CHAPTER-2

THE MALGUDI MILIEU

From Swami and Friends to A Tiger for Malgudi is a march along a historical time. With each of the novel 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, and even a circus, 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 traditional phases of Malgudi’s history contribute to the comic 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 Bhabani Bhattacharya write with the
avowed purpose of bringing about social change, and “Perhaps one of the drawbacks of Mulk Raj Anand’s Novels arises the missionary zeal with which he pleads in them for the amelioration of the lot of the havenots.” 1 Narayan’s Malgudi, as H. M. Williams rightly observes, is “political conflicts and economic depression of Anand’s India.” 2 Against the background of a changing Indian’s weakness 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 experience the swift changes, the innumerable contradictions that make a mark on the orthodox Indian society with its age-old culture, believes 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”. 3 Because of the apparent usurpation of the traditional values and the life style y 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 hysteries'. Sarayu still goes on flowing.

Malgudi in the 1930s is a small town across the river Sarayu with an officer's 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 Mempi 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 the gods, believes in the demons and ghosts that figure in any grandmother's story. On the other hand, he as much 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 crossroads of Indian culture. The old granny, the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher, and the Headmaster with his thin long cane, “5 river Sarayu and Nallappa’s mango grove—all these constitute an intimate Indian childhood. Getting 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 mood 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 Mudall Street, Anderson Lane and Ellamman street recur in each novel with all their particularities, Gaffur, 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 Malgudi ans, provides everything under the sun-tea, bamboos, medicinal herbs, teak wood for furniture, a glass house for tourists, best rose-wood plank to paint signboards.

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 right casts system, their innumerable religious rituals are finely counterpoised against the new generation represented by Mali, Balu, Dr. Pal and others. Malgudi
emerges as a comic amalgamation or 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 solitarily 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 sizeable and static section of Indian society.8

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 H. 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”. Even under colonial subjugation, the Malgudi or 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 1930s Malgudi has not registered these drastic changes and except the peculiarities of the teachers, the funds 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 night meal, with his head on his granny’s lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan 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 Tate. This mutual reciprocity between two generation marks an unadulterated Malgudi existence. But with the growth of years, there develops, gradually, a gulf between these 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 attain 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 show, wells and Galsworthy, Brown’s humor 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 the ears. Susila, Susila, Susila, Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was divine, Susila, Susila-----Malathi, not a spot beside Sudila.(p.162)

This may suggest Natayan’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 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 or cocoanut 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 on 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 older people accept it since “He on the Thirupathi Hills alone knows what is best for us “. (p.86) The anxiety of Chandran’s mother 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 in
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 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, looked 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 state of crowd. He closed his eyes. This was taken by the others for
meditation. (p.109)
Malgudi stands for the Real. Any deviation from its 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 continue for long. Chandran's infatuation for Malathi, his frustrate escape into sanyasihood are all illusions, momentary fit 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 Veera swami's 'Resurrection Brigade' is heard no more. Malgudi is no place for revolution. The notions of revolution should 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 in this novel is envisaged
in terms of the gave 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 boisterous Malgudi life in all other novels, are conspicuously absent here. No one breaks the moral of 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”. (B.29) As Krishna 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 homecoming, certain rituals are to be performed. The threshold has to be decorated with green mango leaves and the floor and the doorway with white floral designs, vermillion 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 nor by any doctor, but by a Swami Ji. The Swami Ji “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 Swami Ji’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 Sadhu and Sanyasi 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 hastened

Sanyasi Ashram. (p.192)

Krishnan personally experience 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”. (p.185)
possible 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 ‘Janma’.

The idea of ‘The Age of Reason’10 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 Narayan’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, labeling, 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 building a well-equipped theatre-----palace 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. "11

The Englandia Insurance Company, which was not transacting even ten rupees ' worth of policies a year, now boasts of 'ten lakes of business. "(p.15) Even women, forever confined to the family kin 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 or 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 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 suffering or
Savitri which envelope the entire novel. Savitri’s rejection or her home
is a pathetic and defeatist 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:
“Sumati and Kamala must study up to the B.A. and not depend for their
salvation on marriage”. (p.80) In a novel of the 70s, 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 the effects of the rapid social changes of Malgudi:

... Malgudi 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 Malgudi district'. (p.70) From the quiet small town of Swami and Friends or of the childhood years of Raja in The Guide Malgudi swiftly changes into a commercial centre. "The Market Road was the lifeline of Malgudi". (p.5)---a fact which clearly illustrates its commercial importance. This spurt in commercial transactions disturbs the serenity of Malgudi 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. Labor gangs have come from other districts and studio. Labor gangs have come from other districts and have occupied the open spaces. The Englandia Banking corporation is there with its European manager who is no-thing but a 'compound of bead 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 Kama', the sophisticated technician De Melly from Hollywood, the vision of Ravi and various such episodes show that Malgudi has reconciled itself 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 exorcism fails, then there is the temple at Sailam 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 remain. 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 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 rejection the illusions of a film career and would not hesitate to shave off her head, fling her jewellery and wear a white saree, The woman 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 or all that has happened. The frenzy and madness that heighten the human comedy in Mr. Sampath ate, of course, a part of the essential spirit of Malgudi”.
(p.209).

