R. K. Narayan, one of the most revered and applauded writers among the trio of Indian writing in English, deeply rooted in Indian culture, tradition and philosophy, reflects the Indian spirit and thought in his works. His fiction imbibes the quintessence of Indian philosophy in general and theory of *Karma* in particular. However, Narayan, an unassuming and unpretentious writer, does not burden his fiction with pedantic philosophical discourses. In spite of all philosophical under-currents in his novels, Narayan does not treat his fiction as a means of social, political or religious propaganda. His fictional works are a simplistic, yet realistic projection of life.

An uninitiated, unperceptive reader of Narayan may often be beguiled by the overt simplicity of his thematic concerns marked by his characteristic comic narrative mode. The mundane commonalities of the Malgudian life depicted by Narayan and the simplicity of thematic concerns gives a non-serious tone to his fiction. However, there is a profound undercurrent of philosophical discourse in his fiction, inter-related with disciplines of religion and ethics.

Thus, Narayan is first and foremost a writer and not a philosopher. Nevertheless, his fictional texts have a foregrounding in Indian philosophy that could be partly ascribed to his traditional background. But his philosophical vision is purely indigenous that bears the imprint of his knowledge of ancient Indian tradition, culture and philosophy. It becomes therefore imperative to
briefly survey the Indian philosophical systems so as to correlate Naranyan’s fictional texts with *Karma* philosophy with a view to envisage the philosophical vision of the writer.

Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual. Consequently, the spiritual motives pre-dominate life in India. The interest of philosophy in India is in the self of man and not in supra-lunar solitudes. The emphasis is on “*AaTman. iviµa*” i.e. “Know Thyself”. Religion in India is not dogmatic, though philosophy is not totally free from the fascinations of religious speculation, yet Narayan unveils this message in his fiction through the presentation of spiritual transformation of his characters such as Raju, the guide, Raja, the tiger, Jagan, the sweet vendor and Margayya, the financial expert.

A close examination of Narayan’s novels from philosophical point of view introduces one to various classical systems that originated in India some three thousand years ago. It is preposterous to describe Indian philosophy as one system since it represents a rich variety of philosophical thought. The classical systems of Indian philosophy called *Darshanas* are categorically classified into three broad groups – the Orthodox (*Astika*), the Heterodox (*Nastika*) and the Indian Materialistic (*Charvaka*). An orthodox system is one that accepts the authority of the *Vedas*. These orthodox systems are six in number – *Nyaya*, *Vaishesika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimansa* and *Vedanta*. Buddhism and Jainism, based on the authoritative spiritual experiences of their prophets are heterodox systems. *Charvaka* is an atheist who rejects spirituality in all forms. In his novels, Narayan presents two distinct types of characters in the light of the Indian philosophical systems. Firstly, there are Srinivas, Nataraj, Margayya, Jagan, Raju, Raja and Jagan who are
philosophers in their own right who expound and promote the value system known as Astika. Secondly, there are those like Vasu and Mali who offer a resistance to the order and harmony of the Malgudians. They represent the Charvaka system.

The first systems, Nyaya and Vaishesika are inter-related. The greatest contribution of Sankhya system to human thought is its conception of Prakriti or nature which is the root cause of all physical entities in the universe. The entire system of Prakriti is woven out of three gunas – Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Purusha or man is the other important category in Sankhya system. Narayan has interwoven these three gunas in his novels. Raju, Margayya, Raja – all live Rajasik life initially. But spiritual transformation in their lives leads them to Sattvik ways of living.

Narayan’s characters are Yogis in their distinct ways. Patanjali’s Yoga-Sutra is the main source of the Yoga system founded on the central object of “Chitta Vritti Nirodha Sa Yoga” i.e. “The control of mind, that is Yoga.” The sense of detachment from all material aspects and the efforts to achieve communion with God as found in Raju, Krishnan and Raja who live the life of Yogis towards the end of the novels.

Vedanta or Uttar Mimansa is the living and vital part of Indian philosophy today that has evolved from the interpretation of the triple texts – the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedanta or Brahma Sutra. The Vedantic tradition believes in Guru. The Vedantins acknowledge the limitation of reason though Vedanta is a fine example of a perfect blending of reason and revelation. The origin of Varna and Ashrama Dharma could be traced from the Vedantic school. These concepts of Varna and Ashrama Dharma are
also reflected in Narayan’s novels. Raju’s sacrifice for the villagers of Mangla, Raja’s sacrifice of hunting wild animals and his constant meditation, Jagan’s detachment from the worldly matters, his recitation of the Bhagwad Gita and Margayya’s last advice to his son - all represent their entering into Sanyasthashrama which is an Indian philosophical thought derived from the Vedanta.

