Chapter - Ten

Problems of Urban Life in Malgudi

Narayan uses Malgudi as the symbol of growing and changing India. It therefore is a matter of literary delight to him to respond to the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation to which his Malgudi and its surroundings are subject. Dr. Iyengar observes: "Urban life in India attracts the novelist by its excitements, perversions, sophistications and violent alternations between affluence and poverty; splendour and squalor."¹ Though Narayan's Malgudi sustains on an ancient traditional culture, the novelist does not miss to recognise the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on it as he calls himself, 'a realistic fiction writer in English.'²

Here is the beginning: Krishna recollected that Kavadi was a wonderful place for one like him from the village - a street full of all sorts of shops, sewing machines rattling away, coloured ribbons streaming down from shop-fronts.³

City life has its own attractions: Kailas had settled down in his old village which was about a night's journey from Madras on which he occasionally descended in order to have a good time.⁴

Human relationships weaken; family attachment becomes feeble. This certainly displeases the people of Malgudi; The cartman complained that his son did not remember any member of the family after he went away to the

2. Narayan's, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.31 (4th August, 1974)
3. ET - p.16
4. BA - p.97
town and worked in a factory.¹ Srinivas's landlord told Srinivas that people had lost all neighbourliness in these days.² Chandran felt that the people of Madras were so mechanical and impersonal; the porter at the station had behaved as if he was blind, deaf and mute; ... the hotel man would not even look at his guest; these fellows simply did not care what happened to you after they had received your money. The 'Jatka-man had departed promptly after he received the rupee, not uttering a single word - Chandran had a feeling of being neglected ... anything was possible in this impersonal place.³

Many Malgudians cannot digest the hustle and bustle of city-life: Chandran sat on the bedstead and rubbed his eyes. He felt weary. He got up and stood looking out of the window: tram cars were grinding the road; motor cars, cycles, rickshaws, buses, 'jutkas' and all kinds of vehicles were going up and down in a tremendous hurry... Electric trains roared behind the hotel building - Chandran could not bear the noise of traffic. He returned to his bedstead and sat on it, holding his head between his hands.⁴

Narayan seems to make it clear that "Malgudi, in spite of its narrowness, snobbishness and stifling conservatism is a lesser evil than Madras with its temptations to debauchery and fraud"⁵ cannot, however, maintain its virtues for long: Raman thought that no marriages did not necessarily mean no children. He saw that the Town Hall verandah and the pavements around the market, the non-man's lands of Malgudi, swarmed with children of all sizes - a visible development in five years.... Where did they come from? Who noticed the

wedding ceremonies of their parents? Or, who were their parents?  

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The contact with industry and the attendant mobility of population towards the cities, makes life horrifying. Malgudi cannot escape narrow streets and slums: Ellaman Street which was the oldest street in the city was so narrow that any passing car almost touched the walls of the house. Keelacheri consisted of about a dozen thatched huts and dingy hovels, smoke-tinted and evil-smelling clustering together irregularly.

To get a house becomes an awful job: At the mention of houses, Srinivas pricked up his ears. He was desperately searching for a house: all his waking hours were spent on this task. As Krishna inspected the vacant houses in the east, west and south of Malgudi he thought they were meant for monkeys to live in and were designed by tuberculosis experts.

Especially to some women, adjustment with such housing conditions is impossible: Susila had been used to large sprawling home in the village and everything else seemed to her small and choking in Malgudi. Having been used to the spacious courtyards and halls of their village home, the wife of Srinivas stood speechless when she beheld her home at the back of Anderson Lane.

