Second Chapter

Narayan and His World
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One often wonders what could be the right point of reference to start a discussion about R.K.Narayan who, it appears, is meticulously barred from any high academic debates. There are a good measure of difficulties in making a theoretical start about R.K.Narayan and his works. This apparently strong and lopsided view does not have anything to do with the widely-accepted contention that Narayan is too simple a writer to deserve any serious theorisation. Although this reductive understanding of Narayan’s fiction may partly explain the absence of any substantial body of theoretical work on him, he has proved an elusive writer in terms of the comprehensibility of the world his fiction produces and reproduces. Pressed to look for any engaging critical work on Narayan, the present researcher was frequently frustrated by the enigmatic silence the academia seems to maintain. The absence of a sustained study may also be construed as an attempt at canonizing his writing by keeping it safely out of the process of academic depreciation.

One of the most strikingly formidable points about Narayan is the process of situating him, not temporally, but politically and culturally. The alleged evasiveness of his fiction thwarts any attempts at ideologically locating him. More symptomatically, his fiction is notoriously resistant to
any form of problematisation. He and his fiction have been conceptually situated and theoretically problematised according to the patterns which are remarkably uniform in their approach. One of such considered views unimaginatively sees R.K.Narayan’s choice to write in English as radically political and ideologically oppositional to the colonial establishment. Here is a citation from Gita Rajan, who locates the origin of his writing in anti-colonial desire:

“....... his writing in English, albeit Indian English, is a political move that places him in opposition to the British writers writing in English. Even though his works may follow traditional, thematic patterns, he contextualises his narrative incidents differently. Consequently, his narrative signals create definite historical implications.

(P-25)

The thesis shall deal with the question of the radical value of Narayan’s mode of contextualising in the following chapters. Yet, it must be said that merely situating the traditional narratives in new settings does not have much potential to be culturally subversive. The stand expressed by the above cited argument, however, is typically representative of the views of the critics who have chosen to valorise Narayan’s decision to write in a language that was an integral part of the extended apparatus employed to consolidate the colonial rule. There is a sense in which this
move by Narayan could be seen as radical: he chose to write in English which was seen by the majority of the Indians as being incapacitatingly non-Indian. The same view held by the Indian readership in general continues to hound Indian-English writers though they seem to have gained more confidence and have cultivated a stronger illusion of wider representability regarding their embeddeness in the culture and ethos of the nation. There is also a constant perpetuation of the long-sustained myth that whatever is produced within the geographic boundaries of the nation is bound to be incontrovertibly Indian. This kind of a cultural aberration is a result of the fact that indicators used to categorise Indian literatures in terms of their conformity to the national metanarratives are indiscreetly Eurocentric. Indian writing in English has, as against the previously prevailing tendency, come to be privileged as representing an authentic Indian culture, though the use of these terms in singular is in itself extremely problematic.

Allied closely to this issue is the question of the very existence of a single national culture and literature that can be termed as distinctly Indian. And, the possibility of imposing a homogenised cultural and literary narrative to encompass the literatures of the entire nation is what sustains the idea of producing the literatures of the nation in one single set of cultural idioms and paradigms. Two questions the thesis intends to
address itself to at this point are: first, is there a specific point at which Indian writing in English can be inserted into the grid of Indian literatures; second, where does Narayan latch onto to Indian writing in English and where does his writing fit in with the rest of Indian writing in non-English. The formulation of these two questions is premised on a few simple, apparently reductive and one-dimensional assumptions. The most important of them is that there is something given and innate about all literatures, and more so about a body of literatures bundled together and branded as national. The second assumption is that it is possible to conceive of a body of literature that is intrinsically Indian, and, as such, there are literatures produced within the imagined frontiers of India that fall short of meeting the standards required to attain to elevated status of Indian writing. Third assumption is that there are certain qualities that make a literature singularly Indian. Simply as they appear, these assumptions demand a greater theoretical engagement.

Any theorisation of Indian national literatures runs the risk of totalising the experiences of the ruling order conditioned by the colonial and neo-colonial processes of canon formation. As it is theorised today, Indian English literature draws its legitimacy from its exclusionary strategies of overdetermination. The process of arbitrarily and teleologically fixing the boundaries and subjective periodisation often
calculatedly undermines the quintessential nature of a national literature. Talking about the difficulties of defining Indian literature Aijaz Ahmad argues:

A literature exists as a theoretical object to the extent that its production can be examined in relation to their objective determinations by the development of the culture as a whole, so that periodization comes to rest on shifts more fundamental than mere breaks in chronology and is able to account for the dominance of the major generic forms, their uneven development in terms of period and region, as well as the material conditions for the subordination of other generic forms in the course of historical development. The possibility of that kind of objective determination in the process of the material development of a culture can certainly exist across languages and state boundaries. Culture and literature, in other words, are not necessarily coterminous with linguistic formation and state boundary, especially in historical epochs preceding the emergence of the bourgeois nation-state and, in countries like India, even after the emergence of such a state, the rise of print capitalism is a variable but by no means an invariable determinant. (244)

As Ahmad points out later in the same work, the problem of defining Indian literature does not spring as much from the variegated nature of the literature itself as does from the mode of narrativizing the
country’s history. The most important formative force of this construction of Indian literary history has been a self-legitimising Bramhinical class privileging the “high textuality”. The texts that were chosen to be privileged over the others had the commonality of having been in conformity with the upper caste value systems. The resultant procedure of canonization of literary texts drew on a highly self-centric idealism that was unavoidably transcendental, ignorant and supercilious of material realities. Ahmad further states why Indian literature as a whole is so difficult to give a firm empirical and theoretical shape to:

There are major languages and literatures for which no comprehensive history is really available. The tradition of circulating texts through the various linguistic communities of Indian by means of mutual translations, without the mediation of English, is so weakly developed that even where such historical research does exist, it is rarely accessible to readers outside the particular linguistic community. The tradition of any sustained effort to study the literatures of the various languages in mutual relation, as overlapping realities constituting a unified configuration, is even weaker, so that we have, as a rule, a peculiar disjunction between an assertion that there is an ‘Indian’ literature, and the actual production of a knowledge which refers essentially to discrete archives of individual languages, with principles of
aggregation either absent or weakly developed. This replicates in some ways those other conceptual frameworks which produce the category of a ‘European Literature’ both as a civilizational unity and as a comparatism of discrete national literatures. (246)