Malgudi experiences fast changes. Its simple economy is progressively replaced by a complex economy with banks and business concern. 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 tragicomic 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 hands a picture of goddess Saraswati in his study room. His son he hands a picture of goddess Saraswati in his study room. His publication of the book ‘Bed life’ or ‘Domestic Harmony’ to which his wife take 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 of these forces not only he, but his entire family are led along a course of self-destruction. Ironically the book ‘Domestic Harmony’ which is the first step towards financial success brings only domestic disharmony to Margayya. Balu’s absconding to Madras is a symbolic journey to the western civilization. There he learns womanizing and drinking. Margayya does not approve of such 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’s 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 cup boards, 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 saree 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 of 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 shanty, and Raju's association with the actress shanty, 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 Margayya's palace of cards, built on perversion is razed to the ground and ambitions and hysterics have been humbled, the original. Inevitable life of Malgudi immediately returns. Margayya'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 Margayya 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-believe 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 'Janma'.
The strong Indian tradition with its religious moorings has been brilliantly analyzed by John B. Alphonso Karkala in his essay ‘symbolism in The Financial Expert.’ 13 symbols such as Fire, Milk, Lotus, the Banyan tree, the two contrasting symbols in Laxmi and Saraswati with their respecting devotees in Margayya 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 has 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 beginning less, 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 fervor 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 Gandhi an or terrorist political action-betrays un sureness 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 Raja 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 Sri Ram’s involvement in politics that even helps him to find consummation in his Love.

Gandhi 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 Sri Ram’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.”16 Yet, notwithstanding these grumblings, the entire Malgudi is ready to receive Gandhi. Malgudi has positively woken 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-Bharati romance cannot function in the normal course of events, because of the orthodox basiers of Malgudi and partly because the 'ideals' dominate the character of Bharati, as in the case of Daisy in The Painter of Signs. 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 Gandhi an non-Violence and terrorist politics Narayan suddenly introduces a comic interlude that at once provides us with a slice of typical Malgudi existence. When, 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 into the town.
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 frailities 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 Railway, Albert Mission college, Anand Bhavan Hotel, Malgudi photo Bureau have all come up. Malgudi has suddenly shot into fame in entire India as a tourist spot a which a 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 kin 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, that 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 east 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 of illusory and the other as real, Narayan recognizes the strength and reality of each. 17

Raju, rared in the ancient Indian tradition is rared by the glamour of the new way of living. His degeneration accompanies his defiance of Malgudi’s time-honored social codes. The first bad words that Raju learns during his boyhood are from the people who work on the railway tracks. Railway, 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”? 18 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 hoary 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. Narasimhaish 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.19
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 of the ancient Indian values. V.Y. Kantar 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. 20

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 of the brink of their destruction.
The Maneater 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 Satyanarayana Puja is religiously observed. There is kumar, the elephant who comes out of the hills of its own accord to stay in a temple; there is the monosyllabic poet with his epic 'Radhakalyana' dealing with the divine love story of Krishna and Radha. A temple festival dancers dance on this entire community takes part. The temple dancers dance on this occasion. To add to this familiar picture, there is Nataraj's wife, the symbol or 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 Gajendra, 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 and other harmless political and social topics. The municipality the same streets, the municipal chair-who always’ were(even in his sleep, so people said) a white Gandhi cap as an unwavering member of the congress party’(p.184) appear again in this docile Malgudi that is to wake up to the tantrums of a commercial civilization 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 there are in our modern, associated as there are in our minds with post-renaissance Europe. Vasu thus becomes a sort of Marlovian overreaches thrust upon the cramped, the very ordinary stage of quotidian Malgudi.22

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 that every one can keep a gradual in the Puja and his guarantee “that it won’t fly off”(p.64) is Rightly, therefore, Natraj thinks, “His presence defiled my precincts”(p.65) and Sastri concludes “He shows a;; 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 rakshasa that were even 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, who made all powerful by the boon of the God, ultimately dies of his own immense strength.

