Chapter - Five

The Institution of Family in Malgudi
--- ooo0000 ---

The joint-family is generally supposed to be a characteristic peculiar to the Indian way of life. Though 'it represents a way of life that is gradually being lost',¹ to a novelist like Narayan whose interest lies in studying the variety and complexity of human relationships, the institution still holds immense possibilities. William Walsh considers Narayan's novels remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated in them.² For instance: that between son and father; daughter and father in Swami and Friends, the Financial Expert, the Vendor of Sweets, the English Teacher; between brother and brother; son and parents in the Bachelor of Arts; between grandmother and grandson in Waiting for the Mahatma and between aunt and nephew in the Painter of Signs.

Narayan felt that the joint-family is almost a rage in academic circles in U.S.A.³ He has been asked to define it. Himself being a member of joint-family Narayan is at ease and replies: 'You see it is like this - a father, mother and sons and then the sons and their families - all under the same roof.'⁴ Narayan stresses the advantages of the joint-family whenever he has a chance.

3. cp. His, "My Dateless Diary" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, p.73 (Chapter: In Chicago, under: 'In Professor's Midst')
4. Ibid. (under: More Joint than Food), p.107
To the Indian novelist in English the joint-family must serve as the strong instrument to mirror the Indian way of life. Narayan seems to be won over by its advantages, when he says: "Rajam was less than twenty but managed the housekeeping expertly and earned my mother’s praise. She got on excellently with my brothers. This was one advantage of a joint-family system – one had plenty of company at home. Yet with all the group life there was still enough privacy for me and my wife."¹

Narayan’s novels deal with the system of joint-family and the attendant advantages: In the two-hundred year-old house near that of Srimam lived six noisy families.² For the Muhurtham of the lawyer’s office there was a large gathering. The lawyer’s father told Raman that the people so gathered where neither outsiders nor guests. They were members of the same family – six brothers, nephews, grandchildren – all living together.³ Srinivas found domestic duties an extra burden. All along in the joint-family home they had been looked after by others; and he had no occasion to view his wife as a sole dependent. But now he found he was violating some principle or other of domestic duty.⁴ Ravi’s father was sorry as he could not offer anything to his guest, Srinivas. He remembered how they used to treat about fifty guests royally. He is aware it was a mistake of his father to have left their old house in the village.⁵

But Narayan is aware that the Indian joint-family, like many other social institutions, is in a melting pot. True, owing to slow and insufficient industrial development, the forces of urban society have not penetrated rural society.

1. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.39 (11th August, 1974).
2. WM - p.4
3. PS - p.31 (27 Jun 76)
4. MS - p.36
5. MS - p.117
to the same extent as in the U.S.A. or Great Britain.¹ But
the new occupations created by urbanisation and industrialisa-
tion have tempted people to sever themselves from the joint-
family. Narayan deals with the severe stress and strain
through which the traditional pattern of Indian family is
passing.

The traditional family is breaking up not so much
as a result of personal animosities but owing to 'the centri-
fugal impact of the new socio-economic changes in the coun-
try.'² This can be seen in the Bachelor of Arts, the English
Teacher and the Man-eater of Malgudi where Chandran's father
and uncle, Krishna and his parents, Nataraj and his cousins -
all separate.

However, points of conflict in a joint-family are
also not rare. These may be the result of non-acceptance of
the roles assigned to members or failure to accommodate devia-
tions from the traditional pattern in the behaviour of some
members. What happens in India must happen in Malgudi. It
is because of the presence of a commonly acceptable old member
of the family that there is co-existence: Margayya's house
is the result of dividing the single house from the street to
the backyard. For, after the death of the old father, the
brothers, their wives and children all fell out. Partition
came after litigation.³ All the four brothers of Nataraja's
father with their wives and children numbering fifteen had
lived under the same roof for many years. It was the old
pattern grandmother of Nataraj who had kept them together
acting as a cohesive element. With her death the unity of the
family was gone.⁴