The kind of cultural, intellectual and scholarly conditions under which a writer like Narayan started writing in English have changed, radically relocating the locus of intellectual investment in the English language. The India of 1940s was a country that justifiably harboured a reasonably healthy dose of scepticism towards the agenda of the introduction of English in a phased manner into various spheres of its life. It was during this decade that many Indians, having experimented with the idea of writing in English, chose, unlike Narayan, to write in their respective regional languages. It is surprising and even puzzling to note that those who chose to write in English and those who chose to write in Indian languages both are argued to have done so as an uncompromising political act. However, it may be tentatively suggested that those who opted to write in English did so in protest against the British rule whereas the choice to write in Indian languages was seen as subversive to the traditional power structures of Indian society. Even though it is possible to name a few writers who defied these broad generalisations, there is to be found emerging a new pattern that constantly reaffirms two diametrically
opposite sets of preoccupations and priorities that govern Indian English writing and writing in Indian languages. Growing importance of the English language enhanced by the wide social acceptance has re-contoured the space occupied by English vis-a-vis other Indian languages. And, this has given rise to a situation where English is seen, as Ahmad states, “the language in which the knowledge of ‘Indian’ literature is produced”. (P-245)

The process of grading the ancient as well as the modern texts along the lines of their languages, caste associations of their origin, content and their intended readership has always been at work in Indian subcontinent and continues to be operative in producing arbitrary modes of canonizing cultural texts. The consolidation of a body of high texts resulted in the emergence of excluded categories of literary works that have been forced to occupy a secondary status for their ‘pagan’ origins and orientations. There exists an ample measure of evidence to the effect that the process of standardization of Indian literature has been predicated on a set of presumptions with reductive cultural equations. Sanskrit has always been considered the sole language in which it is assumed possible to produce enduring literary texts. The mastery of Sanskrit has been deemed indispensable for acquiring any form of knowledge, and, conversely, any knowledge gained through the medium of any other non-Sanskrit Indian
language is written off as trash and ephemeral. Thus, binary of ‘divine’ language and ‘quotidian’ languages has long been constructed, constantly consolidated and religiously conserved. The canonization of Bramhinical and Sanskritic texts has driven a range of textual traditions out of margins, leading to the creation of a homogenised, unified and non-pluralist aesthetics.

Shedding light on this kind of sweeping generalizations Sheldon Pollack has the following to say:

_Sanskrit and India have long been treated as synonyms; works called “Indian theatre” and “Indian literature” can unproblematically concern themselves with Sanskrit theatre and Sanskrit literature alone. The India that constitutes the conceptual framework of such works, moreover, presents itself as a natural kind, directly given and knowable. At the same time, the prolific genre of regional study (“Bengal’s contribution to Sanskrit literature” and the like) never asks what the regionalization of Sanskrit might signify. History itself is an equally straightforward matter: pure chronological sequence without content, as if time merely passed and nothing passed with it. The dominant literary method is everywhere subjective evaluation, and its standards of taste appear as inerrant as they are unself-conscious._ (40)
And, English, over the last few decades, has come to be seen as the natural and organic extension of Sanskrit and by itself plays an instrumental role in shaping the elitist ethos of the country. The basic long-standing debates and discourses about Indian literature are produced in the English language, resulting from a heavy cultural, intellectual and ideological outlay in it, which has bolstered the status of Indian-English writing. The comparisons the dissertation intends to make at this point may appear theoretically unsound and unsustainable, and one may even succeed in discerning a certain degree of prejudice governing this widely-drawn parallel. Yet, it strikes even a cursory observer that there is something markedly similar between the kind of cultural and intellectual conditions under which Sanskrit and English texts have been produced.

There are two very important common features which bind these two literatures and their producers together on a grand epistemological and ontological plane. Writers of both Sanskrit (though some of the earlier ones were mere oral texts) and Indian-English writers have always made and continue to make a conscious choice—which is often seen as brazenly elitist and snobbish-to turn away from the widely-used Indian languages. The second and more important similarity comes from the most formidable difficulty in defining the spatial imagination at work in the production of these two literatures that are defiant in their cultural non-
inclusiveness. Even when this kind of parallelism runs the risk of being misconstrued as wild and unfounded the caste, class and cultural origins of Indian-English writing reveal certain disturbing dynamics operative in deciding its agenda. There is a range of subtle shared features that make it possible to forge an ontological and ideological association between Sanskrit and Indian-English literary cultures. This thesis tries to deal with the cultural, religious and intellectual hegemony of the groups that produced Sanskrit and continue to produce English textualities in Indian subcontinent. Sheldon Pollack while tracing the reasons for the selection of Sanskrit as the language of creative expression argues as follows:

In the primeval moment of Sanskrit literary culture, the Valmiki Ramayana is recited before the hero of the tale, and in this moment much that characterizes the entire history of the culture is encapsulated. The location of the performance is the royal court, whose fortunes were by and large to be the fortunes of kavya. Where the court collapsed, as in thirteenth-century Kashmir, an entire creative literary tradition, however great, could collapse with it; when its presence crowded kavya too closely, as in Vijayanagara, the very life breath could be taken from the poetry. The language of the Ramayana was no quotidian idiom of any historical court, but rather a language of the restricted domain of cosmopolitan culture. It was chosen for this text from among other languages because of its peculiar aesthetic and cultural – and not religious – associations,
not least its cosmopolitanism, precisely commensurate at the level of the political with the imaginative projection of power in Rama’s heroic progress across the macrospace of the subcontinent and in the new order he creates. When this order of cosmopolitan power gave way in the early centuries of the second millennium to a range of new, vernacular polities, Sanskrit literary culture began to give way too. (120-121)

Although Pollock takes a charitable stand by stating the choice was not determined by any religious factors, it has always been true that it is the religious hegemony of the segment of the Indian society that used Sanskrit that made it right choice for all forms of secular and metaphysical transactions. It is more than a historical and cultural irony that English has come to occupy this cultural, intellectual and literary space created by the grand dramatic exit of Sanskrit.

