Preoccupation with human character in one’s fiction, is one of the basic and
the necessary elements of all fiction at all times. It is through character and
conflict that a novelist explores his chosen theme. R.K.Narayan is
preoccupied with, as M.K.Naik puts it, “What man can make of himself and
of the entire business of living” (Naik,1). Therefore an examination of
Narayan’s fiction, necessarily involves an analysis of his characters,
particularly his protagonists.

R.K. Narayan has been justly admired for his remarkable gift of
portraying memorably people of small oddities and eccentricities. The
themes he chooses for his novels will seen to be of perennial interest
especially to a sensitive mind interested in human beings. “Narayan is
primarily preoccupied with man’s fulfilling of the life-role entrusted to him
by tradition and environment, most of his characters have the ring of true
India in them” (Mehta. 51).

On more than one occasion Narayan has said that his primary
interest is in character: “My focus is all on character. If his personality
comes alive, the rest is easy for me” (Mahta. 148). On another occasion in
an interview to William Walsh he is reported to have said: “My main concern is with human character – a central character from whose point of view the world is seen and who tries to get over a difficult situation or succumbs to it or flights it in his own setting” (Westbrook, 152). In yet another interview Narayan has reportedly said: “I value human relationship very much, very intensely. It makes one’s existence worthwhile-human relationship, in any and every form, whether at home or outside” (Holmstrom. 124). These and other statements of Narayan stress the primacy of character, human individuals and human relationships in his fiction.

The mainspring of Narayan’s fictional art is his abiding, humane and responsible interest in varieties of people, especially the vast majority of the average and the ordinary, and in the timeless possibilities of their lives. Infact, Malgudi, which is wholly imaginary suburban town and the locale of the bulk of his fiction, is a richly peopled world. Here indeed one finds “God’s plenty”. Along with Malgudi, the family provides the novelist with a convenient and manageable context, concrete and particular, to study at close quarters human individuals and human relationships in all their variety and intricacy.

Narayan deliberately restricts himself to and insists on matters of everyday life, and therefore chooses ordinary men and women for his
fictional contemplation. Malgudi is peopled by average and ordinary men and women, who generally belong to the middle, and lower-middle classes of South Indian society. This is the class of people whom Narayan understood best and to whom he belonged. Therefore he gives an authentic and convincing account of them. It is about himself and his folks that he writes. His writings may not have great literary flourishes or thrusts, but it is intimate, reliable and real. Their world is the precise area of his creative genius. As H.M. Williams has noted, “Private life, families, the ambitions, success and frustrations of simple Indians usually of the lower middle class. These have provided Narayan with a plethora of subject matter” (Williams. 59). Narayan cherished and explores the unnoticed subtle possibilities of the average and unremarkable. It is important to note that Narayan does not idealize or glorify them. But with remarkable truthfulness, compassion and authorial detachment, he portrays them as they are caught in a net of illusions, deceptions, self-deceptions and achievements.

In the novels of Narayan without exception it is the man or woman of ordinary abilities rather than the extraordinary person that seeks to realize some or the other ambition, fails or achieves a measure of success in society which is more traditional than modern. Against the background of changing Indian society, which is reflected in the imaginary city of Malgudi. Narayan weaves has human comedy. Over the years, Malgudi experiences some swift changes, the impact of which is reflected on the
traditional Indian society with its *** old culture, customs and beliefs and superstitions. As Graham Greene comments “the life of Mulgudi never ruffled by politics proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries and the juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character provides much of the comedy”. Because of the upheaval and replacement of the traditional values of the Western and modern civilization the various human situations depicted in the novels border on the tragic-comic. But ultimately, the tradition and the traditional values triumph. The modernity touches only the fringes of the society and is never very real and does not touch the core. After the conflict, characters manage to return to the real and solid world of Malgudi and to a life free from ‘distracting illusions and hysterics’.

This chapter seeks to examine Narayan’s portrayal of the people of Malgudi and all that happens to them and their way of life, how they tend to entertain certain absurd ambitions and illusions, and how they return to the society to be an integral part of it rather than be isolated, how certain individuals deliberately go out of the family fold to realize their own potential and how in doing so serve the self – same society and how some more characters remain within the warm security of the family ever with all their strives and struggles and how yet another group of persons, realizing the time has come, renounce the world for various reasons and seek
salvation, and finally, by what means and mode of treatment is Narayan able to do all this through his fiction.

The fictional world of R.K. Narayan is its exploration of the familial relationship of the domestic world, is largely devoted to the study of the family and various family relationships in detail, as the family forms the basic unit of any society. Narayan presents his protagonists against the background of their families and familial relations. He skillfully draws particular attention to the various details of their families. Many of them are seen as rooted in the traditions, customs, beliefs and superstitions of their families. Thus every one of the important characters is given a recognizable identity and helped to come alive. As William Walsh remarks, “The family indeed is the immediate context in which the novelist’s sensibility operates and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationship are treated (Walsh. 26).

R.K. Narayan is primarily preoccupied with man’s filling of life role entrusted to him by tradition and environment. The total fictional corpus of R.K. Narayan therefore, presents a panorama of men and women in different life role. His characters are ordinary men and women with human eccentricities, incongruities, oddities, follies and foibles. They are taken from real life and are not abstractions of good or evil, virtues or vices. The novels of Narayan offer a new creative orientation of the traditional
imagination, as it acts upon the individual consciousness within the contemporary society. In his article, ‘The fiction writer, in India: His tradition and his problems’ Narayan says that the writer in Independent India, “…hopes to express through his novels and stories the way of life of the group of people with whose psychology and background he is most familiar”.

One can say Narayan is not interested in the place for its own sake. His abiding interest lies in “peopled places”. Narayan excels as a skillful delineator of characters. He has created a richly varied portrait gallery – “… Students, teachers, parents, grandparents, half–hearted dreamers, journalists, artists, financiers, speculators, film–markers, adventurers, eccentrics, cranks, movie stars, Sannyasies and women – pious and suffering coquettish and seductive (Goyal. 52).