Quires in violation of the orthodox Hindu sensibility, Vasu brings harlots and dead animals to Natraj’s house. Quite in violation of the social codes, Vasu’s egoism and tire 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 preserve that has threatened the peace loving orthodox community of Malgudi meets his ordained end. But daring this brief period of Malgudi’s life Narayan has carved but a brilliant human comedy out of the fear and faith of an innocent 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 Nest comes with all its bewitching ideas and eccentricities. Hero in 1937 Mahatma Gandhi addressed the people or Malgudi on the sands of Sarayu. People visit the temple or Santana Krishna on Badri Hill to remove barrenness in women. Religious ceremonies are observed at the time of Mali’s birth:

As if in fulfillment or the cocoanut seller’s prophecy, Mail 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 would clean him properly and an equivalent weight in gold, silver and corn Badri Hill. According to the solemn vow made daring their visitie.24
Into such an auspicious setting, new ideas of the west enter, providing a job to the orthodox sensibility of the Malgudi. Mali's journey to America is a symbolic representation of the East-west encounter, which is the first in the new generation. Malgudi's orthodox social codes are violated when Mali takes to beef, returns with a half Korean-half American wife. Jagon's familiar world of marriage and morals are in shambles. He is estranged from his sister who con not reconcile herself to a 'beef-eating Christian girl' (p.147) as a daughter-in-law. Jagon 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 Jagon. Jagon's tragedy starts the very moment he abandons his way of thinking and starts getting 'completely identified with Mali's Fantasies'.(p.39) Here Jagon loses the moorings of his own generating an partakes as much as Mali does of the frenzy of the new civilization.

Mali's story-writing much 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 even 'watch a goddess come out of stone'. (p. 191).
In both *The Financial Export* and *The Vendor of Sweets* there is a complete breakdown of communication between two generations, represented by the conflict between two generations, represented by the conflict between the father and the sun. In this tragic-comic clash of generations, Jagon, the ‘ironic Gandhi an 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 fantasies of Mali. He realizes, “A sixty one is reborn and enters a new Janma”, (p.182) and accordingly he renounces the world, reminding us of the concept of ‘Banaprastha’ prescribed by our scriptures. Jagon’s endorsement of Mali’s prison sentence, “A does or prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now” (pp.191-92), echoes Rosic’s idea of ‘Karma’ and Malu must suffer for his ‘Karma’. In the modern context or Malgudi, the old values still function. Within context of Malgudi has taken definite strides on its way to modernity “Malgudi was changing in 1972. It was the base for a hydroelectric project somewhere on the Mempi Hills, and jeeps and lorries passed through the market road all day”, (p12) 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 toddlers dust covered, ragged -
------- a visible development in five years” (p.30) For Raman, Malgudi
suddenly takes up the dark significance of any advanced city 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 70s 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 ort of the doll’s house and stands as
a contrast 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 tragic-comic personification of
the hysterics of the new civilization.
Unable to reconcile to these mad changes, Raman’s aunt leaves for Banaras, 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—his 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 Maneater of Malgudi, Mr. Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets. But in The Painter of Signs they are viewed with marked approval.25

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 letter. 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 seen not to have lost its old fervor 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 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.158) is a mockery of the sacred institutions of marriage. And quite in a similar way, Daisy's condition that "on any say you question why or how, I'll leave you" (p.159) is a parody of the ancient theme of 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 auspicious or 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 Gaffur's tire in which Daisy is moving. Is a movement from sentimental Indian self to a modern gesture of existential defiance of the universe.26 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.183)

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 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 presence 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 clam 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." 27 In this twilight world of Malgudi, old values still persist old customs are still observed in all their religious details. In the outskirts or 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 feeless to the villages where the inhabitants are innocent and unsophisticated in most matter excepting their factions and fights.” 28 Despite all the dismissed. The eccentric hermit surprisingly speak all the truth about Daisy’s past. The innocent beliefs of Velan and other villagers of Mangal can transform a sinner into a saint. The man of the world in A Tiger for Malgudi can renounce everything in the manner of Siddhartha and set his home with a tiger as his spiritual disciple in the foot of Mempi range. 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 autobiographical 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 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 wll.29

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 the comedy of conflict between the old and the New, the middles class hero losses the illusory to gain the real. Raju, Balu, Mali, all middle class youths, in their attempts to gain independènce (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' 30 are stuff for humor in Narayan's novels.

Changes have been sympathetically viewed in all these novels.
Compared to Swami and Friends. The Malgudi of The Painter of Signs
or A Tiger for Malgudi, 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; Gandhi Ji spoke to the people of Malgudi; Krishnan
buried his wife; and Raman now paints his signboards. The Taluk
office gone 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 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. 31


8. Ibid., p.45.


23. Ibid., p.55.


26. Ibid.