Colonial experiences are hard to do away with. Indian writing, like all colonial and postcolonial literatures, finds itself fixated on the reconfiguring political landscapes that preceded and followed the event of decolonization. Indian literary communities are divided on a number of issues about orienting themselves in relation to the processes of colonization and decolonization. Post-independent Indian textualities are, however, in principle antithetical to political and cultural legacies of colonial experiences, and a body of Indian writing does not find it appropriate to be summarily dismissive of the European influence. The
complex disposition of Indian writing to colonialism aside, it may be pretty safely argued that the political consciousness and the unconscious that inform Indian writing is unmistakably postcolonial in the sense that an awareness of having been ruled by and liberated from an alien power foregrounds it.

Indian writing in English nevertheless does not find itself in possession of an unwieldy and ambivalent bequeath. Very often it may be spotted struggling to transcend its trappings a spatio-temporally bound world. The event of Indian independence exists only as a moment in chronological time, ahistorical in its significance. This meticulously-contrived detachment is much more subtly nuanced and calculative than the dismissive cynicism that marks some of the Indian writings in native languages to effect that independence resulted in a mere change of colour of the skin of the rulers.

The amorphously defined space occupied by Indian writing in English is likely to have been determined its explicit and latent affinities with the introduction and development of English studies in India. English literature proper, as it has been amply demonstrated by many scholars including Gauri Vishwanathan, was in league and at connivance with the forces of imperialism. No other ideological apparatus was more decisive in disseminating and reinforcing the structures of colonial rule than English literature per se. As Leela Ghandi points out the tandem in which both of
them worked has been indisputably and abundantly clear by recent studies:

Recent studies of imperial textuality are also mindful of an alleged complicity between nineteenth-century colonial ideology and the emergence of English literature as an academic discipline in the colonies. These accounts argue that the ‘English text’ effectively replaced the Bible— and thereby, the evangelical ambitions of Christian missionaries— to become the most influential medium for the colonial civilising mission. As evidence for the argument, critics frequently cite Macaulay’s infamous minute of 1835, which defended the introduction of ‘English Education’ in colonial India on the grounds that ‘single shelf of a good European Library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia’. (140)

The British, feeling compelled to assume a moral high-ground over the colonized, chose their literature as a powerful instrument to propagate and strengthen the myth of the superiority of the English culture. The whole project of inserting the English studies into the native pedagogies was carefully meant to camouflage the severity and ruthlessness with which the Empire pursued its self-serving ends. The introduction of the English language in the colonies became consolidated into a rigorous process of empire-building. The irreversible percolation and absorption of the ‘message’ of English studies by the native communities ensured the
The painful experience of learning to use English bereft of its colonial context and grossly exploitative enterprise is a part of the process of living and writing in a former colony and to continue to feel the agony of simultaneously being forced to use and to forego it frequently for the same reasons. Even though it is naive and overreductive to consider the choice of English as a medium of creative expression in former colonies as an ethical one, it is undeniable that the British colonial ventures and the English are inseparably and even fatally bound up with each other. Nugugi wa Thiong’o was perhaps the first writer to raise the issue of the English language and studies as intrinsically colonial, divisive and
bourgeoisie. He writes in his essay ‘The Language of African Literature’ why has always felt morally bound to write in Gikiyu, his mother tongue:

We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our language what Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.

But writing in our languages per se---although a necessary first step in the correct direction---will not itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our people’s anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control; the content of the need for unity among the workers and peasants of all nationalities in their struggle to control the wealth they produce and to free it from internal and external parasites. (452)

Indian writing in English is a very strange category. It has always resisted any kind of definitive definition. Its formation over a century has been subject of a good measure of debates that centre on issues ranging from nationalism to ‘quintessential Indianness’. Complexity associated
with Indian-English writing springs from the kind of attitude the nation has towards the language in which it is produced. The problem becomes compounded as a result of the employment of an alien language to produce a literature of the nation that has been a victim of colonialism. This apart, the fact that English and Indian languages are associated with two different diametrically opposed classes explains a good deal about an air of mistrust, cynicism and contempt that surrounds Indian-English writing. As the scholar Dharwadker seems to believe English writers, besides being seen as the privileged, have been put to disadvantage because of the class that comes inalienably attached with their choice of as the medium of creative expression. This is what he has to say about English writing:

*The second consequence (of the institutionalization of English studies in colonial India) was that Indian writing in English, like acculturation to the West more broadly, came to be strongly associated with writers and readers of middle- and dominant class backgrounds, so that even in the post-Independence period, Indian-English literature has been almost exclusively associated with privilege and power. This has meant that since about 1850, Indian-English authors as well as readers have had to struggle with, for, and against their peculiar class interests to
a much more visible extent than their counterparts in the indigenous Indian languages. (237)

The fact that writing in English has originated from a limited number of urban locations of India indicates the direction in which such a literature is bound to be headed. These urban centres, which cannot be conclusively said to be metropolitan, themselves are unrepresentative of larger Indian cultural and literary realities, and very often these locations are said to exist as culturally insulted entities, being stubbornly impervious to pluralist lifestyles and ethos of Indian people. These urban centres are even accused to have failed to establish a line of communication with traditional Indian modes of self-representation. As Darwadker states this aspect of Indian–English writing sets its apart from other Indian literatures:

On this map, (where English studies became swiftly institutionalized) the regions comprising many of the princely states have remained much less Anglicized than those comprising a few highly modernized native states, and the latter, in turn, have remained less Anglicized than the three Presidencies and the urban centres of British India. As a result, most notable Indian writers in English have emerged from a relatively small set of cities and towns that became prominent in the nineteenth-century political economy of language and class: Bombay,
Baroda, Delhi, Lahore, Srinagar, Mussoorie, Lucknow, Allahabad, Patna, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Cuttack, Hyderabad, Madras, Trivandrum, Bangalore, and Mysore. The locations of Indian-English culture in the past two centuries therefore have been geographically and socially more exclusive than the locations of Indian-language literary cultures. (237)

Thus, the roots of Indian-English writing are tortuously to the point of inscrutability, and as such, are considered to be notoriously non-Indian. The cardinal line of thinking censorious Indian-English writing revolves round the pivot of the prominence this particular mode of literature has undeservedly gained. The subscribers to this view point out the discrepancy that exists between the representational credentials of Indian-English writing and the deployment of English language and use-value India. Many writers and critics, whose medium of cultural expression is predictably English, including Salman Rushdie, have very often expressed their views which are not outstandingly unlike that of Macaulay’s. Some of them seem to believe that English can deliver on the issues the vernaculars have failed and view their own choice to write in English as a conscious one prompted by its inherent superiority. This kind of self-idealization and self-centring derives from the carefully-conserved working division between English and vernaculars. We have made a reference to the kind of inevitable situations in India which slap the
English writers with no option but to write in English. This has never been the case for many such writers whose writing often betrays their strong belief that act of writing in English buys passports to a bigger and a better world. The primacy accorded to Indian-English writing is not so much an outcome of either its content-value or immense representability as it is a derivative from its hyped marketability and fabled image-value.