1. cp. Akshaya R. Desai, "Introduction to Rural Sociology
   in India" - The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics,
   Bombay, p.39.
2. cp. A.V. Krishna Rao, "The Indo-Anglian Novel and the
3. PE - p.8
4. MM - 7
Narayan summarises through his novels the trend towards the disintegration of the joint-family. Small families slowly take the place of the earlier big families - some of the Malgudians are sad and some welcome the change: Jagan remembers sadly how his brother had cut all contact with him after the division of their father's estate. Nataraj's cousin lived four streets away from him. She hated Nataraj for staying in his ancestral home which came to his father at the time of division of property. The cousin never forgave Nataraj's family though the division was in his father's time. Nataraj's father resolved to break-up the joint-family in the interest of peace. Their new household consisted of grandauntie, father, mother, Nataraj and his two sisters. Daisy's was a large joint-family consisting of numerous brothers, sisters, uncles, sisters-in-law, grandaunts and cousins. Of this population, fifteen were children. Practically there was no privacy. Somehow, everything in the joint-family repelled Daisy, as she did not so much like common living. Krishna had half a suspicion that his elder brother left for Hyderabad to avoid the painful scenes at home which occurred owing to the idiosyncrasies of his mother and the haughty disposition of the daughter-in-law. Krishna remembers how helpless his brother was then.

In Malgudi, slowly but surely, the members of the joint-family are aware of their responsibilities as husbands and fathers and even among elders the futility of continuing the joint-family is realised owing to the changes in the socio-economic life: Srinivas is past thirty seven with a family of his own. But his elder brother, a lawyer, looked after the entire family without making any distinction.

---

1. VS - p.147  
2. MM - p.5  
3. MM - p.9  
4. PS - p.44 (5 Sept 76)  
5. PS - p.45 (5 Sept 76)  
6. BT - p.30  
7. BT - p.76
elder brother therefore suggests to him to think of doing something for his direct dependents so that they would not feel that they are unwanted. Within twenty-four hours Srinivas sat in the train for Malgudi after sending his wife and son to his parents. Krishna's father-in-law suggests that Krishna should settle his family in the place of his work leaving his parents in the village. Krishna's father has his concurrence in this matter. To help Krishna set up his family, his mother is willing to come and stay with him for a few weeks. Margayya gave Balu one of the houses he had acquired for setting up a family independently although Margayya's wife did not much like the idea. The idea was to make Brinda happy. Balu was eighteen years old and ought to look after himself with a girl to manage the household for him. Margayya wanted to have this arrangement before Balu asked for it.

In spite of this tendency of the joint family to break-up, Narayan highlights the strong sense of kinship in an Indian family: The families of Margayya and his brother are not on speaking terms but they are next-door neighbours and share a well. In moments of special joy or sorrow each of them feels the need for the other.

*     *     *     *     *

Narayan, who has his roots both in family and religion provides religion with a place of preeminence in the Indian families he depicts in his novels: Raman's Aunt lived a religious life all though and never missed a single evening's discourse in the temple. It was the habit of Chandran's.

1. MS - pp.12-13  2. ET - p.17
3. ET - p.19  4. FE - p.156
5. PS - p.31 (22 Aug 76)
mother to sit in the back verandah turning the prayer beads in her hands. Her lips uttered the holy name of Sri Rama. She never let a day go without prayer. At each day break, Ragu, in the presence of his father, washed himself at the well, smeared holy ash on his forehead, stood before the framed pictures of gods hanging high up on the wall and recited all kinds of sacred verse in a loud, ringing tone. When the east glowed, Nataraj sat for a moment on the sand reciting a prayer to the Sun to illumine his mind. Sastri is bent upon performing the Satyanarayana Puja on a particular day.

In such a religious atmosphere the concept of sin has its strong grip on the members of the family: Savitri has the consolation that she has not committed many sins and that she has performed her daily pooja without fail.

