Analysing the works of Narayan one probably would not fail to trace a parallelism maintained between the author's choice of a subject matter and its subsequent placement against a milieu well-known for a characteristic placidity of its own. Yet such placidity or remoteness persists in the bulk of his works not without an intrusion or environmental variation. Despite the author's assertion of himself being only a story-teller as recorded by interviewers or editors one might as well come to find out a few sociological changes that he himself has felt, seen or experienced within the limits of his religion and family mentioned earlier. Referring to such perspectives, as noticeable in his works, P.S. Sundaram affirms:

True to the Hindu notion that one must not set too much value on the things of this world, and must at short notice be prepared to shake it off, character after character in his novels tries in a crisis just to run away—Swami, Chandran, Savitri, the headmaster in the English Teacher, Jagan. But in the end they return, because it is not easy to run away and wisdom consists in accepting the world and making the best you can of it.
If literature is meant to enlarge life by equating it with a social reality, in Malgudi novels and short-stories the author intends to establish the values of an Oriental, or putting it more literally, an Indian Hindu home-life, which perhaps he takes not only as imperishable or time-tested phenomena, but a part of the social reality as formulated in his works. The nature of such social reality is exclusively concerned with middle class family life. The author himself being an ardent believer in the Joint family system holds family as the nucleus of all social interactions or activities and as such, comes to conclude, how any kind of social harmony is feasible only when a family life is set in order. Thus a strong adherence to maintaining a family life based on faith, love or understanding forms the initial concept of sociological balance or harmony in his works.

Besides Narayan appears as more of a moral analyst than a social realist whose sole concern is to delineate the destiny of man. Such a proposition perhaps is a part of his understanding of religion or righteousness as depicted in his works. As life is taken as an incidental phenomenon, man is supposed to discharge his duties as per the established code of conduct and any deviation from the same, as Narayan observes, would incur a loss for him, either moral or material. R.S. Singh observes,
He is chiefly concerned with the analysis of the character of the individual as he lives in the world. 4

In view of such impressions more or less the fictional work of the author might be judged in its socio-cultural proposition. The bulk of his works, ranging from 1935 with the publication of the first novel Swami and Friends up to the latest one Grandmother's Tale (1992), could as such be more relevantly studied keeping them at par with sociological changes operating in both pre-Independence and post-independence era. In all these narratives he seems to have emerged more as an ideational visionary than a down-to-earth rationalist. There is, as such, a quintessential triumph of the ideational over the real or, in other words, persistence of a concept of evolution versus sporadic intrusion of an idea of progress that determines the ultimate truth or reality of his vision as a novelist.

Narayan strongly believes how inspite of a steady deterioration in traditional joint family system, parent-child relationship or marital understanding, the average Indian could not part with an inherent faith in family ties, which the author takes as the crux of Indian social life. Notwithstanding Chandran's reticent departure from home or parents, Raju's open confrontation with the unchanging morals prevailing in a middle-class Hindu household represented or reminded by a mother, uncle or even a taxi driver, Mali's blind
self-surrender to a westernised life of profligacy or Tim's defiant way of leaving home with spouse, the prodigal always 'backs' home—if not exactly home in all cases yet to an ultimate sphere of strategic self-realisation that is literally based on the age-old values of a Hindu family life. Chandran and Tim return home and are reconciled to their parents or guardians, Mali is arrested for breaking the prohibition laws, yet not without the sanction of a father who still expects the prodigal would improve or take over the paternal business. Raju, on the contrary, has nowhere to go, hence circumstantially makes himself the guardian of a cosmic or universal human family ultimately sacrificing himself for protecting it for good.

By way of treating such characters, events or situations as parts of a placid Eastern habitat, the author probably comes to interpret the varied socio-cultural changes more in terms of the Deterioration theory than the Cyclic or Linear directions. The social philosopher-author's affinity with the Deterioration factor probably has been more in vague owing to the moral analyst's preference for establishing the concept of evolution that the latter assiduously attempts to keep in-tact. In novels such as Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert, The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi and The Vendor of Sweets or in short stories like A Horse and Two Goats, The Axe, Lawley Road and Half-a-rupee Worth, the Cyclic or Linear theories not merely appear to coincide with the Deterioration
factor, all these rather appear to have been socio-artistically juxtaposed with an episodic triumph of destiny in the treatment of a plot or situation.

In other words the people of Malgudi or of a growing milieu keep on adjusting themselves with the inherent sacredness of a social set up, the sacredness that spells out the essence of secularism, over and above 'a Hindu secularism' in his works. V.S. Naipaul affirms,

I did not lose any admiration for Narayan; but I felt that his comedy and irony were not quite what they had appeared to be, were part of a Hindu response to the world, a response I could no longer share. And it has since become clear to me—especially on this last visit, during a slow rereading of Narayan's 1949 novel, Mr. Sampath— that, for all their delight in human oddity, Narayan's novels are less the purely social comedies I had once taken them to be than religious books, at times religious fables, and intensely Hindu. 5

To a Hindu an individual bereft of any kind of relationship with society could never make himself a self-complete entity. He as such is subordinated to the group or community he belongs to, and has, as such, no identity of his own beyond it. Such a speculation probably prompts Srinivas to
withdraw from the vagaries of a world of commerce or prompts Jagan to accept

"a calm renunciation which Hinduism prescribes........ That act of renunciation implies an ordered, continuing world."  