It is a veritable world of men and women, both real and exotic that are brought to life in R.K. Narayan’s novels. Narayan’s novels are peopled with all sorts of characters from all walks of life and bred in a climate which is essentially Indian and not only north Indian. Malgudi represents the typical features of south Indian towns, as a whole it emerges as a town representative for the whole of India, for the process of modernization has been more or less the same all over the country. “Malgudi typifies Indian towns growing into cities, where pariahs, teachers, clerks, printers,
policemen etc live their routine life”, observes professor R.S. Singh (Singh 55). “So if Malgudi is the microcosm of India in its multifarious moods, it is also the real hero of his novels, Swami, Chandran, Ramani, Krishna, Sriram, Sampath, Raju, Vasu and Mali – all these characters are typically Malgudian, therefore Indian, despite their angularities and oddities” (Singh. 56).

Narayan always comes upon an ancient myth or legend which lends itself to him to express his moral vision of life. As William Walsh observes: “The religious sense of Indian Myth is part of Narayan’s grip of reality and his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human experience” (Walsh 166 – 167). Because the world which he depicts is paradoxical in its essence. In the Malgudi world appearance and reality, individual and society, hope and despair, laughter and tears and all inseparable and interwoven.

Unlike Hardy, Narayan’s Malgudi is much more human as his interest lies in human being. He explains “I seek life wherever I go, I seek people, their interests, their aspirations and predicaments” (Kohli. 13). Narayan deals with the ways of life of the people, customs, belief and manners. He depicts the social – cultural milieu and changes that occur in the place and people over the years.
Malgudi exists on two levels – the time ripened traditional values that shaped the culture and emotional outlook and the modern way of living owing to the western notions of progress. The younger generation stand for new values and are sharply contrasted against their conservative fathers, grandmothers and grandaunts. Malgudi seems to emerge as a combination of the old and the new, of the ancient and the modern. Narayan presents the life of an entire community which he knows thoroughly and first – hand, being a part and parcel of the middle – class society he portrays.

In the first three novels of Narayan, 'Swami and Friends', ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ and ‘The English Teacher’, there is a progress from innocence to experience, from innocent pleasures of childhood to youth and maturity. The character of Swami in ‘Swami and Friends’ is a portrayal of a young school going boy who disliked the idea of going to school. The childish ignorance of the boy is revealed here. Swami’s only friend at home was his grandmother. The granny is after all an inevitable part of the Indian household. R.K.Narayan understands the importance of a grandmother in a household and presents a typical Indian grandmother in this novel, “Swami’s grandmother is representative of the thousand of Indian grannies. who uphold the Indian joint family, guard the family prestige, insist on the observance of the caste conventions and above all shape the mental attitudes of the youngsters. (Rao.69)
The contradiction between the traditional and modern values is portrayed in the character of Swami. Swami believes in Gods, demons and others as much as he believes in cricket. The traditional Indian values as well as the modern have a stronghold on Swami. Swami grows up and becomes interested in cricket and it is now his turn to play the role of an edifactor as he tries to teach his grandmother about cricket. The granny listens to the tales of cricket and tries her best to understand. The unreserved rapport and communication between these two generations reflect the serene atmosphere of Malgudi. But the same rapport is not to be seen later in the advanced years, which creates a generation gap. In the strength of the grandmother’s presence which Swami finds is infinitely scene and shooting. Malgudi proves to be very much a part of the mainstream of the nation. The Malgudians demonstrate against the arrest of a political worker by the British Government influenced by Gandhi. Even the school children like Swami boycott classes and break the windows of their schools.

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Malgudi awakens to the modern civilizations but still remains enough of its own traditional values like social taboos etc. Chandran’s infatuation for Malathi can never be fruitful in tradition bound Malgudi with its customs. For in a traditional Hindu society love marriages are unheard of. Marriage is always arranged by the family, one’s own parents. Horoscopes must be consulted and they should match
and above all castes must be considered. One sees the working influence of modernity in the life of Chandran and his friends. The religious life of Chandran’s mother is contrasted with that of Chandran who is all for modernity. She represents the traditional Indian wife. She refuses to budge when Chandran tries to argue with her and insists on respecting the old customs, “… she at my rate belonged to a generation which was in no way worse than the present one for all its observances and as long as she lived she would insist on respecting old customs.

Chandran fails to marry Malathi and in desperation becomes a sanyasi in rebellion against the society that prevented him from marrying Malathi. But towards the end he realizes that his renunciation is a rejection of traditional values and comes to understand that reality lies in making peace with society and all that it stands for. Hence his forsaking of his life for fake sanyasi, returning home and making conventional marriage. The protagonist deviation results in disorder and disillusionment and it is only at the end they once again come back to the folds of reality – the reality being Malgudi. Malgudi offers a refuge for outsiders too – Outsiders such as Vasu and Rann though their descent on Malgudi results only in disorder and destruction.

It is noticeable that Chandran’s infatuation for Malathi and his becoming a Sanyasi are but momentary illusions of life. That is why at the end Chandran returns to Malgudi discarding his earlier illusions. Malgudi
and the values it upholds remains to be the only reality in the midst of all illusions. Chandran drops the idea of going to England and restricts himself to ‘The Daily Messenger’ and Malgudi. The modern illusions and the Western values are cast aside and Malgudi stands for the real with its conservative way of living.

Krishna of ‘The English Teacher’ is none other than Chandran settled down to a blissfully happy married life. The novel falls into two parts. The former confines itself to married bliss and the latter to the bereavement of the husband and his reconciliation with life and reality and his communion and achieving oneness with his wife Susila, on a transcendental place. Here there are no upheavals, social or religious in breaking the established norms of society, nut an intense personal tragedy of the protagonist. Narayan is also conscious of the historic nature of this region and has recorded the changing nature of Malgudi, though the people there in still desperately clutch on to superstitions, cling on to the traditional customers and hold on to simple faiths. All this is portrayed in the characters of The English Teacher.