Indian-English novel has, in line with the genre of novel, from its very beginning, become encrusted into a form of writing that lacks a firm ground to hoist itself on and has always been a bit footloose. It has frequently looked up to the British novel wistfully to be fostered by. The absence of a tenacious lineage is conspicuously present in the Indian-English novel that contains very little play of intertextuality. In a former colony like India the novel is a product of colonial encounters and, as a result, postcolonial by definition. In addition, there are very robust reasons to think why Indian-English writing is seen as being constitutively disloyal to land on which and people amidst whom it is produced. More debatably, this literature is viewed to be supportive of and complicitious with the forces that reproduce the cosmopolitan and elitist ideologies.

It is more interesting to note that most of Indian writers in English chose the novel as the right genre of their creative expression, which in itself---apart from the choice of English as the sole language of expression---speaks volumes for the preferences and proclivities of these writers. The
novel is a proven bourgeoisie genre and has the ideology of its class embedded in it. As an inevitable product of industrial capitalism and colonialism the novel has come to acquire an extremely dubious reputation about its constitutive ideologies and orientations. The consolidation of the genre of novel in the early twentieth-century as the most popular and socially-sanctioned form of Indian literature has to do with the advent and anchoring of modernity in Indian social context. The Indian writers, for the first time in the country’s history, through the genre of the novel, engage in a dialectical dialogue with their contemporary social and cultural realities, of course on a lower scale of intensity. The Indian novelist discovers him/herself confronted with the questions of mimesis and its aesthetic viability. Dharwadker attributes different reasons for the selection of novel by the Indian-English writers and these reasons are apparently valid but can prove deceptively simple on investigation:

The Indian-English writers who entered the domain of print for the first time in the altered and accelerated world of the second quarter of the twentieth century rejected the aestheticism of the previous one hundred years and, with it, the dominance of verse and poetry. The primary innovators of this period – R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and G.V. Desani – found that their interests and energies required the liveliness, immediacy, malleability, and capaciousness of
prose for proper articulation, and they therefore chose the novel, the novella, the short story, the essay, and the personal sketch as their preferred forms. In contrast to the high aesthetic aims of the nineteenth-century poets, their discursive intentions belonged to the low mimetic mode, in which a writer confronts and represents contemporary reality and everyday life, individual experience, shared social phenomena, and the unfolding events of current local and national history. (244)

His argument that Indian English writing, from its beginning, has been divided over the issue of class affiliations does not seem to hold much water given the proven fact that what makes this literature distinct from other Indian literatures is its exclusive monolithic class identity. Related closely to the issue of class exclusivity is the question of authenticity of the Indian realities represented and reproduced in English writing. The degree of faithfulness of Indian writing in English to social and cultural ambience of its production has frequently been called into question. There also appears to be a good measure of anxiety that hounds such writers about their ‘authentic Indianness’, if such a thing exists and is definable. The question very often, contrary to what some critics morally supportive of such writing argue, whether Indian-English writers are fairly cosy and comfortable writing in English, but if the general Indian readership is at home with a literature of their country being produced in
the language of the former colonizer. Meenakshi Mukherjee, talking about
the assumption of intrinsic Indianness in non-English writings of India,
says that it is Indian-English writer who has to prove his or her authentic
Indianness:

.....when it comes to English fiction originating in our country,
not only does the issue of Indianness become a favourite essentialising
obsession in academic writings and the book review circuit, the writers
themselves do not seem unaffected by it, the complicating factor being
that English is not just any language—it was the language of our colonial
rulers and continues even now to be the language of power and privilege.
Our discourse on Indian novels in English tends to get congealed into
fairly rigid and opposed positions. (2607)

There are many easily explicable reasons for the construction of the
binary between Indian-English writing and literatures in Indian languages.
The most-widely and often marshalled line of polemics Indian-English
writers have chosen to defend their selection of English is through
discourses of loss of mother tongues. Yet, there are not any great lengths
this argument can go in dispelling the fears in the minds of general
population and readership about the cultural and intellectual hegemony
exercised by English writers and users. The material and psychological
dividing line that separates English writing from vernacular writing is
much deeper than it appears to be and this chasm is further deepened by the latent nexus between Anglophone segment of Indian society and power structures. The grid of power and knowledge has been involved in contriving the strategies of sifting and consolidating an organic power axis which ensures that only a selected few with a ‘right ideology’ and a proper set of values gain their entry into the ruling order. Consequently, there are material implications involved in belonging to the either side of this divide. Insofar as the two modes of literatures, based on the question of language, are concerned the animosity is violently acute. Citing the reasons for the existence of this rankling point of difference Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare point out:

First, dramatically increasing economic stakes are involved in book circulation. The attention paid to English language writing in international and metropolitan newspapers and literary reviews, in college classrooms, in multinational public companies, and in international prizes like the Man Booker prize means that English literature receives disproportionate financial and cultural attention compared with books in Indian languages that have very limited circulation beyond national borders. Such an emphasis on anglophone writing, it is alleged, ignores the innovations, creative energies, and excellence of bhasha (or vernacular/regional) writing in India. The second
reason for the persistence of these debates is that one by-product of globalization is monotonization. In such a fast-changing and ever more routinized society (in which it appears that, world-wide, nearly every coffee shop will become a Starbucks and every restaurant a McDonalds), retaining a sovereign or separate identity “whether religious or ethnic, as refuge or source of meaning becomes intense.” (P-xii-xiii)

Born into a supposedly pure Brahmin family, Narayan had his deep roots in religion. This was further strengthened by his maternal grandmother who was instrumental in introducing him during his childhood to classical Indian and Tamil cultures, languages and literature, defining the traditional Brahmin values and ways of life. Every evening she made him recite the Tamil alphabet followed by Avvaiyar’s saying as well as a few Sanskrit Slokas praising Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. Narayan’s traditional family and social background thus initiated him in early stage of his life in the knowledge of Hindu philosophy, religion and culture. A traditional South Indian Brahmin, Narayan used to start his day with meditation, a little bit of reading of the Puranas and recitation of Gayatri Mantra. His knowledge of Indian classical literature, philosophy, religion and ethics permeates his writing.

