Swaroop, as in the case of Daisy in *The Painter of Siam*. For such romance to fruition, the sanction of the Mahatma is needed, who embodies the grand Indian tradition.

Into this scene of the pre-independence India of Gandhian non-violence and terrorist politics Narayan suddenly introduces
a comic interlude that at once provides us with a slice of typical Malgudi existence. Then, after the elaborate rituals of the funeral, the Granny is discovered not dead, the priest refuses to bring her from that pile of wood since it violates ancient customs. The priest's words sway the superstitious society of Malgudi:

The whole town will be wiped out by fire or plague. It is very inauspicious. Do anything you like, but she can't come back into the town. (p.124)

It is a piece of comic anachronism. Though Malgudi yields to the changes of time on the surface, at heart its people are still bound to traditional beliefs and values.

The Malgudi milieu bears in itself the dreams and aspirations, the frailties and frustrations of her men and women. The Guide embodies the ambiguity involved in the transitional process of Malgudi. The eventful career of Raju from his innocent childhood to the mature wisdom of his last days, coincides with the growth of Malgudi from a small locality to an active town. There are visible signs of a new civilization. The railways, Albert Mission college, Anand Bhavan hotel, Malgudi Photo Bureau have all come up. Malgudi has suddenly shot into fame in the entire India as a tourist spot which attracts tourists from far-off places. Malgudi has opened its doors to the outside world. The Western civilization has already made its impact on Malgudi.
In the interaction of various forces, Malgudi positively has lost much of its virginity. A backward glance over the years enables us to see an innocent, idyllic Malgudi in the childhood years of Raju. The details of this memorable past and of the successive changes are transparently true to life. By means of these details Narayan weaves a cultural, social, economic and emotional complex from which the individual emerges with his dreams and aspirations on his way to salvation. The focus is on the individual as well as on the milieu from which he comes, thus leading to a total impression. Here in Malgudi, where East and the West, or Old and the New meet, there is an inevitable tension between two sets of values:

Domestic life versus passionate love, scholar versus Sadhu, the claims of duty versus the claims of art, an easy warm society versus a cold, but correct individualism, tradition versus modernity—no matter how we phrase the various paradoxes and conflicts—of attitude and motivation in the novel, the important fact is that one side in the issue is no longer treated as chimerical or illusory and the other as real, Narayan recognizes the strength and reality of each.

Raju, reared in the ancient Indian tradition is lured by the glamour of the new way of living, His degeneration accompanies his defiance of Malgudi's time-honoured social codes. The first bad words that Raju learns during his boyhood are from the people who work on the railway tracks. Railways, a sign of the modern civilization, is the cause of Raju's doom. Raju's sinful living with Rosie in the teeth
of opposition from all quarters such as mother, uncle and even Gaffur only ends up in total disaster. In the long run, at the end of the cycle, knowledge dawns upon the erring characters. In the typical religious manner, Rosie believes in 'karma', "I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is karma. What can we do?" Illusions fall off for Raju, as they have for so many others in Malgudi. Gaffur rightly advises Raju, "Listen to my advice. Send her away and try to get back to ordinary, real life. Don't talk all this art business. It's not for us." (p.144) Malgudi brooks no defiance.

In such a mysterious land where people readily believe that yogis can fly to the Himalayas just by a thought, it is no wonder for a sinner to be mistaken for a saint. It is the compelling influence of the heary tradition of India that can transform a sinner into a saint, raise the comic to the serious height of metaphysics.

In The Guide, C.D. Narasimhaiah points out, the traditional past and the changing present which with all the degradation that has come upon it still holds fine possibilities for survival — some deep springs of vital energy sustaining her.

Whether any tangible result has been achieved or not by the penance of Raju, is immaterial. More important is that the individual has sought his salvation according to the great
Indian tradition. The crazy gathering, the Malaria and the T.V. show on the one hand and Velan and the innocent, rustic folk around, on the other, provide a visual East-West comedy. But behind the apparent tremors caused by the Western influence, there is an unconscious commitment to the ancient Indian values. V.V. Kantak remarks,

You are invited to laugh at Raju and at the sweet comedy of the hero-worshipping Velan forcing him to keep to the straight path of his reluctant Mahatma- hood. And yet you do not dismiss Velan's faith as sheer buffoonery nor even Raju's forced accession to sainthood as unrelieved quackery.