Hindus are trained in non-violence. Here is what Narayan says: 'Once a year on a certain date the image of Ponni Amman was taken out. Goats and hens were sacrificed at a mud altar in front of the image late at night. When Grandmother noticed a goat tethered to any lamp post nearby, she closed all the wooden shutters...'

Naturally, in the novels one gets an echo: Nataraj was brought up in a house where they were taught never to kill. Even swatting the flies had to be done without the knowledge of the elders.

Then there is the concept of 'pollution'. Ignorance has its sway: Sriram's Granny refuses to pollute herself by sitting on the canvas as that is some kind of leather

1. BA - p.12
2. BA - p.44
3. TG - p.11
4. MM - p.5
5. MM - p.11
6. DR - p.102
7. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.32 (23rd June, 1974).
8. MM - p.67
probably cow-hide, in her opinion.¹ Raju's mother looked anguished for a moment wondering how she was going to accommodate a 'Rosie' in her home.²

Breach of this rigorous convention has its effect: Jagan's brother spoke of Jagan in anger and shame after the Mali-Grace episode. Jagan was never invited for his father's anniversaries.³

Narayan attempts a scientific explanation and seems to support a deep-rooted practice such as this: Ambika turns down Jagan's suggestion to her to pretend that she was not in the month. In an orthodox household with all the pujas and the gods a menstruating woman had to isolate herself as the emanations from her person were supposed to create a sort of magnetic defilement and for three days she was fed in a far-off corner of the house and was unable to move about freely.⁴

But Malgudi, the prototype of the Indian way of life is also changing. Hindu religious musts and conventions are slowly vanishing: With difficulty Jagan controlled commenting that an orthodox Hindu woman would never clip her hair as Grace had done.⁵

But times have so changed that Jagan is forced to accept Grace as his daughter-in-law. Mali had proved that there was no need for ceremonials, not even the business of knotting the 'thali' around the bride's neck. Nothing, no bonds or links or responsibility.⁶ The priest officiating at the funeral rites of Sriram's Granny asks Sriram to shave

1. WH - p. 12  2. TG - p. 124
3. VS - p. 148  4. VS - p. 171
5. VS - p. 99  6. VS - p. 182
off his moustache and his head, which the shastras make compulsory. But Sriram emphatically declares that he would not shave his moustache nor his head. The priest realises that modern life makes it difficult to follow all the rules and takes shelter under the same shastras which say that it is wisdom to accept what has come to pass.¹

* * * *

Marriage in India creates not only a social contract but also a stronger religious contract. Both the husband and the wife have obligations to each other. Narayan's characters live up to this ideal: It is the view of Raju's mother that living with the husband is not easy as modern girls believed, for he would not be conquered by powder and lipstick alone. Falling at the feet of the husband was the only go for a woman.² The landlord of Srinivas counsels Srinivas's wife never to leave her husband's side whatever happens.³ Rosie agreed with Raju's view that a good wife ought to be interested in all her husband's activities.⁴ Ramani expects his family to receive him after he returns dog-tired from office.⁵

Failure to fulfil her part of the contract is something that pricks the wife and is also unimaginable: Even when Rosie allowed Raju to make love to her, she was beginning to show excessive consideration to her husband on the hill. She was troubled that she had failed in her duty of respecting him.⁶ Rosie is conscious that she had received the goodness, comforts and the freedom Marco gave her which she had misused. She felt she had failed in the wifely duty of guarding and helping her husband whatever his way of dealing

1. WM - p.122  2. TG - p.137
3. MS - p.36    4. TG - p.107
5. DR - p.25    6. TG - p.105
with her.\(^1\) Dancing is to Marco as to many orthodox men and women of the old school, another name for prostitution. Once Rosie talks about it she has gone back on the condition on which she has entered into his contract and he feels free to repudiate her. He cannot understand how a wife can be unfaithful to her husband even once and can still be in love with him.\(^2\)