But Daisy an unusual fellow-feeling: She said that we should live at least for a while as millions for our population live; otherwise we will never understand our own people. It was her ultimate wish to select the tiniest hamlet

1. PS - p.47 (4 Jul 76) 2. TG - p.128
3. SF - p.75 4. MS - p.8
5. ET - p.23 6. ET - p.29
7. MS - p.35
and live in a hut. She would not want anything more than what a majority of our population have.¹

In most of Narayan's novels one sees the description of the inside of the house or room: "Raju's house with its complete lack of privacy consisting only of a pyol, a large multi-purpose room, a kitchen and a well is entirely true to our society."² In the ill-ventilated dark passage, between the front hall and the dining room, Swaminathan's grand-mother lived with all her belongings.³ Natesan's was a very narrow room with a small window.... One opened the door and stepped on the cot.⁴ Swami's room was only a corner in his father's dressing room.⁵ It was a most painful experience for Srinivas to go into Ravi's house. The single room crowded with Ravi's younger brothers and sisters, the smoke from the kitchen hanging over the whole place like December mist, the impossible heaping of boxes and bedding and clothes.⁶ Ponni lived in a hovel with an extension of thatched shed abutting on the crooked street which served as Mari's workshop.⁷ After crossing a network of stifling lanes and bylanes Chandran could see Ragavan's one-roomed house with a small bunk attached to it full of heat and smoke serving as kitchen.⁸

Modern Indian Lodge of Malgudi is like many others spread over this country: Room No.14 (of the Lodge) where Mohan lived was half-a-cubicle on the staircase landing. The cubicle was divided by a high wooden partition into Room 14 and Room 15. The room received its light and ventilation from the single window in Room 15 over the wooden partition.⁹

3. SF - p.21 4. BA - p.31
5. SF - p.3 6. MS - p.115
7. DR - p.134 8. BA - p.106 9. BA - p.66
But Malgudi wakes up to this acute paucity of housing: Rajam's father lived in Lawley Extension which consisted of about fifty neat bungalows, mostly occupied by Government officials. At one time, only those with very high incomes could have residences in Lawley Extension, but about five years ago under a new scheme the Extension developed farther south. Sampath's house was so far away from the town that all his time was taken up in going to and fro.

Narayan gives a graphic account of development of Malgudi hinting the need for more houses: Srinivas wrote the Editorial on the new housing policy for Malgudi: Plenty of labour from other districts had been brought in because the District Board and the Municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building and three or four cotton mills had suddenly sprung into existence. Overnight Malgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town with a sudden influx of population of all sorts... Women cooking food on the roadside, men sleeping on pavements became a common sight in all parts of Malgudi.

"The urbanisation of India is a legacy of the British rule. Formerly most of the Indians lived in the villages. It is the Englishmen who set up factories. The old towns were replaced by large towns like Bombay, Madras, Calcutta. Urbanisation brought to the fore the problem of slums." Genjun H. Sasaki sums up life in slums: "In slums and poverty-stricken homes there is no adequate recreation for children and no conditions to feed them enough. Moreover, their delinquent parents with constant quarrels do not.

1. SF - p.26 2. ET - p.60
3. MS - p.83 4. MS - p.26
5. op. Mahajan V.D., "British Rule in India and After" - S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1969, p.667
provide children with favourable surroundings."

Narayan's description is true to this observation: The city sweepers lived on the banks of the Sarayu. It was probably the worst area in the town and an exaggeration even to call their residences, huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin sheets and shreds of coconut matting all crowded in anyhow with scrathy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust. \(^2\)

In Malgudi public opinion is moulded against the slums: Srinivas started a regular feature entitled; 'Open Window' in his periodical. The feature stood for the abolition of slums and congestion. It described the tenements, the pigsties constructed for human dwellings in the four corners of the town by rapacious landlords. It became an enemy of landlords. \(^3\)

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Another problem Malgudi suffers from is the increasing incidence of crime, as a result of the problematic and restive urban life. References, though stray, could be had in Narayan's novels.

The circle police inspector talked to Nataraj about the crime in his area. They had a lot of cattle lifting cases but the trouble was identification when the property was traced. The criminals mutilated the animals and the case was dismissed. They had a few murders too and a certain amount of prohibition offences around the dry-belt areas. Offenders often disappeared into the jungles on Nempi and sometimes one had to camp for days on end in the forests. \(^4\)

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1. op. His, "Social and Humanistic Life in India" - Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1971, p.110
2. WM - p.23
3. MS - p.6
4. MM - p.54
The bank-manager told Sriram it was better if he carried less cash about him now-a-days with pickpockets about. Malgudi has been alive to the need for jail-reformation and law and order. This is not unaccompanied by its comical side too: The Police Inspector told Raman that the lock-up was always full as indicated by the crime-chart. The Inspector provided for Pollidol to save the criminals from bugs. A garden was also tended for their welfare. In Lawley Extension, where government and police officials lived, the constables went round with thoroughness on their beats. Mari slipped into an ill-lit conservancy lane, his ears cocked to catch the creaking of police boots. When he heard footsteps he flattened himself against a wall and stood still. Mari knew that in Ellaman Street a man could go about freely because the policemen slept on the pyols of houses or under the awnings of shop-fronts and did not get up till the morning.