In Indian context women more than men represent custom and reason and for every occasion whether it be a home coming or birth, certain rituals are to be performed. And it is women who have the responsibility of performing these rituals. For instance, one has to decorate the threshold with mango leaves on every occasion, considered to be auspicious. And the
floor and doors are to be decorated with write floral designs. Krishna’s mother is no exception to all this. When Susila, Krishna’s wife falls ill, she attributes the illness to the influence of the evil – eye and she calls a Swamiji to remove the evil influence and “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 tread”. (93) The doctor also seems to have faith in the Swamiji. He says “Ah no, don’t belittle these people. There is lot in him too, we didn’t know when we understand it fully I am sure we doctors will be able to give more complete cures”. (93)

Such beliefs and customs prove to be extremely comic and yet all the more intense and serious for it. And it is towards the end that Krishna achieves a transcendental ‘oneness’ of spirit with his wife Susila. After attaining peace within himself Krishna resigns his job at the Albeit Mission college and takes up the vocation of teaching young innocent children. The characters Krishna and Susila symbolizes the spiritual significance of the Indian system of Marriage. In the portrait of Susila, Narayan presents the Ideal type of a Hindu wife, steeped in the cultural traditions of the country.

Narayan’s sympathetic treatment of his characters makes ‘The Dark Room’ a most fulfilling and touching novel to read. As in many of Narayan’s novels, conservatism and reform are contrasted with the quiet irony and subtle humour which have become so characteristic of this author. Total submission, even when the husband neglects his wife is an
idea ingrained in the women themselves. Savitri is made to feel how completely dependent she is upon her husband Ramani, when pressure is brought to bear upon their long-standing marriage. Ramani gives the first hint of how progressive the town has become. The manager of the Englandia Insurance Company branch, he boasts of getting ten lakhs of business. Women come out of the bonds of the tradition and seek financial gains and economic independence, Shanta Bai is an example of this. She says “I love unconventional things. Otherwise I should not be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband” (Room, 79). Ramani strongly recommends that the English Insurance company employ the rather elegant and fiercely Independent Mrs. Shanta Bai. There arises a conflict between the old and new and the tradition and modernity. The fact that Ramani has taken a mistress is thrust upon Savitri by her friends, she tries to persuade him to leave her. As a result the traditional housewife Savitri suffers. Savitri retreats into herself and lies quite still in the one private place she ahs of her own, the dark room. Savitri is at last stirred to revolt, to assert herself as a human being.

‘I am a human being’ she said through her heavy breathing. You mean men will never grant that for we are play things when you feel like hugging and slaves at other times. Don’t think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose. (Room, 97)
Savitri tries to renounce her family. She gathers up the very few belonging and walks out of the house, leaving her children staring dumb foundedly. For a short time she struggle to be self. Sufficient, but realizes quite soon that she must return although a part of her has died. She couldn’t bang the door on her family responsibilities. She resigns herself to her fate. R.K. Narayan portrays a clear picture of the traditional Indian wife through the character of Savitri and a typical modern woman through the character of Shanta Bai in this novel.

Malgudi experiences raped social changes which one comes across in *MR. Sampath* for the first time. One comes to know that “… Overnight as it were Malgudi passed from a semi – agricultural town to a semi – industrial town, with a sudden influx of population of all sorts”. (Sampath, 26) And the Municipal chairman plans a grand “Malgudi Extension sheme” visualizing “a grand city at the eastern end of the town with its own market, business premises, cinema, schools and perfect houses”. (Sampath, 29) Thus Malgudi develops into a thriving commercial center quite advance. Slums spring up as a result of industrial progress. All this shows the economic and cultural advancement of Malgudi which is epitomized in the marking of the film. “The Burning of Karna” with a Hollywood director. But despite all these changes it retains its traditional middle class values intact. Srinivasan’s wife cannot venture to go outside the house all alone. Ravi’s mother thinks that her son is possessed and resorts to occult. The
inhibitions regarding laid down, the society allows ample scope for an individual like Sampath, to play various roles like printer, film director and an actor, thus providing him an opportunity to realize his potential. But for all his vagaries Sampath too returns to the reality at the end and normalcy is resorted; Ravi’s madness subscribes; Shanthi realizes her place with her son and rejects the film career. Srinivasan goes back to his even tenor of life in Malgudi.

‘The Financial Expert’ is a splendid example of Narayan’s ability to create a wholly credible from what would have seemed, to another writer, intractable material. Malgudi experience rapid economic changes and there is flat economic growth many banks and business concern materialize and promote the financial growth of Malgudi. Maragayya of ‘The Financial Expert’ becomes a financial wizard due to the impact of the second world war. “Contractors, stockists and other have a lot of money and the town was reeking with it” (Expert, 158) Maragayya sits under a tree and shows yokels how to borrow more and more money from the Co-operative Bank, is shooed from his spot by the new manager of the Bank. He tries to conduct his business as usual but his heart is not really in it. He has to find other means of self aggrandizement. Narayan beautifully portrays the character of Maragayya. He describes Maragayya’s spectacular rise from a street money lender to a financial wizard until his downfall. Maragayya with the sudden downfall regrets for the past and eventually
comes back to the folds of the society and even the broken joint family bonds are restored and the original inevitable life of Malgudi immediately returns.