Narayan's women-characters are conscious of their other duties too: The old landlord of Srinivas flatters the wife of Srinivas for looking after the home so well. In his opinion, she is a model to the modern girls.\(^3\) Grace knows that the Hindu wife has certain duties on Friday, like having flower in the hair, washing the door-steps and decorating the threshold with white flour.\(^4\) Srinivas's wife can never think of eating before her husband eats.\(^5\) Rosie likes to eat last, after serving food to Marco and Raju, like a good housewife.\(^6\) The Mahout thought he had married a dutiful wife because she did not eat unless he was back home. Even when he was out for days, she starved, that's all.\(^7\)

Narayan's male characters know the value of developing the art of family life. They are conscious of their shortcomings and repent for that; in their own way they try to compensate for failing to perform their duties: Srinivas is unable to distinguish between potato and raw plantain served to him. He thus irritates his wife, and is also angry with himself because he does not know the art of family life.\(^8\)

---

1. TG - p.106
3. MS - p.53
4. VS - p.93
5. MS - p.38
6. TG - p.68
7. MM - p.128
8. MS - p.47
another occasion, Srinivas realises that his neglect of his wife is cause enough for her justifiable grievances. He thinks that the husband-wife relationship is the most tactile of all human relationships. Krishna persists that the headmaster had a duty towards his wife and children. Raman is aware that with a wife with her own income one had a greater responsibility to prove that one was not going to depend on her. He had to be careful not to be commented upon as being either neglectful or running after women.

There are clashes in the family when the husband sleeps over his duties: Srinivas's wife bursts into a sob asking why her husband had neglected the family and made them the laughing stock of the entire village. The headmaster's wife declares that her children are fatherless even when the father was alive, owing to his neglect of them.

Young minds at home are poisoned against marriage because of these recurring clashes: Babu is determined not to marry even if it is going to cost him his life.

The wife has to be satisfied by fulfilling her mundane wants and by being away from bad habits: Srinivas is unable to refuse taking his wife and son to cinema, which is his duty. Sampath accepts the potent advice of Srinivas regarding the former's family responsibilities. He decides to take his wife and children for a drive. Nataraj does not have the heart to deny his wife's demand for a gold necklace as that was the only demand in all the years of their wedded life. Sriram's Granny recollects how the smoking habits of her husband disturbed the even tenor of their married life.
It is the intrusion or its anticipation that throws Narayan's female characters off the gear in the routine and happy family life: Even at the mention of a woman-client, Margayya's wife became uneasy and looked sullen. It is the fear of Nataraj that if his wife sees him talking to Rangi, it would be the end of his domestic career. Srinivas's wife describes to her husband how Sampath's family life which was happy had been ruined by Shanthi, and asks him to do something about it. Seeing Sampath lost in film-making and Shanthi, Srinivas lectured to him on family ties and responsibilities.

Even in Malgudi's male-dominated families, husbands start showing consideration for their wives and their wishes: To avoid a clash between Shanthi and his wife, Sampath decides to set up two establishments as, in his opinion, that is happiness to his wife and children. Jagan is duty bound to obey the last wish of his dying wife. So, he throws away the last bit of leather at home and discontinues for life, the practice of preparing his own pair of non-violent foot-wear.

There is also an assertion of rights by the women in Malgudi. No more are they chattels and toys to their husbands: Aunt's grandfather had deserted his young wife and run away to Poona. But years after, his wife was able to corner him there while he was living in grand style with his concubine.

It is thus that Narayan meets successfully the very difficult task of making the Indian domestic life both acceptable and authentic.
Narayan aims at presenting an authentic picture of the Indian family and the human relationships therein. The central figure in the father-right Indian joint-family of the past and in the individual families of the present, is the father. All authority flows from him. He is much feared and often is respected forcibly. Even young Narayan says: 'I felt nervous at the sight of my father - he looked forbidding and I was cowed by his tone and by the spectacles through which he glared.'