Before we go on to engage with the process of postcolonially revisiting Narayan’s works it is profitable to make a brief reference to what
he has to say about his choice of English as a creative medium of expression. His view about his decision to write in English is closely related with his vision of and attitude to India. Quite surprisingly, there is very little Narayan has said about the kind of dithering and quandary he encountered when it came to making a choice about the language of writing. For him, it appears to us on retrospection, the choice to write was obvious. He could have chosen to write in Tamil, his mother tongue in which he was quite proficient, which he did not do due to some unexplained reasons. Of course a writer does not have to offer explanations for the choices he makes regarding the language, thematic concerns and other technical aspects. Yet, the writer’s silence over such essential issues can often work against an unprejudiced reception of his or her works.

English, for Narayan, is one of the languages in which an Indian can choose to write. It is a transparent medium, not constitutive of one’s self, which self can appropriate to its advantage. English does not, as a language, enjoy any powers of mediation, and it is preposterous to believe it to be capable of structuring and organising one’s experiences and perceptions. This humanist understanding of language does not permit Narayan to be radical in his approach to the issue of English and Indian vernaculars. Even though Narayan claims his choice to write in English was personal one influenced by his wide-reading in and exposure to
English and he made it when people were not very sensitive to the question of language in 1930s, it is difficult see this decision as not having been determined by the reach and the clout it enjoyed.

In *The World of Nagaraj*, the protagonist, deciding to write about the saint Narada chooses English as the right language of expression against Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil; for he believes that it is the language that can help him transcend all barriers. Drawing a parallel between the choice made by Narayan and Nagaraj to write in English, John Thieme says the following:

> The broader implications of this (the view that English transcends caste and class constrains) are, of course, controversial. As the language of the former colonizer and new global superpower, English has traditionally been the language of the elite in India, though increasingly less so as the number of Indians speaking it has grown along with the expansion of the middle classes and the boom in the Indian economy that began around the time *The World of Nagaraj* was published. In Narayan’s case the use of English seems comparatively innocent, though it is clearly a product of his education and upbringing and debates that he had been having with himself ever since his boyhood. The suggestion that using English enables the writer to transcend barriers of ‘caste, creed, nationality or religion’ may well reflect a typically South Indian
preference for it, as opposed to Hindi, as a language to of pan-Indian communication as well as an international lingua franca, but the words put in the mouth of TM (a character in WON) at this point suggest a more general reason for favouring it. English is preferred as a language of ‘freedom’ and in this sense Narayan’s choice of it is markedly at odds with views of his works which suggest he is trying to preserve a fossilised Bramhinical view of experience. (176)

English is the language of the intellect, not of emotion; and in India English should therefore be appropriated. Hence, postcolonial writing uses the language of the colonists but adapts it to the discourse of the colonised. It is performed by two processes: abnegation and appropriation. Abnegation stands for challenging the notion of universality as claimed by the colonists with regard to the language. Appropriation, on the other hand, is the use of the imperial language to express the cultural experience of the colonised. This is a process by which imperial English is made to encounter vernacular languages. Standard English words are used in many new meanings, and, in turn, the English language receives many new words from indigenous languages. Besides, postcolonial literature emerges out of the tension between these two pulls. In one sense all postcolonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between worlds, a gap in which the
simultaneous processes of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice.

Thus, challenging and overhauling the Eurocentric notion of language become an essential part of literary decolonisation. All the aspects of the world of the colonised including the language of instruction and commerce were dominated by the empire. The colonial education of the middle class people then tended to create mental colonisation among them. By the early 20th century, students from the colonies were heavily influenced by the excellence of the English language and literature. This factor seems to account for the syncretic nature of the postcolonial society, which cannot be compartmentalised into either a purely traditional or a purely alien. A postcolonial reading of R. K. Narayan's works, especially essays with regard to his attitude to the English language would likely to reveal that he endeavours to formulate a synthesis between the Indian element and the colonial one.

Narayan is credited with bringing Indian literature in English to the rest of the world, and is regarded as one of India's greatest English language novelists. Narayan broke through with the help of his mentor and friend, Graham Greene, who was instrumental in getting publishers for Narayan’s first four books. Colonialism hurt and damaged those subjected to it, but it
would be inaccurate to portray the process as being a simple matter of subjugation and humiliation; it was far more complex than that. The writer in the colonized country tended to soak up the culture of the colonial power and feel a familiarity and some affection for it, even though the experience of colonialism may have demoralized and destabilized his own colonized culture. This damage, although it may later be seen for what it is, is passed over: in his mind he is a member-in-waiting of a broader community of letters. His aspirations, though, are likely to be dashed; his yearning unfulfilled. Although he may not realize it, the metropolitan culture is largely indifferent to him and his world: the literary circles after which he yearns are distant, impossibly out of reach. Of course, the conquest is feasible, and literary doors may open.

Narayan and Malgudi supplement each other and at times the latter develops and thrives in defiance of its creator. The question always keeps centring on putatively microcosmic India Narayan created in Malgudi, a fictional big village that persistently tries to become a town but constantly fails. Narayan entered Indian literary scene through the construction of this imaginary locale that is argued by many critics to be an authentically representative India. And, as the creator of such a faithfully-represented Indian life, ethos and setting Narayan gains reputation as an indisputably Indian writer. This view that Malgudi is a microcosmic India requires to be
qualified and even moderated by a caveat that there are layers and layers of Indian life, people and experiences that are extraneous to Narayan’s world. The issue of authenticity, which often pervades Indian literatures including the one written in English, is wantonly paraded to prove that Narayan’s fiction embodies in it is distinctly Indian.