Narayan has artistically woven the concept of Moksha in his novels. Adi Sankaracharya’s Adwaita conceptualizes of Nirguna Brahman as the ultimate reality, the identity of the Jiva and Brahman and conception of Moksha as the merging of Jiva in the Brahman. The ideal of Moksha is central to all the Indian philosophical systems and doctrines with the single exception of Charvaka. All the systems are one in defining Moksha as an experimental comprehension of Ultimate Reality that is to be exclusively attained not by discursive knowledge but by an experience described as Prajanana, Kevalagnana, Anubhuti – a state of ultimate bliss, joy or liberation.

Narayan has conceptualized the theory of Karma as depicted in the Bhagwad Gita, which presents unambiguously a comprehensive ideal of true religion and in its conceptualization of Ultimate Reality and the ideal of morality. This most luminous philosophical poem specifies the fourfold path of detached action (Niskama Karma Yoga), the path of knowledge (Jnan Yoga), the path of devotion and dedication (Bhakti Yoga) for the attainment of the ultimate goal of Moksha. The theory of Niskama Karma i.e. detached, selfless action is pivotal to any discourse on the Bhagvad Gita. The Karma Yogi performs his duties in a detached manner acquiring in the process a state of indifference to pleasure or pain. Through detachment from the material sense
of ego, the Yogi, or follower of particular path of Yoga is able to transcend his illusory mortality and attachment to the material world and enter the realm of the Supreme. Raju is a Nishkam Karma Yogi in the sense he always promotes the interests, tastes and likings of others by sacrificing his own aspirations and desires. He promotes the research of Marco, the dancing talent of Rosie, the well being of the jail-mates and the villagers, and in the end sacrifices his life for the genuine and universal cause of humanity.

Narayan's novels also corroborate with the two Indian epics, The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the most convincing documents of spiritual, religious, social, political and ethical teachings in India. The Ramayana is a perfect encyclopedia of the learning of the ancient Indian sages, especially of the quintessential wisdom of the Upanishads, the Vedants Sutras, the Bhagvad Gita, the doctrines of Advaita Vedanta and so on. The Ramayana is also rightly regarded as Dharma Shashtra. As Sant Keshavdas opines, in The Esoteric Meaning of Ramayana, “The Ramayana is not a mere story. It is the story we live every moment of our lives.” (www.hinduism.co.za/ramayana.htm)

The Mahabharata often described as the fifth Veda has recorded almost the entire political, social, moral and religious history of ancient India. This encyclopedia of life and knowledge of India is also known as Arthashashtra, Dharmaashashtra and Kamashashtra. The fourfold objectives of human life – Kama (enjoyment), Artha (wealth), Dharma (ethical living) and Moksha (spiritual bliss), theories of four Varnas i.e. Brahma, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra and four Ashramas i.e. Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa attain credibility and authority in the Mahabharata.
Margayya’s acute appetite for money, Raju’s concerns with Rosie and Raja’s hunger and anger as depicted in The Financial Expert, The Guide and A Tiger for Malgudi respectively represent the ideals of Artha and Kama. The spiritual transformation in these characters in the end promote the other two ideals, Dharma and Moksha.

Indian ethics also determine the behaviour, attitude and philosophy of life of common man in the society. In Sanskrit the word “Dharma” signifies the moral code of universe. Consequently, morality in an Indian philosophical context is co-related with every activity of life. Manu and Prasastapada are the two great social and moral thinkers of ancient India who have offered a detailed discourse on Hindu ethics. Manu has classified the duties of an individual as Sadharana Dharma and Prasastapada has propagated the concept of Samanya Dharma and Vishesha Dharma. Under the class of Sadharana Dharma or common duties, Manu enumerates ten duties – steadfastness (dhairya), forgiveness (kshama), application (dama), non-appropriation (chouryabhava), cleanliness (shoucha), sensuous appetites (indriya-nigraha), wisdom (dhi) learning (vidya), veracity (satya) and restraint of anger (akrodha). All these duties prescribed by Manu are significantly relevant for the attainment of an individual’s own perfection. The life of Margayya, Nagaraj, Jagan, Raju and other protagonists in Narayan’s novels protect and promote these duties.

The terms of literary and social discourse in pre and post-independence era in India have largely been determined by Gandhian philosophy and thought. Gandhism forms a significant part of post-independent or post-colonial discourse not only in India but in the Third World
as well and a large corpus of Indian writing in English over the years has been inspired by the Gandhian thought and ideology.