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

The Man eater of Malgudi offers a panorama of the ancient and the modern juxtaposed together. Once again we are in that placid atmosphere of the small town Malgudi. The feel of the traditional India is everywhere. The Satyanarayan Puja is religiously observed. There is Kumar, the elephant who comes out of the hills of its own accord to stay in the temple; there is the monosyllabic poet with his epic 'Radhakalyana' dealing with the divine love story of Krishna and Radha. A temple festival is held in which the entire community takes part.
The temple dancers dance on this occasion. To add to this familiar picture, there is Nataraj's wife, the symbol of Indian womanhood, steeped in all her superstitions and domestic anxieties. The ancient mythologies, carrying in them the religious reverence of centuries still have their appeal:

The sight of the God, the sound of music, the rhythm of cymbals and the scent of jasmine and incense induced in me a temporary indifference to everything. Elephant? Who could kill an elephant? There came to my mind the tale of the elephant Tarananda, the elephant of mythology, who stepped into a lake and had his leg caught in the jaws of a mighty crocodile; and the elephant trumpeted helplessly, struggled, and in the end desperately called on Vishnu, who immediately appeared and gave him the strength to come ashore out of the jaws of the crocodile.21

There are discussions on Nehru's third Five Year Plan and other harmless political and social gossips. The same municipality, the same streets, the municipal chairman who always wore (even in his sleep, so people said) a white Gandhi cap as an unwavering member of the Congress Party22 (p.184) appear again in this decade Malgudi that is yet to wake up to the terrors of a commercial civilization. The easy flow of life is suddenly interrupted by Vasu, a taxidermist:

He is seen as the extreme representative of a new egoism as well as a new will and a new energy that we can call western or modern, associated as these are in our minds with post-renaissance Europe. Vasu thus becomes a sort of Marlovian overreacher thrust upon the cramped, the very ordinary stage of quotidian Malgudi.
But in the orthodox atmosphere of Malgudi it immediately takes up a religious interpretation. Vasu's business proposition to supply stuffed eagles at about fifty rupees each so that every one can keep a sacred garuda in the Puja and his guarantee "that it won't fly off" (p.64) is at once a morbid violation of the sacred traditions. Rightly therefore, Nataraj thinks, "His presence defiled my precincts" (p.65) and Sastri concludes "He shows all the definitions of a rakshasa." (p.95) Even though we witness a modern scenario (Vasu is an M.A., and taxidermy, as Vasu claims, is a modern art), we come to realize that Narayan operates in a religious framework where the ancient India is more pronounced. As ordained by the sacred mythologies, Vasu, the rakshasa must bring his own death:

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? (p.242)

Here is a distinct parallel to the myth of Bhasmasura, the demon made all powerful by the boon of the god who ultimately dies of his own immense strength.

Quite in violation of the orthodox Hindu sensibility, Vasu brings harlots and dead animals to Nataraj's house. Quite in violation of the social codes, Vasu's egoism and
sadism disturb the serenity of Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi community including Vasu's mistress is morally against him. As A.N.Kaul has pointed out, "In the midst of this solid reality, Vasu becomes not impotent, but unreal."23 The unreal has no place in Malgudi, which always stands for the Real. After the clouds have gone, Malgudi is once again its old self. Vasu, the demonic presence that has threatened the peace loving orthodox community of Malgudi meets his ordained end. But during this brief period of Malgudi's life Narayan has carved out a brilliant human comedy out of the fear and faith of an innocent people nurtured on the hoary traditions of India.

The East-West conflict is more acute in The Vendor of Sweets. Against the background of Malgudi's rich Indian heritage, the West comes with all its bewitching ideas and eccentricities. Here in 1937 Mahatma Gandhi addressed the people of Malgudi on the sands of Sarayu. People visit the temple of Santana Krishna on Badri Hill to remove barrenness in women. Religious ceremonies are observed at the time of Mali's birth:

As if in fulfilment of the coconut seller's prophecy, Mali was born. The very minute he was delivered (in the village home of his mother) he was weighed on a scale pan, even before the midwife could clean him properly and an equivalent weight in gold, silver and corn was made up to be delivered to the god on Badri Hill, according to the solemn vow made during their visit.24
In such an auspicious setting, new ideas of the West enter in, providing a jolt to the orthodox sensibility of the Malgudians. Mali's journey to America is a symbolic representation of the East-West encounter, which is the first in the sequence of events that are shortly to corrupt the new generation. Malgudi's orthodox social code are violated when Mali takes to beef, returns with a half Korean, half American wife, Jagen's familiar world of marriage and morals are in shambles. He is estranged from his sister who cannot reconcile to a 'beef-eating Christian girl' (p.147) as a daughter-in-law. Jagen says to the cousin, "Mali is displaying strange notions." (p.33) Out of the familiar background of Malgudi, Mali makes forays to strange regions, hitherto unknown to Jagen. Jagen's tragedy starts the very moment he abandons his own way of thinking and starts getting "completely identified with Mali's fantasies." (p.39) Here Jagen loses the moorings of his own generation and partakes as much as Mali does the frenzy of the new civilization.