The real problem of Narayan does not lie in his being unrealistic; a novel can entail a monstrous amount of verisimilitude and, yet, be unrepresentative for mysterious reasons. The question is not whether his stories, themes, characters and locale appear and sound like Indian ones but is there a bigger world beyond Malgudi which Narayan has left methodically ignored and excluded. Understanding Malgudi is understanding Narayan, and in itself Malgudi is a very hard nut to crack. In Malgudi does lie the most important key to understanding the psychodynamics of Indian-English writers and the force that control such writers living in psychological self-exile. It must be realised that it is not the absence of pluralist vision that underlines Narayan’s world as does the idea of a frozen India impervious to the possibilities of change.

Madras, the city where Narayan was born, was one of the first cities to be culturally colonised by the English. Narayan belonged to a family that could be safely characterised as fairly educated. He certainly was not the first generation college-goer and, naturally, did not suffer the disadvantages the entire Indian population faced excepting a miniscule
minority. The English and their ways of life were always a source of fascination for Narayan, who while professing distaste for the alien influence, keeps looking for the right stories to tell the white about. This world of the Whiteman with its fatal allure never completely deserted Narayan and his fiction. It is very unthankful on one’s part to destroy something that has been pervasively present in one’s consciousness and has struck deep roots in the unconscious as well. Critics could always argue this attitude to be the rejection of Narayan’s past. The choice of English is certainly a political statement, yet a very ambiguous one at it in case of writer like Narayan. The other language he could have chosen to have written in is Tamil; this choice would have entailed a greater entrenchment in the literary tradition of the community. Writing in regional languages, as it has been proven and accepted, demands a higher commitment on the part of the writer in terms of the knowledge of the represented world.

To have chosen to write in the ruler’s language could arguably be said to mean that a particular writer has chosen to market himself on a larger scale. To have chosen the colonialist’s language as the medium of expression may have meant, as has been overwhelmingly theorised in case of Narayan, to taunt, tantalise and ridicule the ruler in Homi Bhabha’s view through mimicry. It is unlikely to have occurred to Bhabha that the relentless and endless mimicry can often lead to self-degradation. To have
selected to write in the colonialist’s language and idiom and to have said nothing significantly damning against the occupier is a fairly self-revealing gesture that runs the risk of being misconstrued as sheer complicity with the ruling order. Narayan started writing against a cultural background which was charged with an intense rivalry between Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the state of Mysore. Narayan could not have been ignorant of the anti-Brahmin movements that raged in the states of Mysore and Madras—the two spaces that shaped his mental landscape. The rampant anti-Brahmin movements gave an illusion that the follies of history were finally getting rectified, which by no means was true. The movements drove Brahmins go for a cover and made them come out with more camouflaged strategies of self-idealisation. We may venture to argue, though it is difficult to prove conclusively, that lying in one’s own mother tongue much more exacting than in that of one’s putative foe. The most hideous of the enemies, we are exhorted, dangerously dwells our inner spaces that include the matrix of our psyche, and very often it does so furtively. The attempt to project tension and the stress of conflict onto the process of making choices where there is none is a move tantamount to grossly falsifying histories. A mere look at the following remark by Pankaj Mishra is brazenly revealing:

*These writers have to overcome their intellectual upbringing before they learn to look directly at their world and find a voice that*
matches their experience. The disdain for one’s own language and literature taught at school and college; the forced initiation into a foreign language; the groping for knowledge through an abstract maze of other cultures and worlds—these are things that can make for a lifetime of confusion and ambivalence. (221)

These writers happened to come from the families and social milieus that had long trained them to instinctively eke out living by appropriating what the ruling culture had put on display for sale. There was nothing surprising about what happened to them under the alien rule and what they unfeelingly extracted from it. The choices were clear and easy to make, and the results were lucidly foreseeable. One does not see where the confusion and ambivalence lie. Yet, attempts continue to be made to locate the virtues of a writer where they do not evidently lie. The following passage taken from Meenakshi Mukherjee is a case in point:

For decades Malgudi has been perceived as a quintessential Indian town, ordinary and uneventful, where shopkeepers ply their easy-going trade, idlers sit around the Market Street gutter, benign crooks go about their business of cheating gullible people, husbands absent-mindedly torture their wives—all in a gentle and unchanging rhythm. If complications arise, they are bound to be resolved by the end and normalcy restored. What is always emphasised is its Indianness, by which
are meant a good-humoured inertia and a casual tolerance which almost any reader in the country is expected to recognise as familiar. Like other imaginary towns in literature we do not know the latitude and longitude of Malgudi, nor do we know its different languages, its ethnic or communal tensions. (2608)

It is hard to think of a more deceptive argument about a literature that is so wearily and lugubriously Indian, leaving the reader to wish it had been about some other people and clime. If one does not know the ‘ethnic or communal tensions’ of Malgudi one cannot claim to know anything about it. Mukherjee’s assessment of Malgudi is right; it is essentially unknowable as its people are bereft of their communal identities. There have been many arguments put forth in defence of the inevitability of a particular section of Indian society being historically tricked into writing in English. It would be futile to engage in any kind of confrontation with any of these much-vaunted discourses. Most of the Indian metropolitan writers, like Indian diasporic writers, wistfully construct an India divorced from its materiality. These writers, contrary to the argument advanced by Mukherjee, think very little about the existence, nature and validity of their relationship with India. The anxiety that seems to badger Indian-English writers is does not relate to not being seen as sufficiently Indian; it is rather related to failing to gain a wider recognition.
Narayan, quite differently for more secular reasons, does not let himself be bothered by the question of his Indian identity. He very confidently—may not always be justifiably so—strides on without entertaining any anxiety about the task of investing his work with any Indianness. A close reading of his works will reveal that he never pauses to gauge the degree of Indianness his work entails. This kind of confidence springs from a sense of certainty about his fiction being invariably and innately Indian.