There is a realistic description of the life and attitudes of criminals: Burglary was only a side occupation for Mari. He did it for the excitement it produced, for the profits of the adventure and to please his wife. Sriram was kept in the jail with a gang of men, miscellaneous criminals who were there for anything from murder down to confirmed pickpocketing. Most of them were planning what they would do at the end of their term. Some of them were planning to return again and again and spend the rest of their lives here.

A prisoner explained to Sriram how his effort to escape was foiled: They were six of them in the cell. They spun out the blanket strands raised themselves on each others shoulders, tied up the rope and climbed out. No one would

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have found them again but one of them broke the lock of a house on the way and was caught. Raman saw an old offender who attempted day-light crime even on the day he was let out and returned to the police station.

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To Narayan, another matter of literary significance in the portrayal of realistic Indian life is the changing philosophy and practice in the field of infant and adult education. Much of what he writes about this theme seems to be based on his personal experience in Indian surroundings which lends charm to his writing.

G.D. Narasimhaiah observes that few have portrayed the early schooling of the Indian child so convincingly and tenderly as Narayan has done, and that "Swami & Friends is the story of the psychological disturbance of a normal boy whose social relations are tangled owing to an insensitive system of education." Further, "A very remarkable feature of the English Teacher is the criticism it provides of the system of education in India. The author contrasts the coercive methods... with the Leave Alone System." Narayan's intentions do not seem to be clear to H.H. Annaiah Gowda who says: "No doubt there was much intellectual waste as a result of British Education but I am not sure if Narayan had this in mind while weaving his 'The Bachelor of Arts', being himself a product of that system."

1. WM - p.141 2. PS - p.45 (29 Aug 76)
The readers are introduced to the history of our educational movement: Krishna told the Headmaster that to many, a school could not be had unless a few thousands were invested in building and furniture. The Headmaster felt that multiplying our expenses and looking to the Government for support was the history of our educational movement.¹

How the cane or the overdone petting spoils the child in the Indian home is brought out: Looking to the way Balu was treated, Margayya's neighbour commented that children begotten late in life were usually petted and spoiled.² Margayya's account book was guttered by Balu. A man in the crowd said that this was the result of giving the children anything they ask. Margayya angrily slapped the uncovered seat of Balu and another man in the crowd said that if boys are not chastised they would grow up into devils.³ Raju's father taught Raju the Tamil alphabet. The modern notions of child psychology were unknown then; the stick was an educator's indispensable equipment. Raju's father quoted the proverb that an unbeaten brat would remain unlearned.⁴

That times have completely reversed certain ideas is clear: Sampath taught his children music himself because he did not believe in leaving the children to professional hands.⁵ Dr. Pal cautioned Margayya that parents are prohibited from teaching their offsprings, in all civilised countries.⁶

It is indeed a welcome sign that Narayan's characters who are teachers are conscious of their responsibilities to infants: "The Headmaster's 'Leave Alone System' of education is based on the belief that childhood is the nearest..."
human approximation to the spiritual condition and that the system could be important 'for the future of mankind' because it would 'retain the original vision' which would be ruined by the blinding 'curse of adulthood'.

There is the realisation that unnecessary expenses and empty theorising are the crux of our educational system: The Headmaster had done away with table and chair. In a corner he had a seat for visitors. The Headmaster said that in a poor country like ours one could do without luxuries. The Headmaster was certain that one would want nothing else in life by living in the midst of children. Even adults could learn a great deal watching them and playing with them. The children learnt more if they were taught while playing. Everybody talked about the game-way in studies but nobody really practised it.