In *Waiting for the Mahathma*, Narayan takes the risk of introducing Mahatma Gandhi as a character. The Mahathma belongs to the class of the extraordinary while the ordinary and overage are Naranyan’s forte. The Mahatma’s humanity and compassion are stressed, he is seen as the living embodiment of the very essence of renunciation ideal sainthood. The Malgudi community welcomes Gandhi when he visits Malgudi. It is hear that the idealism of Gandhi and the hypocrisy of the municipal chairman are juxtaposed. Untouchability was vigourously practiced in Malgudi. Gandhiji preached against this evil. He cheered to stay with the low class people in the slum during his visit to Malgudi in order to creat a moral awakening amongst his people against untouchability. The novel also shows the emergence of modern women. Bharathi with her own ideals and identity in a person in her own right. Sri Ram’s love for Bharathi which is Non-traditional cannot flourish. Bharathi is able to influence Sriram and make him realize certain values of life.

Over the years Malgudi changes. The social, cultural and economic changes are reflected in the place as well as the people. In the lives of the individuals and their dreams and aspirations in the way they try to achieve their ambitions, be it money or fame or salvation. The advent of modernity
gives rise to a perennial conflict in Mulgudi. The conflict between two sets of value - the old and the new, east and west, tradition and modernity, illusion and reality and so on. “Domestic life version verses passionate love, scholar verses and Sadhu, the claims of art, an every warm society versus a cold, but correct individualism, tradition versus modernity”. (Kaul. 51) These are the conflicting emotions always warring with each other.

Raju of ‘The Guide’ represents modernity and its influence. He is lured by his infatuation for Rosie, a married woman and in trying to fulfil that desire he defies the age-old ethics and conventions of Malgudi and the violates the rigid social code. And it is once again the impact of modern civilizations – the railway that cause Raju’s doom, by bringing Rosie into his life. Ultimately he refuses to listen to his mother and pays a deaf-ear to Gaffur’s advice.

In the course of events Raju mistakenly comes to be taken for a saint which is not really surprising in a country like India which has its own great tradition of yogis and rishis. And it is the centuries – old tradition that helps transform a sinner into saint. As C.D.Narasimhaiah points out, “the traditional past and the changing present with which all the degradation that has come upon it still holds the possibilities for survival-some deep spring of vital energy sustaining her.” (Narasimhaiah.148) Here Raju’s attainment of salvation is in accordance with the great Hindu tradition of ‘Varnasramadharma’ particularly that of ‘Sanyasasrama’. Raju’s
redemption suggests Narayan’s affirmation of the permanent values. Thus Malgudi changes and yet remains the same. Its spirit remains the same and it is this that sustains and restores the protagonist to their old or normal life. Rosie, the educated young women who lead the life of a holy man because the circumstances forced him are some of Narayan’s well – portrayed characters in this novel.

In ‘The Man – Eater of Malgudi’ Narayan depicts the conflict between good and evil and tradition and modernity. The action, as the title implies centers around Malgudi and its environs. Vasu represents all that is modern and alien and Natraj stands for the traditional Malgudi community. There is the temple elephant Kuamr – looked on as Gajendra and there is the monosyllabic poet trying to compose his epic ‘Radhakalyan’. And the novel once again celebrates the triumph of traditional values – good overcomes evil, thus proving that a society does not tolerate evil for too long. Natraj’s faith in god makes him think ‘Elephant? Who could kill an elephant’ which proves to be true at the end.

Vasu, the taxidermist descends upon Malgudi and disturbs the serenity and peacefulness of the people and even tenor of life. He is seen as an extreme egoist. The traditional Malgudi frowns upon Vasu’s offer of supplying stuffed eagles, regarded as sacred garudas to be kept in the puja to be worshipped as Vasu’s action is a violation of all that is sacred. That is why Natraj thinks that his very presence defiles his precincts. He becomes a
satirical embodiment of modern western violence and Sastri decides that “he shows all the definitions of rakshasa”. (Man-Eater, 231) And a rakshasa should perish according to the ancient Hindu mythology.

Vasu thus is equated to Bhasmasura of the ancient myth who ultimately destroys himself. He violates every sacred code of Malgudi society and the conservative Hindu society finds it unable to withstand his existence. Otherwise Malgudi society proves to be tolerant providing a place for all eccentrics except murderous violence. Malgudi means reality and in the midst of solid reality, Vasu becomes “not important but Unreal” and society has no place for the unreal. (Kaul 55)

The impact of modernization on a conventional society becomes clear in *The vendor of Sweets*. The conflict between the old and the young and East and West is inherent here. Jagan a prosperous widower, of sixty is a sweet vendor in Malgudi. He steeped in the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His main concern in life was his son Mali. Jagan was proud of his son Mali, who has gone to the United Sates for higher study. Mali’s visit to the United States is a symbolic representation of the East – West encounter which is the first sign of the corruption of the younger generation. After ret returning from the United States, Mali resorts to beef – eating which in itself is a violation of the social code of Malgudi. Jagan is bewildered when he is faced with all these strange motions. He accepts Grace, the Korean – American girl as his daughter – in- law but his real troubles start from the
moment he tries to identify with Mali’s fantasies. Mali scheme to finance story – writing machines jolts from his passive existence. To him it becomes “a comic parody of the spontaneous creative process of the human mind, a kind of comic jolt, to Malgudi natural flow of life, where the granny still tells stories to children at their beside” (Biswal, 26). He realizes that a time has come for him to change his lifestyle and go to things into night perspective. “At sixty one is reborn and enters a new jamma” (186). He renounces the world and enters the stage of Vanaprastha laid down by the scriptures and thus proves once more of prevalence of the age old values.

Raman in The Painter of Signs compares the changing Malgudi scene with that of New York. There is a marked change in the attitude of people too. Raman is the fair representative of the change. He is the advocate of the age of reason. His attitude is that of being scientist. “Be Scientific please be scientific” (Painter, 10). Despite this one can say that he sand at cultural crossroads. There mages a conflict within him between odd and new values of life. He feels confused and he is in a dilemma unable to decide “whether the legendary gods are real or imaginary allegories (Painter, 133). Like Raman, daisy too is a symbol of modernization. She is the first of her kind and is a kindled spirit like Rosie of The Guide and is a liberated woman.