Such is perhaps the spirit of secularism or equilibrium maintained in Narayan's view of sociological changes as depicted in his works. Hence Vasu, the modern 'rakshasa' dies a self-invited death, Mali is compelled to undergo 'a dose of prison-life', Raju has no option other than accepting the dictates of a rural community, Srinivas locates a 'balance of interest' maintained in all things in life or Margayya prefers to occupy, once again, his place under the same banyan tree wishing to set off his career anew. Such is the crux of Narayan's sociology at work in all his narratives. Malgudi, like Hardy's Casterbridge or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, could survive all kinds of characters— a microscopic presentation of India which, as H.M. Williams visualises,

is full of buffoons, eccentrics, knaves, prostitutes, lechers, adulterers, money-grubbers, drunkards and would-be gangsters.  

Besides there have been foreign returned youngsters, ex-criminal turned to holy men, chastened onlookers of life or
even a few far-sighted financiers who could not part with an ultimate target of domestic harmony. Dr. Rann has to be ousted from Malgudi, the stereotyped-yet-ever-sanctified 'miniature India, following the intense psychic torture he brings to a devoted spouse. The moral analyst's purpose has consistently been to keep his locale free of obtrusion of any kind leading to prevalence of evil or anarchy in the Indian sense of the term. Probably for this reason the concept of religious determinism eventually comes to overtake the concept of economic determinism in most of his works. Here one may conveniently accept the former as an integral part of the idea of evolution that the author has attempted to project throughout.

Thus sociological changes, as spelt out by him, are more or less sporadic phenomena in or around Malgudi that the author intends to set as an archetypal model before his own people, who as such could not chalk out a decisive code of conduct for themselves, vacillating between a craze for imitation and an abrupt sense of reality or contemporaneity both before and following Independence. Raja Rao, in view of social changes operating in the sub-continent, affirms in one of his interviews:

The change is obvious..... What I deplore is the crumbling of traditions. The old institutions are dying and there is nothing new to take their place...... of course traditions are living, moving—they are
enriching themselves all the time. They have
to or they remain mere conventions which are
very rigid. Traditions have to adapt and
change with time. But this new hunger for
change is something which we must experience.
We will probably reject it and then go back
to the old traditions. I am sure the
traditions will come back in a much stronger
way.8

Probably like Rao's, there is a hint in Narayan to return
to tradition. Elsewhere in the same interview in connection
with East-West encounter, Rao offers a more definite view of
religion that perhaps he has experienced:

It is basically about my theory of
Dharma..... when you are right with yourself,
you are right with the world.9

Narayan wants to establish his view of life in a manner similar
to that of Rao, but with a difference. He treats his characters
and situations both from the perspectives of the theories of
Dharma or righteousness, and Karma or destiny, instances of
which one may trace in his works. Just before leaving for
Kashi, the ever-devoted aunt of Raman does not forget to give a
bit of her mind to her nephew, for whose sake she is leaving
home for good:
"You see, on Fridays, I usually drop a ten paisa coin into the money-chest kept at the temple. Never failed even once these thirty years since I came to this house to look after you. That God protects us, remember. You may put the coin in whenever you pass that way; otherwise, you may tell our neighbour to do it for you."\(^{10}\)

In similar direction Rosie, on hearing from Raju the act of forgery committed by the latter, does not seem to support him at all, on the contrary, in a precisely indifferent tone she rushes in to justify his imprisonment as part of destiny that befalls him at the moment:

"I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is Karma. What can we do?"\(^{11}\)

The philosopher-author perhaps tries to juxtapose the theories of 'Dharma' and 'Karma' as parts of the Hindu view of life thus converting his works into a fable of Hindu sociology. Both the theories, as such, come to coincide with one another in Narayan’s depiction of a character or situation, which he seems to have diligently utilised for reminding the people of India as to how much they owe to their cultural heritage of the past. He attempts to explain or justify how only by means of reviving the values of antiquity, as revealed in his attitude to Dharma or righteousness, the Indian everyman could overcome the
limitations of Karma or destiny (or nemesis?) that has befallen a Mr. Sampath, a Raju or a Vasu—each of whom stands for an average Indian in the bulk of his works. Though himself averse to any kind of critical or sociological speculation being imposed upon his narratives, Narayan offers a world of men and events that eventually pass through a balance of interest in the Hindu sense of the term. R.S. Singh concludes,

Narayan's view of life is essentially Hindu view. He seems to be guided by the statement made in the Gita: 'Dharma protects those who protect Dharma and Dharma destroys those who try to destroy Dharma.'

Thus one comes to pity his protagonists whose calculations ultimately fail in the marathon of money making or love making, for all these are treated only as passing phases in view of 'the balance of interest' metaphysically maintained or regulated as part of the author's Hindu notion of life. He defines his social awareness in a manner that sounds like the inner voice of the Vedic civilisation flourishing in India since time immemorial. One might, in this context, identify the vision of the moral analyst—author with that of Srinivas while the latter is absorbed in a state of contemplation:

The whole of eternity stretched ahead of one; there was plenty of time to shake off all follies. Madness or sanity, suffering or happiness seemed all the same.... It did n't make the slightest
Taking the passage into consideration, Narayan's treatment of sociological changes helps one understand his innate faith in maintaining a metaphysical rigidity of the spirit of Indianness, which he attempts to establish throughout. The references made to various theories of sociological change, as defined and explained in connection with his novels or short stories earlier, more or less provide a background to the author's own sociological treatment of theme or characterisation. In other words, such theories help in building up Narayan's ideas of sociological changes in Hindu-Indian context—a treatment or idea that has rather been reared in the direction of Deterioration principle or the mode of religious determinism as mentioned earlier. Unlike Naipaul who witnesses a catastrophic end of the Indian Hindu civilisation, Narayan visualises, prophesizes or even comes to feel, experience and assert a timeless quality of the same, which he astutely sums up in an interview with the American press-reporter:

Most Indians pray and meditate for at least a few minutes every day, and it may be one of the reasons why, with all our poverty and struggle, we still survive, and are able to take a calm view of existence.


9. Ibid.