Schools based on the above theory are bound to be enjoyed by the teachers and the taught: The Headmaster considered the articles made by children at school a real source of joy. In the Headmaster's school, the children could come at any time and go away when they liked. Leela was very happy when Krishna sent her to the Kindergarten so that her mind was engaged away from her mother. Leela insisted on being taken to school even on Sunday when singing, hearing stories and playing was the business. The children shrieked with joy when the Headmaster announced that he would tell stories he had made with the help of letters and pictures.

2. ET - p.152
3. ET - p.140
4. ET - p.151
5. ET - p.156
6. ET - p.136
7. ET - p.150
8. ET - p.153
But it is an irony that many do not realise the value of such an educational theory as the Headmaster's: The Headmaster could not have his own children in his school as his wife thought it was a fool's idea. Krishna is unhappy to see that his parents-in-law undid in a couple of weeks all the elaborate cultivation of character which he imagined he had been practising on the child for three years. His father-in-law said that he believed in spoiling children and his mother-in-law broke the regulated dieting.

There is, however, a reawakening: Daisy told a village mother that children must be taught correct posture early in life. The elders tried to send their children away when Daisy was speaking to them on family planning. She commanded the children to stay because she thought it was important for them more than for their elders.

Krishna is finally convinced of "the need for an Indian Educational System based on valid psychological and moral principles and compatible with indigenous wisdom." Infant-education gives him meaning for his life: Krishna thought with pride that looking after Leela was his chief occupation.

Now about education in the Indian schools, on the significant aspects of which elaborate references could be had in Narayan's novels. Narayan traces how "in India British capitalism transformed the socio-economic structure of the Indian society and further established a centralised state."
"The teaching of English received the filip at first from private sources such as mission schools... and the enrolment of the students increased... The reasons for the utilisation of English found different interpretation; Ram Mohan wanted to teach the language so as to reduce ignorance and break the Brahmin's monopoly on learning whereas Bentinck and Macaulay had in mind to create a new class of Indians... who would be upholders of the Empire."¹

Narayan's characters are aware of all these developments and air their views in testimony. The description of the school boy's life in India - in and out of the school - becomes photographic because most of what Narayan writes about schools and school-boys is based on his own experiences. "'Swami!' is only the second half of Narayan's original name and the shortened form 'Narayan', was adopted out of deference to the novelist's publishers,² 'not wanting the novel to be confused with an autobiography.'³

Though Harish Raizada considers 'Swami & Friends' as a juvenile comedy describing life in South Indian schools, C.D. Narasimhaiah does full justice to Narayan by saying that in 'Swami & Friends' is the life of all Indian school boys seen through an adult vision and registered for the first time in respectable creative writing.⁴

Narayan spells out his own views on education thus: "My educational outlook had always differed from those of my..."

References:
2. cp. P.S. Sundaram, "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India) - 1973, p.27
elders and well wishers. And after five or more decades my views on education remain unchanged... Educational theories have become progressively high sounding... but in practice the process of learning remains primitive. ¹

For this state of affairs, the parents and the teachers are responsible, to begin with: Rajam was pestered by a home-tutor for two hours a day thrice a week even during the vacation. Swami's father asked him to read even when the school was closed for the vacation. ²

The children are disappointed with their parents for the latter's inability to guide them, though it is unwarranted: Chandran felt disappointed because his father who had studied science for his BA could not solve Chandran's problems in history. ³

There are many teachers who neglect their legitimate duties: Ebnezar was asked by the Head Master to explain why sufficient portions were not covered in the First Term. The explanation was that a period a week was reserved for rambling revision, even before the portions were covered. ⁴ Krishna had not prepared even a page of lecture though he had four hours of teaching to do. So he went five minutes late to the class and dawdled over the attendance for a quarter of an hour. ⁵

The managements of schools use teachers as they like. Narayan himself suffered once when he was teaching in Chennapatna: "The Head Master sent me to a Fifth Form to handle a Physics class. When I pleaded that I was a history

1. op. His, "Reluctant Guru" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1974, p.17
2. SF - p.83  
3. BA - pp.20-21
4. SF - p.11  
5. ET - p.9
man, he brushed aside my objection and said that since the physics teacher was absent I should take on his duties and keep the class engaged. It sounded silly to me."