Narayan remained in India – an Indian writer who was happy to be read by those outside India but who remained firmly within the world into which he had been born. It is always appropriate to start a discussion about Narayan with a well-made attempt to summarise his achievements, though one may always spare any normative inferences for the later arguments in the thesis. Many Indian critics seem to believe that mere act of locating the Indian-English writing in rural setting gives it an undeniable authenticity. Possessed with this illusion Indian-English writers set their works in ‘conjured up’ Indian villages that have been notoriously Bramhinical and sanskritised in form and substance. Being unmindful of this aspect of Indian-English writing, critics continue to sing eulogies for the ‘authentic’ representation of India in this fiction which looks progressively grotesque and surrealistic in its content. The following is an extraction from
Dharwadker who talks about the accomplishments of Indian-English writers including Narayan:

Whereas the nineteenth-century poets had tried to Indianize and thus authenticate their writing by composing lyric, dramatic, and narrative poems on distinctively Indian themes, especially by intertextualizing their verse in English with folk and literary materials from the subcontinent’s past, some of the fiction writers of the 1920s and 1930s attempted directly to (re)locate their narratives thematically and aesthetically in the Indian village. Narayan, Rao, Anand, and Desani contributed significantly and differentially to this cultural shift, but Narayan’s construction of an authentically Indian narrative location proved to be particularly durable and influential, partly because it was unique. In the fifteen novels that he published over six decades (from Swami and Friends [1935] to The World of Nagaraj [1990]) Narayan focused almost exclusively on the possibilities of innovation latent in the form known in modern British literature as the ironic comedy of manners.(245)

All discussions about Narayan to date unfailingly revolve round two conclusively-proven points: one, his writing is intrinsically Indian; two, he has successfully translated Indian experiences into English. These two points, it is vociferously argued, make him a decidedly Indian writer
and, in this capacity, his works faithfully represent India in all its diversity and plurality. The best source for a non-Indian to know India is to go to his novels. Susan Ram, one of the two co-writers of Narayan’s biography, states that when she felt at a loss, on her first arrival in India, to come to grips with the myriad experiences with varying degrees of complexity she was advised to read Narayan. And, of course, the advice proved immensely useful, she claims. It is preposterous to deny the fact Narayan may have come handy to a lot of people who wanted to ‘know’ India, but did not know where to start. It is not impossible to guess where this kind of a profitable piece of counsel is likely to have come from. But it is fruitless to attempt to fathom the depths of this ‘known’ and ‘knowable’ India as the non-English speaking subject.

The main focus of this thesis is a space called Malgudi; a place so nearly Indian, yet so wistfully unlike it. Malgudi is simultaneously colonial and postcolonial; simultaneously pre-modern, modern and at times incredibly postmodern; it is at the same time feudal, bourgeoisie and a classless society. It is a space that has transcended history and has come to terms with the death of history. Most importantly, Malgudi is pre-industrial and post-industrial without having ever been industrialised. It all boils down to the hypothesis that it is simultaneously a place and a non-place. Postcolonial theories, irrespective of their brand, are very particular about the spatial dimension a writer and his/her works are
framed in. After all colonialism is about going, seeing and conquering places before taming people and mastering the culture that comes riveted to it. Postcolonialism is also about coming to terms with the havoc wrought by capitalism-driven colonial expansionism. Hence, Malgudi is a postcolonial space on which a good number of disparate and contradictory forces meet, constantly trying to efface one another out of existence. In a recent book on Narayan, John Thiem makes the following comment that Malgudi is:

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\text{(f)ar from serving as a metonym for a settled, secure India, the town is a product of a particular coming together of social, religious and above all psychic forces, which undergo transformations as they interact with one another. In varying ways in the different novels, it is seen to be at a cultural crossroads, transforming itself in response to a range of incursions, many of which are associated with aspects of modernity. Malgudi also emerges as a luminal location, because of the seemingly discrepant admixture of genres which its creator draws upon. Built on the fault-lines, where classical Hindu discourse and the more ‘realistic’, supposedly Western form of the novel collide, it ushers new forms of fiction into being. (4)}
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Narayan’s fictional characters have their mooring in Malgudi. This town of Malgudi is a traditional one visited by Lord Rama, Laxmana, Sita,
Hanuman and Goddess Parvati – the mythical Gods and Goddesses to Buddha, Sankara and Gandhi – from the mythical to the real. These Malgudians invite parallels with Chaucer’s Canterbury characters, Shakespeare’s fools and Hardy’s rustics. Narayan’s rustics and fools are controlled and governed by a value system that is enshrined in their culture, tradition, religion and philosophy though their understanding of these systems varies from person to person that accrues a high degree of complexity to these characters.

A closer analysis of Malgudi is, it is hoped, likely to yield a better understanding of Narayan’s attitude to India and the factors that at shaping his idea of India as it is depicted in his works. The main concern that propels this thesis is the nature of relationship between Narayan and the land that occupies his creative world. An attempt is made to understand the nature of problems that thwart his ventures to translate his idea into the socio-cultural locale of Malgudi. Nation, as an imagined space, comes into existence through a range of cultural texts. The emergence of the Indian nation, like all other ones, is dependent on its fictionalisation and mythic construction. The rise and development of the genre of novel, as it is elsewhere, has been intertwined with the process of the evolution of Indian nation. The arrival of modernity, facilitated by technology, made the novel possible as it reify Indian nation. Most prominently, the rise of the educated middle class paved the way for the
blooming of the novel. The novel that thrived on the explosion of the print culture constructed the imagined community in the form of nation. Nation as a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an envisioned end is easy to comprehend, but hopelessly impossible to believe in. Narrativising the Indian nation is the most engaging thematic preoccupation of Indian-English writing. Narayan’s construction of Malgudi is one such attempt at fictionalising India as a comprehensible and wieldy imagined community.

The novel is capable of working against the intentions of the writer, and there exists a possibility of Malgudi betraying the prejudices of its creator much against the well-engineered goodwill of the writer. The later Indian English writers are said to have moved away from Narayan’s provincialism as unravelled in Malgudi towards a definitive cosmopolitanism. It is that requires to be profoundly debated. Since this thesis is not about the self-directed evolution of Indian English writing it would be irrelevant to deal with the question of divorce between Narayan and later writers. As per the provincial space called Malgudi is concerned it is dangerous to write it off as a little town that has been conceptually passed over. There are people for whom the idea of India is wedded to the eternal of its perpetual immutability. It does not change,---Malgudi changes very little, at least in essence--- it keeps resisting any fundamental changes and the all Narayan’s novels are about fighting off change and degrading ‘alien’ influence. It would be incomplete to conclude any
introduction to Narayan without making a reference to the Indian diasporic writer V.S.Naipaul, whose attitude to India is problematic and contentious. Naipaul, who has often made pitiable desperate attempts to understand Indian on which he still vociferously claims to have some right to pass judgements, includes a reasonably extended discussion of Narayan in his travelogue (if it can be called one) *India: A Wounded Civilization*. The following few passages are about Naipaul’s understanding of Narayan and his (Narayan’s) India.