Narayan's child-characters feel similarly: Kamala hated Ramani because he scolded her mother and made her very unhappy. Kamala could not talk to Ramani when he was angry. Savitri's throat went dry on such occasions.

This brings about the absence of a proper contact between the young and the old in the family. There is an estrangement of relations: Jagan repented how little he had known of Mali though for twenty years they had lived together. Jagan had always been considerate to Mali. He had been kinder to him after Mali lost his mother. But from that very incident, the boy had ceased to speak normally to his father.

School is the most unwanted place and studies, the worst bores for boys. Narayan's boys are no exception. But here again, fatherly authority encroaches on their liberty: Staying at home was extremely irksome for Swaminathan. But his father had forbidden him from going out till the examinations are over. He often felt he ought to tell his father

1. op. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.23 (30th June, 1974)
2. DR - p.90
3. DR - pp.24-25
4. VS - p.42
5. VS - p.44
what he thought of him. But somehow, when one came near doing it, one failed.\(^1\) With the examinations just two weeks, Swami's father seemed to have made up his mind to harass his son.... One day, Swami was piqued enough to retort: Why are you so nervous about my examination?\(^2\) Having revolted against the headmaster of the Board High School Swaminathan finds himself in deeper trouble. Any boy in India would have thought as Swami does here: If his father should hear of it he would do heaven knew what. His father would not allow him to remain in the house if he did not go to school. He might beat him. He would not go home that day or any other day. He could not face his father.\(^3\)

But such fathers are everywhere in Malgudi: Ramani orders Babu not to miss his school on any account even though Savitri confirms he is not well.\(^4\) Raju prefers to be neglected and stay at home. But his father was a stern disciplinarian. He was perhaps a snob who wanted to brag before others that his son was going to a school.\(^5\)

Swaminathan's father had his courts closed in May, much to Swami's displeasure. He is compelled to stop his loafing in the afternoon with Rajam and Mani. Instead his father asks him to read even when he has no school - a gross breach of promise.\(^6\)

In the presence of such authoritarian fathers the boys and girls naturally will be shy and lose all their individuality. Theirs is but to do and die, and not to question why! When Swaminathan lectured to Granny about cricket he had not noticed his father's presence. But now he writhed awkwardly.\(^7\) Ramani warns his children never to ask him to be

---

1. SF - p.56  
2. SF - 51  
3. SF - pp.144-145  
4. DR - p.5  
5. TG - p.23  
6. SF - p.83  
7. SF - p.128
taken out with elders - even for the cinema. At twenty one Chandran worried about parental disapproval when he wished to go to a late show. It is Ramani's philosophy that only a battered son will grow into a sound man. So he beats Babu so severely for tampering with electric lights that it is even beyond Savitri to protect him.

Sriram reacts to this sort of training, thus: Sriram is unable to prevent a cockroach from disturbing him when he is eagerly taking down a message of Subhash Bose transmitted through the radio. Finally the set is dead. Now the agonised Sriram remembers that while some youngsters could take any mechanism to pieces and assemble it again, he was brought up as a fool by his Granny and was not fit to turn even a screw.

Paternal authority builds a wall between the children and parents and the father who looks at all the doings of his sons with jaundiced eyes, thinks that he is there only to order: Even when Swami was missing, his father was not so nervous as his wife and mother were. He decided to treat Swami with some firmness and to nip this tendency in the bud. Babu was horrified at the prospect of carrying a packet to school and eating. But Ramani asks him not to contradict elders who know what is best. Balu has fled from home. His mother brooded night and day over her son and lost the taste for food. But Nargayya considers Balu as a curse as he has no regard for his father's words. Swaminathan's father dismissed in a fraction of a second, his son's request for six pies to buy a hoop. Granny and mother are both