A character of Narayan does the same: The poet-teacher told Vasu that he taught anything the boys must learn – History, Geography, Science, English.

Many teachers hinder the development of the mental faculty of students: Ebnezar, the fanatic, was not able to answer questions posed by Swaminathan about Christianity but punished him for asking. Gajapathy advised his students to listen to him with their pencils. Those who answered questions before they were asked to, were snubbed.

Ill-treatment to students is also very common: One had to go to the drill ground after the four-thirty bell, and for three quarters of an hour, the Drill Master treated you as if you were his dog.

The attitude of teachers discourages the flowering of students' personalities: In a big college, the professors could know personally, only the most sycophantic or the most brilliant. Chandran was neither. Mohan, the poet, complained that no original work would ever be possible as long as Brown was in the Albert Mission College. Prin. Brown would permit reading before the Literary Association only his lecture-notes on Wordsworth or Eighteenth Century prose.

With such a system of education it is natural for one to get frustrated: Shantha Bai considered that it was

1. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.34 (28th July, 1974)
2. MM - p.19
3. SF - p.6
4. BA - p.25
5. SF - p.17
6. SF - p.123
7. BA - p.23
8. BA - p.48
all nonsense to say that Women's Salvation lay in education.

It is significant that the Malgudians are seriously pondering over the steps to be taken: Krishna was tempted to attack a whole century of false education. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we had been strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture feeding on leavings and garbage.2

The result is that educational canons are ignored, sometimes to the wonder of the then British in India: Mr. Brown wondered how Krishna could take up work in a children's school without primary school training. Krishna replied that he was beginning a new experiment in education,3 D. Pillai's method of teaching History conformed to no canon of education. Still he had earned a name for kindness and good humour.4

Narayan says that the whole aim of our education is to strain the faculty of memory;5 The result is not far away: A student who had not understood even a line of a poem had written down two pages about it by way of paraphrase. He did not know why he had written so much.6 Narayan did not like the idea of being taken to the orange-coloured school-building. He hated it at first sight.7 To Narayan "the best part of one's life is to be at home. That is so because all schools are deficient. Until we adopt the viewpoint of a child and reorganise our educational system, our schools will continue to repel children. They may overcome it, get used to it or resign themselves to it - but love the school, never."8

1. DR - p.61
2. ET - p.203
3. ET - p.205
4. SF - p.4
5. cp. "Reluctant Guru" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1974, p.21
6. ET - p.12
7. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.22 (16th June 1974)
No wonder, school is a hateful place to Narayan's child-characters: The teachers' voices got on Swaminathan's nerves. He was terribly bored and felt sleepy. Mani seldom brought any book to the class and never bothered about home work. He came to the class and slept bravely on the last bench... In most of the classes he stayed longer than his friends did. Swami shuddered at the very thought of school and he thought it to be a bad place. Daisy found her studies dull and lifeless. The first thing Swaminathan wanted to do after the annual examination was to use his books as fuel in the kitchen.

Recollection of his experiences in school and incorporation of the same in his novels makes the fiction of Narayan both authentic and moving: "In my boyhood, the teacher never appeared in public without the cane in hand... now-a-days, the cane being discredited has yielded place to the foot-rule, especially in 'Convent' schools." Narayan's Head Master delivered a regular quota of cane-cuts on his upturned palm in respect of absence from Drill classes.

Here are the echoes: The teachers in the Board High School were ruthless beings and missing a single class meant half-a-dozen cane-cuts on the following day. Swami was given six cane-cuts on each hand for each day of absence... He decided to leave the school... He would never go back to it as long as that tyrant was there. Within fifteen days of the schooling ceremony of Balu, Margayya heard that his son was caned almost everyday, was having his

1. SF - p.4  2. SF - p.8
3. SF - p.3  4. SF - p.66
5. PS - p.45 (5 Sept 76)  6. SF - p.64
7. cp. His, "Reluctant Guru" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1974, p.19
8. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.22 (7th July, 1974)
ears twisted by all and sundry and that even the school peon pushed him about rudely. Swami was happy to stand on the bench than being caned.