In one of his conversations with Naipaul, Narayan prophetically declared “India will go on”, which of course it does, so does Malgudi. It is not hard to guess why this may have come as incomprehensibly surprising to Naipaul. He does not want know India more deeply than his impressions allow him—as does the Muslim world. He always wants to keep looking for the images of the world that reinforce his foregone conclusions about it. Here is a comment about Narayan’s ‘apolitical’ and undisturbed world as it appears to Naipaul:

*Narayan’s concern had always been with the life of a small South Indian town, which he peopled book by book. His conviction in 1961, after fourteen years of independence, that India would go on, whatever the political uncertainties after Mr. Nehru, was like the conviction of his earliest novels’ written in the days if the British, that India was going on.*
The British themselves are far away, their presence hinted at only in their institutions: the bank, the mission school. The writer contemplates the lesser life that goes on below: small men, small schemes, big talks, limited means: a life so circumscribed that it appears whole and unviolated, its smallness never for wonder, though India itself is felt to be vast. (9)

Naipaul finds it amusing, even puzzling to note the aplomb of Narayan amidst the social and political chaos and uncertainty that pervades India. For Naipaul, the political has to be as loud and denotative as it is in the west. His understanding of India is self-defeatingly languorous and dishevelled. There are worlds to which he is wilfully blind and deaf. Even though these two writers seem to belong to and believe in two worlds that have nothing in common, there are shared grounds on which they happily meet. Narayan’s novels can be found trying to grapple with a debilitating restlessness that seems to be continuously generated in him by the world he lives. Like the small and self-contained world of Malgudi, Narayan comes under a mounting pressure to admit a wider and a more abrasive reality into his universe. Naipaul keeps looking for what he wants, and when does not find what he wants he refuses to believe what he sees or dismisses it as non-truth. His solipsistic faculties are legendary. Narayan, on the other hand creates a world to his liking with, using the carefully handpicked material, and banishing what he wishes
had never existed. He does not plan or build big; what he builds, of course himself, is safe, seclusive and detached enough to keep big, bad world at a bay. Even his villains and forces of evil are manageable and redeemable. The following passage from Naipaul makes it clear what both of them so fondly share:

But Narayan’s novels did not prepare for the distress of India. As a writer he had succeeded too well. His comedies were of the sort that requires a restricted social setting with well-defined rules; and he was so direct, his touch so light, that, though he wrote in English of Indian manners, he had succeeded in making those exotic manners quite ordinary. The small town he had staked out as his fictional territory was, I knew, a creation of art and therefore to some extent artificial, a simplification of reality. But the reality was cruel and overwhelming. In the books his India had seemed accessible; in India it remained hidden. To get down Narayan’s world, to perceive the order and continuity he saw in the dereliction and smallness of India, to enter into his ironic acceptance and relish his comedy, was to ignore too much of what could be seen, to shed too much of myself: my sense of history, and even the simplest ideas of human possibility. (13)

The ‘ironic acceptance’ Naipaul talks of in this passage is more than an attitude and strategy used by Narayan. There are ways of constructing one’s world, and very often it takes different forms, embedding unique
modes of resistance to the dominance or ‘corruption’ one see around oneself. Narayan’s efforts are directed at constructing an India meant to subtly refuting the west-invented and -perpetuated myths of country’s confounding social and cultural chaos. Central to our argument of Narayan postcolonial fiction is Ashis Nandy’s theory that the orient has successfully managed to evolve certain strategies of reclaiming the lost self. The thesis does not share some of the views expressed by Nandy about the basic nature and severity of colonialism being psychological; that is a luxury only a well-ensconced academician or an intellectual can afford to indulge in. The brutalised native has more immediate concerns than to seek the succour of psychiatrist educated on and trained in self-centric concept of psyche and psychoanalysis. His does not mean all his theoretical positions are invalid or uninsightful. The basic plan of this dissertation involves a sincere deployment of some of the arguments advanced by Nandy in his work The Intimate Enemy.

How did the Indian upper class react to the British colonialism? Did it really feel threatened? What did it think would come of the bitter rivalry to rule the minds of the subalterns? We do not make any attempt to answer these questions, for at least at this point, they are purely rhetorical in substance. For all its subversiveness anti-colonial resistance of the upper class went unnoticed; Narayan is a case in point. He is not ‘political’, declares Naipaul; it is quite possible that either he does not understand the
rules of the game or in case of Narayan the surrender is neither as total nor as overt as with Naipaul. Narayan is a fine survivor, so is Naipaul. But the demands of conformity to the rules are totally different. Here is what some Indians did to strike a balance between the overwhelming presence of an alien force and a class of native pagans, according to Nandy. Is saying in so many words that people like Narayan chose to play along from whichever perspective you dare to look at it? Here is what he wants to do in his work mentioned before:

(Tr)he colonised Indians do not remain in these pages(of The Intimate Enemy) simple-hearted victims of colonialism; they become participants in a moral and cognitive venture against oppression. They make choices. And to the extent they have chosen their alternative within the West, they have also evaluated the evidence, judged, and sentenced some while acquitting others. For all we know, the Occident may survive as a civilization partly as a result of this ongoing revaluation, perhaps to an extent even outside the geographical perimeters of the West. (P-XIV)

The following chapters of the thesis intend to examine the nature of protest Narayan’s fiction produces against colonialism, modernity, the West and the other within his own civilisation. It also attempts to problematise the world that remains meticulously excluded from Malgudi. A homology is attempted to be drawn between the strategy of othering
used by the coloniser and Narayan’s modes of constructing the high-caste self. The postcolonial concerns of the study include a tentative venture to measure distance covered by Narayan in the ‘politically-informed space’ between attempts to produce the discourses of resistance and to work as, as Spivak puts it, ‘native informant’.