She comes out of the family fold to Uphold the cause of family planning with an enormous Zeal. In Raman’s words she has “a sort of
unmitigated antagonism to conception”. (Guide, 70) the very thought of having children is repulsive to her. She is a complete contrast to the women of Malgudi like Raman’s aunt. The aunt is quite traditional and is unable to come to terms with Raman’s passion for Daisy. She leaves for Benares, to spend the rest of her life there looking forward to a peaceful end at the feet of the Lord Viswanantha. Thus she renounces her family ties. Towards the end Daisy too leaves Raman finding it impossible to reconcile herself to the idea of playing the role of a traditional house wife. And Raman finds himself “Uncomfortable poised between the two worlds”. (Mathur. 36) He thus divorced from the two – his traditional self represented by his aunt and his modern self represented by Daisy. The deserted Raman symbolizes “The be wilderness of the new generation of Malgudi”. (Biswal. 28)

O.P. Mathur observes that “Modernization and modernized characters were targets of irony in many of Narayan’s major novels like The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, MR. Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets. But in The Painter of Signs, they are viewed with market approval” (Mathur.35) But nowhere do we find this marked approval. What one finds Malgudi – a Malgudi that is quivering between tradition and modernity, East and West inextricably mixed up. It is that conflict which creates the ‘psychological and social tensions’ involved in the uneasy conjunction of old ways and new evolving values.
Daisy symbolizes the later and yet is unsure if her new values which is the reason why she unconsciously upholds the traditional values just like Raman. “Bring them (the gods) 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. It I am wrong let them strike me dead. I am prepared for it”, (140) Thus we can see that Malgudi has not lost old values and “even in those with a tendency towards modernity one is always aware under the educated speech of the Profound murmur of older voices”. (Walsh.11) The traditional society does not permit a marriage between Raman and Daisy which in fact seems to be unusual in the sense that Daisy lays down certain condition and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work and she further adds “On any day you question why or how, I’ll leave you”. (One finds a parallel of the Gangashantanu myth of the Mahabaratha) here where Ganga marries king Shantanu on the condition that he should never question her actions, her actions, whatever she may do and the moment he does she would leave him.) Although Malgudi does not encourage any of these modern perversities, it tolerates them and intimately accept them into its fold if and when they choose to return as is evidenced in the case of Raman.

In ‘The Talkative Man’ one sees Malgudi well into the eighties with all modern amenities such as a night club, Nalli’s Hardware, a real estate
office – offering its services to Malgudi citizens. The town now populates hundred and odd thousand people. The geographical changes reflect also the attitudinal change in the people and the changing attitude of people towards women, regarding their education and employment and economic independence. The visions of the old librarian regarding his grand daughter Girija bring out clearly the attitudinal changes. He wants his grand – daughter to get a Degree and become and officer.

But despite all the development Malgudi still retains its essentially Indian scene and its agricultural tradition. The old values are still intact and very much valued. And the moral code of the society does not change all that much. Hence Madhu’s abhorrence at Girija’s affair with Rann. That is the reason why Talkative man’s neighbours are shocked at commandant Sarasa’s appearance in a satwar Kameez, and bobbed hair and people stare at her. Likewise Rann also creates a stir in Malgudi with in dress and deportment. People are apt to gaze at him whenever he ventures out of Talkative Man’s house, where he is a guest, in the three piece suit, as if questioning Talkative Man about his oddity. It is only later, after all these rather unnerving experience of being started at the Rann adapts himself to the normal ‘Malgudi executive costume’ of cotton pants and shirt sleeves.

In the traditional society of Malgudi one still hesitates to and cannot throw away even a calendar portrait of Gods and Goddesses, “How can anyone discards a God”. (Narayan.1). Even Though Talkative man does not
hesitate to borrow a smuggled camera to take a Photography of Rann, he has qualms about disposing of the puja room even if only to retire to the room once in a while in order to think where no one dared to intrude. It is into this world of values that Rann descends and causes disruption and disorder before pursed by his wife Sarasa, the commandant, who to her chagrin finds husband hunting to be a ‘fatiguing business’. This story is of a wife’s attempt to retain her erratic elusive husbands.

Malgudi has an amazing power of retaining it traditional values. The innocence still does not give way to experience. That is the reason for the innocent villagers being able to transform a sinner into a saint, that is the reason for the master of ‘A Tiger for Malgudi’ renouncing the world and living in the Mempi Hills. It is an unusual novel not only for Narayan but for any writer. The narrator is Raja, a circus tiger, cruelly trained and treated by this owner, he escapes one day and terrorizes people of Malgudi. The tiger is befriended by a holy man. The rash tiger is transformed into a soft being. Malgudi remains a conservation town unused to modern life. Thus one can say Narayan celebrates the survival of permanent values, and Malgudi provided the necessary fixing of background against which is set a comedy of deviation and disturbance of the normal.

Narayan transforms the actual world in which the lives into the imaginary world of Malgudi. He writes of people and place and places about whom he knows and amongst whom he lives, because he an eye for
faithful reporting of actual people, scenes and occurrence. Narayan seems to have “a model of his minds eye”. (Varma. 101). The world of Malgudi or the Malgudi world thus becomes a replication of the actual world. “Narayan is primarily concerned with telling stories and presenting Indian characters against the cyclorama of Malgudi, which is for him, a symbol of India,” (Williams. 62)

Narayan presents a variety of people though all walks of life because he acquired a valuable experience and familiarity of human types. He also portrays the social cultural changes that have been taking place in Malgudi. And it is true that what is true of Malgudi is true of all India. Thus Narayan creates an awareness of “a significant part of the national condition” (Varma. 103) and becomes “both a spokesman of the community in which he lives and of himself.” (kohli. 18) with an ease because he is very mush “a product of the society in which he lives”. And Narayan’s outlook, as O.P.Mathur observes, “broadens out from the’ family to the community and the nation.” (Mathur. 35)

Thus R.K.Narayan with deft strokes and an unusual sensibility portrayed all the memorable characters, in the Indian context in his novels. The U.S Ambassador Harry G.Barnes said: “In honouring India’s best – known and best loved novelist in the English language, Americans were paying homage to a great creative artist who helped to view life both through laughter and through tears and in the process had enable us to
recognize that we are all part of the entire continent of humanity.” (The times of India.5).