Mali's story-writing machine is a perversion of the new civilization, a comic parody of the spontaneous creative process of the human mind, a kind of comic jolt to Malgudi's natural flow of life, where the granny still tells stories to children at their bedside. In such a Malgudi one can even 'watch a goddess come out of a stone.' (p.191)
In both *The Financial Expert* and *The Vendor of Sweets* there is a complete breakdown of communication between two generations, represented by the conflict between the father and the son. In this tragi-comic clash of generations, Jagon, the 'ironic Gandhian satyagrahi,' a funny mixture of hypocrisy and sincerity at the same time, makes a progressive ascent to the ultimate knowledge. He is restored to the moorings of the traditional past which he has lost while identifying himself with the fantasies of Mali. He realizes, "At sixty one is born and enters a new Janma," (p.182) and accordingly he renounces the world, reminding us of the concept of 'bana prastha' prescribed by our scriptures. Jagon's endorsement of Mali's prison sentence, "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now," (pp.191-92), echoes Rosie's idea of 'karma' and Mali must suffer for his 'karma.' In the modern context of Malgudi, the old values still function. Within a few years, Malgudi has taken definite strides on its way to modernity. Malgudi was changing in 1972. It was the base for a hydro-electric project somewhere on the Mempi Hills, and jeeps and lorries passed through the market road all day." (p.12) Malgudi now boasts of drunkards, smugglers and students having side-burns and check shirts who were the 'admirers of hippie philosophies.' (p.10) "The town hall veranda and the pavements around the market, the no-man's lands of Malgudi, swarmed with children of all sizes, from
toddler to four footers, dust covered, ragged — a visible development in five years." (p.30) For Raman, Malgudi suddenly takes up the dark significance of any advanced city life like New York. He compares it to a jungle where the charms of the old Malgudi are fast vanishing. A corresponding change has also occurred in the attitude of the people. There has been a shift in values. Raman with his "Be scientific, please, scientific" (p.7) attitude, is in a dilemma "Whether the legendary gods were real or imagined allegories." (p.171) Raman is the representative of this new attitude.

In the Malgudi of the 70's the old, orthodox tradition is very faintly felt, though it has not altogether vanished. Very much like Raman, Daisy is the symbol of new women liberated from all taboos. Daisy is immediately set in contrast to Raman's aunt, who still upholds the traditional values. If to have children is the cherished notion of Indian women, Daisy's philosophy is a "sort of unmitigated antagonism to conception." (p.87) Daisy comes out of the doll's house and stands extremely opposite to all the other women in Narayan's novels. In a way Daisy fulfils the wish of Savitri in The Dark Room who wants to have education and an independent existence. Torn between instincts and ideals, this family planning zealot is a tragi-comic personification of the hyste-
rics of the new civilization.
Unable to reconcile to these mad changes, Raman’s aunt leaves for Benaras, quite in the traditional manner. On the other hand Daisy also leaves Malgudi, incapable of accepting a traditional life. As the curtain closes, neither the aunt nor Daisy is there; only Raman is there divorced from the two—the traditional self represented by his aunt and his modern self represented by Daisy. The deserted Raman symbolizes the bewilderment of the new generation of Malgudi.

In this context O.P. Mathur remarks in his essay, ‘The West Wind Blows Through Malgudi’:

Modernization and modernized characters were targets of irony in many of Narayan’s major novels like The Guide, The Man eater of Malgudi, Mr. Samath, and The Vendor of Sweets. But in The Painter of Signs they are viewed with marked approval. This ‘marked approval’ has never been made explicit by Narayan.

In the cultural milieu of the 70’s when the Old and the New exist together in an incongruous relationship, Daisy heralds the approach of the latter. Yet the old India subtly creeps into her unconscious when she asks Raman to bring the gods back to their pedestal:

“Well, bring them back to their pedestal, before you begin to feel that they resent you and are punishing you with madness. The gods, if they are there, will look into my mind and judge whether I am choosing the right path or not; if I am wrong let them strike me dead. I am prepared for it. (p.179)

These words seem to voice the sentiments of an orthodox Indian woman who very much believes in her ‘Karma.’ Malgudi seems
not to have lost its old favour completely, or perhaps, it is a nostalgic attempt of Narayan to relive a past that is fast fading out.

In the tradition-bound society of Malgudi the marriage between Daisy and Raman is an impossibility. A marriage proposal with conditions — "One, that they should have no children, and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work" (p.153) — is a mockery of the sacred institutions of marriage. And quite in a similar way, Daisy's condition that "In any day you question why or how, I'll leave you" (p.159) is a parody of the ancient theme of Santhanu, Santhanu, the king, promised his bride that any day he questioned or obstructed her while she took away each child that was born, she would instantly leave him. Neither the perversion of the modern, nor the mockery of the past has any place in Malgudi.