Narayan has imbibed the Gandhian philosophy in his distinctly inimitable style and manner. His fiction resonates with the wisdom of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagwad Gita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The important feature of all Narayan’s novels is the setting and the locale. All his novels are located in the imaginary town of Malgudi, known for its past history, a symbol of antiquity. Here Lord Rama made the river Saryu flow by pulling an arrow from his quiver and scratching a line on the sand. It is the land where Gautam Buddha preached the sermon of compassion, Sankara highlighted the Vedantic philosophy, Christian missionaries advocated their religion, Mahatma Gandhi preached his doctrines of truth and non-violence. So Malgudi is not a modern fashionable town, but a town having moorings in the mythic, historic past of the country and is a place that provides an ideal setting or locale for the intellectual, philosophical, religious, ethical and moral activities of his characters. This fore-grounding in the ancient past of India through the imaginary town of Malgudi accrues to Narayan’s novels a credibility or authenticity.

His characters at various levels of reality and circumstances reiterate or critique the Indian philosophical thought, religion, moral or social code. Philosophy in the Indian context is not confined to the dissemination of intellectual knowledge and wisdom only. The homocentricism and centrality of man is the perennial theme of Indian philosophy and it has been rightly averred that Indian philosophy is not merely a view of life but it is also a way
of life. Thus, for the protagonists, namely, Srinivas, Nataraj and Nagaraj in his respective novels *Mr. Sampath*, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The World of Nagaraj* philosophy is operative in their lives as a way of life. These characters have largely constructed their philosophy of life from the *Vedas*, the *Upnishads*, the *Bhagwad Gita* and the two Indian epics, though the interpretation and the subsequent implementation of philosophy varies as per the personal needs, familial or social conditions as well as the power of comprehension and assimilation of his characters and protagonists.

Narayan’s characters are classified into three distinct groups on the basis of their perspectives, activities and engagements in a family or society. Firstly, there are the chief protagonists who manifest specific philosophical vision in life that subsequently go on to expound and promote the Indian philosophical value system. Secondly, there are the characters who offer a resistance to the organic harmony of the Malgudian world thereby violating the ethical, moral system. Lastly, Narayan introduces common people who offer a critique of Indian philosophy.

Srinivas and Nataraj and Nagaraj, the practitioners of the philosophy of *Karma*, devise ways and means to counter the hostile alien forces of the universe in a philosophical way. Theirs’ is the philosophy of quietism of acceptance not to be misunderstood or misinterpreted for defeatism. The victory of the protagonists in these three texts and the subsequent annihilation of the subversive forces is a vindication of the Indian philosophical value system. The concepts of *Karma, Mayic* philosophy, quietism of acceptance leading to self illumination, the conflict between good and evil and the journey of an individual into the self are valorized in these
texts. The *Varna Ashrama Dharmas* are intricately interwoven in the texts of Mr. Sampath and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *The World of Nagaraj*.

Narayan expounds and believes in the cyclic vision of life. Krishnan in *The English Teacher*, Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* project the doctrines of *Karma, Punarjanma* and *Sansara*. These doctrines are Indian philosophical attempts to probe into the primordial riddle of the origin of the sufferings of an individual in the *Sansara*. Indian philosophy upholds the belief in the cyclic vision of the world, the individual and the self. The chain of events in the life of Krishnan, Margayya and Jagan consistently depicts a cyclic order which is the expression of an almost hermetic philosophical system, a classical exposition of Hindu equilibrium that survives the external shocks in a patient and peaceful manner. Narayan’s novels delineate the gradual stages of evolution in the protagonists from the stage of *Brahmacharya Ashrama* to the stage of *Grihastha Ashrama* as well as *Vanaprastha Ashrama* to the finale of liberation, self realization, *Moksha* in the modern context.

The final aim of life according to all the Indian philosophical systems is to release the ultimate bliss, the *Moksha*. In this context, Narayan imparts a new direction to the concept of *Moksha*. *Moksha* in the Indian philosophical context is self-centered. Krishnan’s systematized acceptance of a job as a teacher in a kindergarten school is an attempt to redefine the concept of *Moksha* in the contemporary social context. Similarly, Jagan, the vendor of sweets, a man of worldly affairs renounces the world to enter the *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. His new *Janma* completes the full cyclic vision of life.
The overall impact of Gandhian philosophy and thought in terms of literary discourse in India can not be undermined. Gandhi in the contemporary times has become a legend. Behind the chimeric narrative mode of his fiction, Narayan makes a sincere attempt to sensitize the readers with the nuances of Gandhism. Narayan has translated and transcreated in his fiction the multidimensional paradigms of Gandhism in his novels. He posits the need to contextualize Gandhi in the modern times, in much the same way the concepts of *Moksha* or *Vanaprastha* need to be reoriented in the present context.