MALGUDI WITH REFERENCE TO: THE DARK ROOM, THE ENGLISH TEACHER AND WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA

Malgudi is the symbol of contemporary India. Narayan constructs his Malgudi with the art and skill of a town planner, making, of course, necessary additions and alterations to meet the demand of the changing times. The present study seeks to highlight the topography of Malgudi with particular reference to the novels, ‘The Dark Room’, ‘The English Teacher’ and Waiting for the Mahatma. These novels are taken into consideration to facilities the geographical description of the place and the social – cultural changes that have occurred in the place as well as the way of life of the people over the years, thus drawing attention to the topography of the Malgudi world – a world where the human drama is enacted by various characters, Narayan skilfully draws particular attention to the various characters. Many of their families. Thus everyone of the important characters is given a recognizable identity and helped to come alive. The Dark Room and The English Teacher appear chronologically after Narayan’s first two novels and present the obverse and reverse of the theme of married life. These two are primarily domestic novels. In both the novels the family is settled in the small town of Malgudi.
The Dark Room is a bleak, haunting story of a traditional Indian women Savitri, III – treated by her husband, wanting to rebel but in the end unable to do so. Savitri is made to feel how completely dependent she is upon her husband Ramani. Ramani was working in the Englandia Insurance company in Malgudi. “The Englandia Insurance company is a big one,….. Malgudi district was not giving them even ten rupees worth of policies a year and now ten lakhs of business is passing through my hand every year”. (Room, 16) Ramani strongly recommends that the company employ the rather elegant and fiercely independent Mrs. Shanta Bai. Ramani arranges for the accommodation of Shanta Bai and takes much care for her.

Savitri is frustrated at the behavior of her husband and his relationship with Shanta Bai. Savitri retreats into herself and lies quite in the dark room. After further betrayal and walks out of the house, leaving the children staring dumb – foundedly after her. Savitri disgusted in life attempts to drown herself in the river but is rescued. “There was still one step, the very last submerged under water, very slippery with moss; and then one felt the sand under one’s feet; water reached up to one’s hips; and as one went further down to one’s breaste; and now the running water tripped up one’s legs from behind”. (Room, 120) For a short time Savitri struggle to be self – Sufficient, but realizes quite soon the she must return although a part of her has died.
*The English Teacher* depicts Krishna’s grief at the premature death of his wife, and his wife, enable him to gradually accept her death as well as to develop an equanimity of mind and inner calm, considerable degree of non-attachment and serenity of mind associated with the shitaprajan. The hero of the story Krishna, is an English teacher in Malgudi. Krishna decides to bring his family to the town and starts searching for the house. After a lot of hassles he is able to rent a house in the Sarayu Street. His wife and child come with his father-in-Law. They are all happily settled. The couple decide to buy a house of their own. They visit several streets during the search for the house. “We agreed to go out on the following Sunday morning to Lawley Extension to choose a house or a site”. (Teacher,51) “We were now in Market Road”. (Teacher, 53) “We walked down the cross Road”. (Teacher, 63) Krishna’s friend Sastri, a contractor helps them in choosing a house. Now comes the turning point of the novel. Susila goes to the lavatory and finds it difficult to come out because of the door mechanism. After that she feels sick and convulses with disgust because the lavatory was unattended for a long time. Krishan decides to consult a doctor but the medicine does not have any effect on Sudila’s condition worsens. Susila’s blood test reveals she is having typhoid. Susila passes away. Krishna starts communicating with the spirit of his wife. Krishna is beyond himself with joy because of the direct communication with Susila. Krishna resigns from his college job. When he comes home he feels nostalgic about
the jasmine scent which Susila was so found of. He starts calling “My wife, My wife” with all his soul. His mind trembles with rhythm. When he open his eye he finds her sitting on the bed looking at him with an extraordinary smile. Now the boundaries of their personality dissolve. They are united again through the strength of their love.

In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Narayan takes the risk of introducing Mahatma Gandhi as a character in the novel and getting him to take an interest in a young couple, Bharati his follower and Sriram, a pleasant but aimless individual. The story is about how the young Sriram is transformed into a person of ideals because of the Mahatma’s influence.

Sriram falls in love with the fascinating Bharati, who is witty, idealistic and strong in character and mind; through her, he is drawn into the entourage of Gandhi and his followers. The portrait of Gandhi is Masterly, a sure and delicate description of Saintliness. Sriram selfish, weak and romantic as so many of Naryan’s young heroes, is incapable of understanding Gandhi’s message, but something in him responds to its grandeur and his confused fervor takes a poignantly ridiculous course. Narayan attempt of portraying the live character of Gandhi into the imaginary world of Malgudi receives much applause. The Malgudians are proud of Gandhiji’s visit to their home town. They were all eager and are enthusiastic to receive Gandhi.
“Malgudi was about to have the honour of receiving Mahatma Gandhi” (Mahatma, 14). The sea of people waited for Gandhi in the river bank of Sarayu. Gandhiji’s speech inspired the Malgudians. He spoke on non-violence quit India movement, caste system and also about the evil of untouchability. Gandhiji’s humanism revealed when he stays in a hut in the slum. The Narayan describes the Malgudi slum very naturally in the novel.

“Mahatma entered his hut. This was one of the down huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived in the blanks of river. It was probably the worst area in the town and an exaggeration even to call them huts. They were just hovels put together with rags, tin-sheets and shreds of coconut making all crowded in any how scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust” (Mahatma, 23). Thus Narayan gas taken a daring and successful attempt in introducing Gandhi as a character of Malgudi. The political fire of struggle for freedom and the patriotism of the Mulgudians is also well portrayed. The action of these novels takes place in the imaginary town of Malgudi. The place has a reality and living and growing vitality which no reader of Narayan can fail to notice. The main landmarks – River Sarayu, Mempi Hills, Lawly Extension, Market road appear in all these three novels.