The lawyer, whose vocation is the pursuit of logic, insists on the letters in his name plate to be slanted towards left, because his astrologer has said that a left slant is suspicious for his ruling star. Raman who wants to establish the 'age of Reason' is sentimentally in love with Daisy. Raman's sudden change of stance from a willing Santhanu to a reckless adolescent intending to drive a nail into Gaffer's tire in which Daisy is moving, is a movement from sentimental Indian
self to a modern gesture "of existential defiance of the universe." In the Malgudi of the 70's,

the twilight world of contemporary life quivering hesitantly between tradition and modernity, East and West, inextricably mixed up in the minds of individuals and creating what S.C. Maroux, in another context, calls "the psychological and social tensions involved in the uneasy conjunction of old ways and new evolving values."

As usual, once the illusions are over, a return to reality is inevitable. Raman mounted his cycle and turned towards the Boardless—that solid, real world of sublime souls who minded their own business." ( p.133 )

A chronological study of R.K. Narayan's novels helps us to realize the temporal changes that have come over Malgudi over the years and the eternal spirit that has withstood all such changes. Amidst all the manifestations of change, there is somewhere an ancient home or temple, a grandmother or an aunt. Srinivas traces the ancient history of Malgudi, which has been blessed with the divine presences of Rama, Buddha and Shankara. In the Malgudi of Swami and Friends the anxieties and tensions of the modern changes are not prominent. Yet afterwards, "the comparative calm of the thirties is gone, or is going; we are heading towards the war and the post-war years of hectic striving, chronic uncertainty, expense of spirit and lust in action." In this twilight world of Malgudi, old values still persist, old customs are still observed in all their religious details. In the outskirts of Malgudi, the villages
with their ancient way of living are viewed as the repository of the orthodox traditions and they are closely interwoven with the Malgudi existence. Narayan's novels "send out long, sensitive feelers to the villages where the inhabitants are innocent and unsophisticated in most matter excepting their factions and fights." Despite all the material progress, the ancient beliefs cannot easily be dismissed. The eccentric hermit surprisingly speaks all the truth about Daisy's past. The innocent beliefs of Velan and other villagers of Mangal can transform a sinner into a saint. Though Malgudi has come under the blandishments of the new civilization, the silent, hidden self of Malgudi still holds dear the traditional values of life.

Malgudi is an intimate part of Narayan's experience. The disintegration of joint family, the emergence of a middle class, the rise of economic individualism are some of the accompanying factors of the modern civilization that Narayan himself has experienced. These are vividly portrayed in his auto-biographical works. The orthodox society of Malgudi is left open to various new influences. Narayan remarks,

Society presses upon one all the time. The progress of the last half century may be described as the progress of the Frog out of his well. All means of communication, all methods of speedy travel, all newspapers, broadcasts and every kind of invention is calculated to keep up a barrage of attack on the Frog in the Well.
Narayan's concern is with the middle class and it is this class which oscillates between the old and the new, ideals and instincts. For them it is the 'twilight world.' Caught in this comedy of conflict between the old and the new, the middle class hero loses the illusory to gain the real. Raju, Balu, Mali, all middle class youths, in their attempts to gain independence (which is a feature of the modern age of democracy and individualism), economic as well as social, get isolated from everything. The absurdities and contradictions that one notices in 'the plight of the modern unknown warrior who is the middle class common man' are stuffs for humour in Narayan's novels.

As years pass by, changes are bound to occur. These changes reflected in the Malgudi milieu are noted in minute details and the unique human responses to such changes have been sympathetically viewed in all these novels. Compared to Swami and Friends, the Malgudi of The Painter of Signs is much altered; its virginity and intimacy have given place to a shocking impersonality. Yet the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley who has built this town years ago still remains. The Sarayu river still flows on as it has been doing since time immemorial. On her sand Swami played; Gandhiji spoke to the people of Malgudi; Krishnan buried his wife; and Raman now paints his signboards. The Taluk office gong strikes.
above the hooting of all taxis, above all the noise of the town and also in the quiet hours of the night. One tends to agree with K.R.S. Iyengar,

...that Malgudi is the real hero of the ten novels and the many short stories: that underneath the seeming change and the human drama there is something—the 'soul' of the place?—that defies, or embraces, all change and is triumphantly and unalterably itself.
NOTES


8. Ibid., p. 45.


23. Ibid., p.59.
26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 K.R.S. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, p. 373.