---

1. DR - p.26
3. DR - p.47
4. DR - 45
5. WM - 100
6. SF - p.152
7. DR - p.128
8. FE - p.121
helpless.¹ Mani looked tame and unimpressive in his domestic setting. While the Bushy Eyebrows - Mani's uncle - was at home, Mani could not come out. Nobody gave Mani any money also.²

Even the wife sometimes conspires with the husband in ill-treating the children. But grannies and mothers are on the whole, ready to take up the cases of their sons: Swami's mischief has been complained against by his mother. His father therefore asks Swami to read even in the holidays. Swami is angry with his mother for carrying tales.³ Swami wants father's room for a few hours. But his mother has to ask and get it for him.⁴ Swaminathan has fever. But his father asks him to run to school. It was easier to squeeze milk out of a stone than to get permission from father to keep away from school. However, Granny and mother are on his side and ask him not to go to school.⁵

Children cannot afford to lose the sympathy of grannies: Nobody paid any heed to Granny who sat and called people to bring a lemon for her stomach ache. Though, initially Swami also turns the request down, finally he thinks of his grandmother and feels guilty.⁶

Father also is not always bad: With an unusual affability, Ramani calls his children to his room. For children it was a privilege, though rare.⁷ Swami was slowly reviving from exhaustion and nervousness. In his semi-conscious state, he mistook Mr. Nair, the District Forest Officer, for his father. He wanted to know why his father was doing such an extraordinary thing as sitting by his side.⁸ At five o'clock, when he was ready to start for the club,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. SF</td>
<td>p.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SF</td>
<td>p.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SF</td>
<td>p.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SF</td>
<td>p.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SF</td>
<td>pp.130-132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SF</td>
<td>pp.125-126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. DR</td>
<td>p.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SF</td>
<td>p.164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Swaminathan's father felt sorry for having worried his son all the afternoon. "Would you like to come with me to the club, my boy?" he asked Swami. After a long wandering Swami longed to be back home. He wished he had gone home and told his father everything. Father would have scolded him a little which would have been worthwhile because father could be depended upon to get him out of any trouble. People were afraid of him. So Babu declares his ambition of becoming a big man and working in his office day and night like his father.

However, the set up of the old family with the father as the sole authority has been in a melting pot even in Malgudi. Ripples are caused on its placid waters by the spread of education and urban influences. No more are sons handmaids of fathers: The Head Master's was a fine house in the Lawley Extension and he was the only son. But his father said such bitter things that the Head Master left home. Chandran asks indignantly why the young should be cudgelled and nose-lead by the elders. He strongly feels elders should allow the young to arrange their lives as they pleased and leave them to rise or sink on their own ideals. Ramani had never tolerated any advice from any one, not even from his father, who, when Ramani passed his matriculation had advised him to continue his studies and was told, "I know better what I must do." Chandran returns home at nine p.m. Late-coming upset his father. It was Chandran's earlier habit to enter the house from the back-door on such occasions. But now he was twenty one. To be afraid of one's parents at twenty one was losing one's self-respect.

1. SF - p.39
2. SF - p.156
3. DR - p.95
4. ET - p.166
5. BA - p.71
6. DR - p.122
7. BA - pp.11-12
The youngsters slowly gain confidence and are prepared to chalk out their future, select partners and live the way they like: Margayya could not tolerate Balu, who, by failing at his SSLC examination had brought disgrace on the family. But Balu asked Margayya not to talk nonsense. This stupifies the father for talking till now was only a one way business.¹ Mali declared one morning that he could not study any more, since he did not find studies interesting. Jagan knew that Mali had never before spoken to him in this tone. Mali seemed to have suddenly grown up.² Chandran knew he was now a full-grown adult. So he was bold enough to declare his love for D.W. Krishnan's daughter.³ The Head Master, after his B.A. was asked by his elders to study law and to rush into an office chair. But he resisted the idea as he loved children. No one could prevent him from starting a school.⁴ Raju's mother warns him to put an end to his illicit relation with Rosie. But Raju asks his mother not to interfere with what he is doing as, being an adult, he knows what he is doing.⁵ Raman thinks it is no use worrying about Aunt as he had done nothing to hurt her. He is only trying to shape his life and can't help it if she worries about things like Daisy's religion.⁶ Aunt's enquiry with Raman as to where he was going in the evenings annoyed him. He was an adult past thirty and no aunt or even a goddess could ever have the right to question his movements.⁷