According to Narayan, Gandhism does not simply correspond to spinning wheel, wearing *Khadi* and eulogizing Gandhian ideology. Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma* in pre-independence era and Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* in post-independence era initially take Gandhism for a ride. Sriram ushers into the Gandhian camp for ulterior motives, Jagan follows the Gandhian way of life to the minutest details without grasping the true essence of Gandhism. Through Sriram and Jagan Narayan exposes the pseudo Gandhians. However, Jagan and Sriram gradually undergo transformation from the class of pseudo-Gandhians in their search for truth and self-realization.

Moreover, Narayan projects Gandhi’s anti-imperialistic stance in his critique of the Western educational system in *The English Teacher*. Similarly, the inherent discourses on colonization and de-colonization found in *The Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The English Teacher* posit the need to reorient the history of colonized nations with a view to expose the imperialistic biases and their subversive strategies.
A number of Narayan’s novels that are not centralized on the Gandhian theme also adhere to the Gandhian ideology. In *A Tiger for Malgudi* and in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, the victory of good and the annihilation of evil could be treated as a vindication of Gandhian ideology and principles.

The thematic concerns in Narayan’s fiction extensively explore the *Karma* philosophy of self-realization or self-enlightenment which is considered to be the ultimate goal in an individual’s life. The final goal of life for an individual is the attainment of release from the recurrent cycle of birth and death. Narayan’s fiction substantiates the conceptualization of *Moksha* and his unshakable faith in the existence of God. *The Guide* and *A Tiger for Malgudi* manifest the essentials of Indian philosophy. The protagonist in *The Guide* dies a martyr to the cause of Hindu thought. The Vedantic philosophy of Moksha or self and self-realization, the concepts of *Maya* or illusion, *Avidya* or ignorance and the ideal of *Nishkama Karma* or action without attachment, the four ideals of *Purushartha* and other Hindu concepts such as ascetic purification, *Yoga*, renunciation, cyclic progression of life and death – all these philosophical ideals have been artistically inseminated in these novels.

*A Tiger of Malgudi* can be regarded as a practical document of the *Bhagwad Gita*. The novel offers the most enlightening overt discourse on the four ideals of *Kama, Artha, Dharma* and *Moksha*, the tradition of *Guru-Shishya*, the three *Gunas* and the objectives of *Ashrama Dharma*, the concept of *Sansara*, renunciation and detachment. The power of *Yoga* and the philosophical discourses on the *Bhagwad Gita* through the autobiography of a tiger are also expressed in the novel.
The quintessential lesson of renunciation leading to final liberation or *Moksha* is valorized in Narayanian fiction. The protagonists in *Mr. Sampath*, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The World of Nagaraj* are philosophers in their own right. Narayan’s projects these ordinary people engaged in ordinary pursuits of life who have no idea about *Moksha* but their philosophical vision surely imparts to them a purpose and meaning in life. Narayan has improvised and re-modified the concept of *Moksha* in *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The Financial Expert* and *The English Teacher*. Jagan, Margayya and Krishnan attain *Moksha* in their own ways in terms of detachment from worldly affairs. They achieve a stage in the end where they remain unmoved and indifferent to all adverse conditions. Raju in *The Guide* and the tiger Raja in *A Tiger for Malgudi* acquire the maturity of saints which could be described as *Satvik* life, a deeply religious and spiritual life corresponding to the Indian philosophical paradigms of renunciation and *Moksha*.

Thus, Narayan’s novels can be studied as a critique of Indian philosophy and its inter-related discipline of *Karma* theory. Narayan’s admission that there is a nucleus of absolute truth in all his novels substantiates his faith in the contents of Indian philosophy. Narayanian religion is cemented in the culture and philosophy of India and it is fully in conformity with the essentials of Hinduism. The tension between the one and many, a perennial theme of Hinduism operates quietly throughout Narayan’s fiction, the author’s optimistic view of life traces the will of God in all matters, actions and ends, is a marked feature of Hindu religion.

The ethical and moral code in Narayanian fiction reiterates the basic trends of Hindu ethics which is founded on a threefold system of spiritual life
encompassing the stages of social, moral and transcendental. Majority of Narayanian characters adhere to the Varna Ashrama Dharma, Sadharana Dharma and Vishesha Dharma as per the Hindu ethical code specified by Manu and Prasaspada. His fictional texts critique the problematizing issues or facets of Indian philosophy, religion and ethics, the four ideals of Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha and the positionality of an individual in an Ashrama.

Narayan is, thus, deeply entrenched in the Indian philosophical system which is rendered clearer once one witnesses the originality of the texts, the motives of characters, the ideals of the protagonists or the reactions of the Malgudians in a particular situation or a context. An analysis of his novels unleashes the spontaneous flow of philosophy of Karma. His novels offer us an insight into the wisdom and knowledge of the epics, the Puranas and the Upanishads.
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