Rivers are considered sacred in India and a dip in the holy waters of a river is supposed to purity both the body and the soul. The flowing water of a river is an accepted symbol of purification and purification and
spiritual cleaning. River Sarayu is the most prominent landmark of Malgudi. The river and its two banks are heart and soul of the town. In *The Dark Room* the river Sarayu, is described beautifully. “Sarayu was flowing in the dark, with a subdued rumble. Summer was still a few weeks ahead and now the water was fairly deep in some places though in a few weeks time the river would shrink to a thin streak of water furrowing the broiling sands”. (*Room*, 115)

Savitri plans to down herself in the river at the dead of night. She sits in the banks of Sarayu not knowing where to go, finally plunges into the river to end her life. “What was the use of sitting on the river – step with a wandering mind and wasting one’s time”. (*Room*, 119) Thinking so Savitri rose and stepped down into the river. “She stood in the water and prayed to her God on the Hill to protect the children”. (*Room*, 120 - 121) Mari rescued Savitri and dragged her to the opposite bank.

In *The English Teacher*, the river Sarayu plays a major role in reveling the inner emotions of the inhabitants of Malgudi. When Krishana becomes disgusted with the life he decides to take a plunge in the river which gives him ‘a new lease of life, I walked nearly four miles down the bank. Before turning back, I selected a clean spot, undressed and plunged into water. Coming on the shore and rubbing myself with a towel, I felt I had a a new lease of life”(*Teacher*, 10). Krishana and his wife Susila have “a most exhilarating walk down the river”(*Teacher*, 55). The day Susila
caught typhoid fever she insisted that she must wash her feet in water. Washing herself for the last time in the river acquires a ritualistic significance. Krishna is able to communicate to his dead wife in the garden home beyond Sarayu and hence discovers a transcendental world. When a distinguished visitor came to the town, “… The President and the members let him up stairs of the tower in the municipal building from there pointed out to him with great pride Sarayu cutting across the northern boundary of the town glistening like a scimitar( Teacher, 142)

The banks of River Sarayu, palys a major role in Waiting for the Mahatma. Malgudi was to have a the honour of receiving Mahatma Gandhi. In the huge gathering sitting on the sands of Sarayu, awaiting the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, Sriram was a tiny speak”( Mahatma, 15). The bank of the river sarayu now accommodated a sea of people who gathered to listen to Mahatma’s speech. “The crowded was so great that Sriram for a moment forgot where he was, which part of the town he was in and but for the noise of the birds would not have remembered he was on the banks of Sarayu”. (Mahatma, 21) Mahatma Gandhi Stayed in a small hut in the slums of Malgudi. “Gandhi occupied a hut with a small entrance facing the river sand….” (Mahatma, 34) Thus river Sarayu has a symbolic significance in all the three novels. Without Sarayu, Narayan’s novels are in complete. The unity of the plot and the theme in these novels mainly depends on his river, which is an integral part of Malgudi landscape.
The Mampi Hills is one among the major landmark of Malgudi. The Mempi hills is called “Mountains” in *The English Teacher*. (60) and are surrounded by Mempi Forest. The children also have a discussion about the Mempi Forest. “Who can tell me where Forest is? (Teacher, 136) Sriram has visited the Mempi hills years before. He visited Mathieson Tea plantation to paint the ‘Quit – India’ massage on its gate – post having also met the British owner, “a seven – feet figure with a red face and sandy hair”. (Mahatma, 74) The most glaring discrepancy regarding location occurs in *The English Teacher*. In all the other novels, the Sarayu river, which has its source in the Mempi Hills flows to the north of Malgudi. Infact, in ‘The English Teacher’ itself, Krishna reminds his wife, “Lawly Extension is south and this river north of the town, we are going to Extension on business”. (59) But when they reach new Extension, which is further down south, they see “beyond it all the blue outlines of Mempi Mountains” (65) and this leaves the reader wondering whether the Mempi hills have shifted from north to south.

Several streets and lanes which branch of from the Market Road both north and south figure repeatedly in these novels. Vinayak Mudali Street, Kabir Street, North Street, Ellamman Street and Grove Street branch off form the Market Road. “Mari turned his steps from the crowded Market Road, Vinayak Mudali and Grove Streets…” (Room , 124) Krishna and Susila during their search for the house visited market road and its streets.
We were now in the Market Road”. (Teacher, 53) Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma* lives at 14, Kabir Street which is behind the Market Road. “an old teacher of his and the pawnbroker lives in the Market Road”. (Mahatma, 5) Near the river is the Sarayu Street, “a coveted spot in the town.” (Teacher, 23) where Krishna lives in a perfect domestic felicity for so short a time.

The Lawley Extension named after sir. Fredrick Lawley is one among the major landmarks of Malgudi Neel Bagh – the palatial house of Mr. Natesh, the Municipal chairman is situated in the Lawley Extension. “Massive gates… of cast iron patterned after the gates of Buckingham palace”. (Mahatma, 28) Mr. Natesh’s plans to house Mahatma Gandhi in it are, however, frustrated when a great man announces his decision to stay in the sweeper’s colony. Krishna, the ‘English Teacher’ is not so lucky when he goes in search for a house. He omits “Lawley Extension because it was expensive”. (Teacher, 23). Equally unlucky is Mari, the thief who made a profitless excursion through Lawley Extension. “His voice rang through the broad silent streets of Lawley Extension”. (Room, 124) Lawley Extension was at one time the southern most Portion of the town. But we learn in ‘The English Teacher’ that “about five years ago, under the new scheme, the extension developed further south…” (Teacher, 56) Krishna’s friend Sastri is chiefly responsible for the growth of ‘New Extension’ which branches from the Lawley Extension. Krishna and Susila visit New Extension and the
last house in the cross – road. Susila goes to the lavatory and finds difficult to come out. She feels sick and disgust because the lavatory was unattended for a long time. She has a fatal encounter with the fly, which ultimately kills her. There is apparently a ‘South Extension’ also Savitri’s house is in the Extension. “The lights are out in our house in the South Extension”.  