There is the other change that is welcome on the part of the parents who now listen to their children patiently, mildly provide suggestions and leave decision-making to youngsters: Swami's father realises Swami's stubbornness and gets him admitted to the Board's School, after Swami's theatrical

¹. FE - p.113  
2. VS - p.29  
³. BA - p.68  
⁴. ET - p.165  
⁵. TG - p.135  
⁶. PS - p.41 (12 Sept 76)  
⁷. PS - p.41 (12 Sept 76)
exit from the Albert Mission School. 1 When Krishna ordered his daughter to obey her mother without a word he is advised not to be so harsh with her. 2 Chandran went on long rambles by the river, returned home late and sat up for an hour or two chatting with his parents. 3 Sriram's Granny watches Sriram turn twenty. She considers himself old enough to take charge of his own affairs. 4 The negotiations for Chandran's marriage with Malathi have almost failed. Chandran asks in a thick voice if father would still try and find out if something could not be done. His father assures him to find out what is wrong and would try to set it right. 5 Margayya finds out lost Balu in Madras. But Balu does not want to see any member of the family. Margayya finally makes all concessions to him to bring him home. Balu feels he has returned to a new home. 6 Chandran wants to take up an agency of 'The Daily Messenger'. Nanjundaiah, Malgudi's Barrister, and particular friend of Chandran's father, asks what happened to Chandran's plan of going abroad. Father replies that he did not like to stand in the way of Chandran if any of his propositions was sound. 7 Chandran felt quite happy that his uncle was speaking to him like an equal and was not teasing him as he used to do before. 8 The horoscopes of Chandran and Jayaram Iyer's daughter have perfectly matched. But Chandran's parents leave the whole matter for the final decision of Chandran. 9

Thus the final picture of the family with the revised relationships emerges, where everybody is everybody else's equal: Babu is too old to believe Ramani who has kept the children under the impression that Savitri has gone to her parents. 10 Balu tells his sisters that he would ask his

1. SF - p.107
2. BT - p.76
3. BA - p.54
4. WM - p.6
5. BA - p.87
6. FE - p.143
7. BA - p.128
8. BA - p.132
9. BA - p.151
10. DR - p.165
father to search for Savitri and if Ramani is angry he had decided to inform the police through his friend Chandru.\(^1\) Chandran is aware that he is getting on for twenty four - two years since he left college. But he was still leeching on his father. He knew there were people who supported a family at his age while he was unemployed.\(^2\) Susila and Krishna decide to avoid quarrels at home as they knew such quarrels affected the child's health.\(^3\)

\[
\text{**\textbf{Narayan's writings are studied in American classes as examples of Indian life.}}^4 \text{ Family is an important channel for the blossoming of the individual's personality. But the nature of the patriarchal family in India is such that the parents desire to relive their past by creating aspirations in their children which could not be realised by them. Not only are the young inspired by the old through stories of noble and successful souls but they are also compelled to listen to what they should or should not do. The result is that the elders almost resist yielding to any demand of their sons or daughters.}
\]

Here is the reaction of Swami's father to his son's list of examination stationery: In our days, slates were good enough for us. But now you want pen, paper, ink and pad to keep under the paper.\(^5\)

And then about studies: Even Chandran admonished his younger brother Seenu, for wasting his time in the morning. Chandran recollected how, when he was in the Albert Mission, he used to study for at least two hours every morning. Here is Seenu with no sense of responsibility.\(^6\)

---

1. DR - p.170  
2. BA - p.125  
3. ET - p.54  
4. cp. Narayan's, "My Dateless Diary" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, p.73 (under: In Professor's Midst)  
5. SP - p.59  
6. BA - p.22
But as Malgudi changes socially and economically, the generational wisdom by age is under strain. The difference in the outlook of this and its preceding generation creates conflict. It is thus that Jagan's concepts of marriage and morals, food and good life are shattered to pieces as Mali comes of age.