(Room, 44)

The town has two high School and a number of Elementray Schools. Savitri children studied in the Elementary School, “The clatter of one O’clock bell rang from the Extension Elementary School…” (Room, 6-7) Sriram was educated in the Higher Elementary School near Kabir Street as mentioned in Waiting for the Mahatma. (4) There is “That baby’s (sie) School in the next devote himself in the end.

There is also a college – Albert Mission College where Krishna works as a English Lecturer. The best restaurant in Malgudi is the Bombay Anand Bhavan located in the Market Road. Krishna and Susila visited this restaurant during their search for a house, “Family room upstairs, with a wooden, marble topped table and four chairs”. (Teacher, 53) Sriram visited this restaurant often. “When evening came he visited the Bombay Anand Bhavan and ordered a lot of sweets and delicacies and washed them down with coffee”. (Mahatma, 12). Malgudi also has cinema halls as described in these novels.
“Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped theatre – the palace Talkies – which simply brushed aside the old corrugated – sheet – roofed Varity Hall, which from time im–memorial had entertained the citizens of Magudi with tattered silent films”. (*Room*, 26 – 27)

Ramani takes his wife Savitri for a Tamil film to the ‘Palace Talkies’. On another occasion Ramani takes the children to ‘Laurel – Hardy’ show and Shanta Bai to ‘Ramayana’ to the same theatre. Krishna takes Susila to the theatre to see a Tarzan film – gesture aimed at patching up their first quarrel. “Tarzan at variety Hall: (Teacher, 50) By 1942, One more theatre has come up”. “….there is the regal Picture palace and seeing the latest ‘Tamil film here is an essential part regal Picture palace and seeing the latest Tamil film here is an essential part of sriram’s unruffled, quiet existence”. Before he meets Bharathi (*Mahatma*, 12)

The town Malgudi has its own recreation centre like clubs. Ramani of *The Dark Room* is a member of one of the clubs. It is here that Krishna of *The English Teacher*’ meets the college principal Mr. Brown. Banks and Fund officer are also there in Malgudi. Ramani of *The Dark Room* is the local manager of the branch of Englandia Insurance Company. There is a fund officer which makes payment to Sriram’s grandmother in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. 
Temples have a great importance for Indian and their way of life. The Spiritual needs of Malgudi are well – serve by about half – a – dozen temples. Krishna’s wife Susila prays devotedly, like an ideal Hindu wife, at the temple and the household shrine. Immediately after Susila’s fatal encounter with the fly during the house – mounting expedition, the couple visits the small, newly built Srinivasa temple at the New Extension. The old women in the temple says, “He (the God Srinivasa) grants all your boons and blesses your efforts”. (Teacher. 63) Krishna prays, “God bless the child and protect her” and thinks “It is God’s infinite grace that has given me this girl’. (Teacher. 66) Savitri disgusted by the behavior of Ramani leaves the house she was employed to keep the old Subramanya temple tidy. She prayed God for the welfare of her children. She cleaned the temple and also did some gardening. “The temple has been built fifty years before by a local philanthropist, and dedicated to Subramanya, the pea-cock enthroned god, the young son of Shiva”. (Room, 176).

Savitri’s visit to the temple possibly influence her decision to resume her suties as wife and mother. Malgudi environs are not less important than Malgui proper and they also provide the setting for these novels. Most of these are beyond Sarayu river, to the north. Immediately beyond Nallappa’s Grove are Sweeper’s huts, “Just novels, together with rags, ten – sheets, and shreds of coconut matting… with scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust” (Mahatma, .23) When Gandhiji
announces the decision to live here, the huts get a surprise face – lift almost overnight. On the other bank of the river is the cremation ground, “a forlorn walled area which Krishna enters by a small door on its southern wall”, when Susila’s bear is brought in (Teacher, 106). It is here that the great drama of the sudden rival of Sriram’s granny occurs when ‘the old women’s body stirs as the pyre if lit’. (Mahatma, 34).

A garden with a pond full of blue lotus and lined with casuarinas trees and with a ruined shrine on one side plays an important role in The English Teacher. This symbol of the lotus pond with a garden and a ruined temple is a unifying factor. The garden is separated from Malgudi by the river Sarayu. This garden represents the ‘green heaven” for Krishna. (Teacher, 154)

“Narayan’s also of the archetypal symbol of the garden – lotus, pond – temple while absorbing its mystic significance, as a symbol of initiation, transformation, transcendence and self – renewal, through the protagonist’s participation in a symbolic world by images of beauty, creativity, timelessness and divinity, reveals his talent for original experimentation. (Naik. 131)

The Malgudi railway station is well portrayed in ‘The English Teacher’. Krishna was waiting in the railway station for the arrival of his wife and child. “I was pacing the little Malgudi railway Station in great
agitation” (Teacher, 30) “Why couldn’t they make these railway carriages of safer dimensions? It ought to be done in the interests of welfare in India” (Teacher, 30) Observes Krishna in the Novel. It is also described that “The train stops for seven minutes” only in the Malgudi railway station (Teacher, 31).

Malgudi has a central jail too. Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma is been put in the central jail. Bharathi says Sriram that she too is going to the jail regarding Quit – India movement with Gandhiji. “Bapu has also given me instruction as to how I should occupy my time in jail”. (Mahatma, 93). The three novels taken into consideration clearly portray that Malgidi has a viable existence in the geography of Narayan’s imagination, which recreates the town and its environs successfully for the reader.