Scientific outlook tries to replace superstition and sentimentality: Nataraj appeals to Vasu not to shoot Kumar - the temple elephant. But Vasu says he feels sickened when he sees a man talking sentimentally like an old widow. Vasu admired people with a scientific outlook. Chandran who is cynical, asks his mother why she was afraid of every long hair and ochre dress she saw.

The younger generation dismisses many of the pats-on-the-back of the older generation as stories: Swami's Granny told him about her husband's calibre. Her husband frightened the examiners by answering questions within a tenth of the time that others took to do it. His answers would be so powerful that his teachers would give him two hundred marks sometimes. The old landlord of Srinivas believed that shaving off the heads and leaving a very small tuft made the people of the past generation clear-headed. Srinivas answers him saying that it is their failure to get the same amount of co-operation from barbers which has been compelling them to go from stupidity to stupidity.

Each generation is puzzled about the way of life of the other: Swami is disappointed to learn that his Granny knew nothing about cricket. He thought, the boys and men of her days spent all the twenty four hours in doing holy things. Granny recollects that in her days people hung

1. MN - p. 175
2. BA - p. 43
3. SF - p. 22
4. MS - p. 52
5. SF - pp. 127-128
portraits of gods and ancestors. But Sriram has hung only his photograph. She wonders why he does it.¹

But finally, there is both enlightenment and adjustment. The barber who cut Sriram's tuft is amused to find out Sriram without the piece of cloth under his dhoti. He understands that that was the habit of the modern generation.²

The clash of the generations at times makes each of them to lose faith in the other: Swami disqualifies his Granny from seeing or talking to Rajam as she is too old. He feels it is infinitely safe to show one's friends a sleeping granny.³ When Sriram is taken to the Bank and is asked to fill in a form he wants to know what he is doing and why. Granny quickly reacts by speaking of her generation which never asked either why or why not.⁴ Sriram has decided to leave home to dedicate himself to national service. The Mahatma asked him to obtain the permission of his Granny before doing so. But Sriram thought Granny to be too old to understand new things.⁵ Jagan is happy to learn that Mali is planning to earn Rs.2,500/- by writing a book. However he does not want to give him the money to handle as he has no belief in the present generation. Jagan thinks his generation could do no wrong with money as they had come under Gandhi's influence.⁶

William Walsh says, "The members of the middleclass chosen by R.K. Narayan have some reason for independent critical existence; but there is always a tension between this, and that deep source of power - the family."⁷ Even in Malgudi

---

1. WM - p.111  
2. WM - p.112  
3. SF - p.37  
4. WM - p.8  
5. WN - p.57  
6. VS - p.45  
the traditional structure of the family is under questioning, the freedom to the constituent members of the family is enhanced, and of this the older generation is both aware and satisfied: The Cousin said that our young men lived in a different world from ours and we must not let ourselves be upset too much by certain things they do. Though Jagan is the biggest sweet-vendor in the country, his son Mali wants to try writing. Jagan admits there are bound to be changes of outlook from generation to generation and there would be no progress without it.

Narayan treats the conflict between tradition and modernity through his depiction of the generation-gap. In most of his novels one has the three generations - granny's and aunt's belonging to the oldest; parents to the middle and the sons and daughters to the latest. The extensive spread of education, the impact of the West and urbanisation - all these widen the gap between the generations and sometimes produce comedy and sometimes, tragedy. Though Narayan belongs to the older generation, he pictures this tension between tradition and modernity "from the vantage point of skeptical detachment which is the safest antedote to sentiment."

* * * * *

1. VS - p.143
2. VS - p.46