The very purpose of sending children to school often fails: Raju's father who wanted to save his son from the language of the railway trackmen had certainly not made a safer choice in sending his son to the 'one-man pyol school' as the man habitually addressed his pupils as donkeys and traced their genealogy on either side with thoroughness.

One is bound to lose interest in such schools: Swami said he did not care for the dirty school and fled from the class after being beaten heavily for his absence from the school.

The system of examination also comes in for much criticism at Narayan's hands: "The real wrecker of young nerves is the Examination System... I remember the desperate nervousness that debilitated me from January to April every year."

Likewise his characters think: Margayya felt angry at the thought of examination. They were a curse on the youth of the nation, the very greatest menace that the British had brought with them to India.

Examinations are meant to save the teachers: Krishna thought that his duty was to admonish, cajole and browbeat a few hundred boys of Albert Mission College so that they might mug up Shakespeare and Milton and secure high marks and save him from adverse remarks from his Chiefs at the end of the year.

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1. FE - p.87
2. SF - p.16
3. TG - p.24
4. SF - p.106
5. cp. His, "Reluctant Guru" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1974, p.19
6. FE - p.127
7. ET - p.1
The teachers, supervisors, clerks in schools, and examiners all have their contribution to this degeneration. When Gajapathy valued test or examination papers he never gave anybody more than forty per cent. One supervisor was drowsing in his chair; another was pacing up and down, with an abstracted look in his eyes. It was a general belief in the school that the clerk was omniscient and knew all the question papers of all the classes. Mani invested four annas in fresh brinjals and got 'valuable hints' from the clerk. The Headmaster said that worship of sports is nothing but copying the Western system of education and laughed at the fact that sportsmen are even made to pass examinations.

Of his father, Narayan says: "My father, in spite of his strict attitudes in school matters, had one very pleasant quality - he never bothered about the examination results...he had no faith in the examination system at all." Narayan's grandmother examined his slate when he returned home and remarked that they did not seem to teach him anything in his school.

Rajam - Narayan's character - puts the conclusion in a nutshell: The marks one scores in the examination is no indication of one's level of intelligence.

Some young men have false hopes about degrees. Sriram felt that those who went to colleges and passed their BA were certainly people who knew how to conduct themselves before girls.

1. BA - p.24 2. SF - p.61
3. SF - pp.52,54 3. ET - pp.152-153
5. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.35 (14th July, 1974)
6. Ibid., p.22 (16th June, 1974)
But the older generation has realised the futility of education, the way it is offered: Margayya was convinced that people can learn nothing in schools. He had no faith in our education. Boys must learn things in the rough school of life. Mali hated his lessons, syllabus and all his books. The Cousin felt that when Mali tore his books he did an appropriate thing our education being what it is. Sastri spoke of Balu as a young man whose education was deliberately suspended because his father having his own idea of education was more keen on training the young fellow in business than letting him acquire useless degrees.

Even education in sex is thought of first as bad but finally as something 'must' at the suitable age. On such a matter in the traditional and conservative Malgudi there cannot of course be unanimity of opinion: Margayya did not want Balu even to know that there was such a book as "Domestic Harmony." He made it a point that Balu did not get at the manuscript of Dr. Pal's 'Bed Life'. It was quite distasteful for Margayya's wife to know that her husband had decided to educate Balu in sex the moment his son was interested.

Narayan's approach to educational theory and practice is not pessimistic. While scattering in his novels ideas current in our country on the subject and supplementing them with his own and others' experiences, he has not lost sight of his duty as a citizen. He remembers that 'his senior uncle conducted night school for slum children for a couple of hours in the evening' and that a few years

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1. FE - p.122
2. VS - p.37
3. FE - p.151
4. FE - p.95
5. FE - p.73
6. FE - p.75
7. op. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.31 (4th August, 1974)
ago he "hoped to build a little shrine on the topmost rock of his mini-mountain, gather the village children in its corridors on an evening and teach them reading and writing and impart to them various lessons about the modern world. If every person who is educated adopted a little group and imparted to it whatever knowledge he possessed, the five hundred million population of India could be transformed in five years."\(^1\)

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Another curse of urban life which Narayan observes in India through his novels is the coming into existence of a class of 'social black sheep' thriving on the hard-earned money of the common man.

Adulteration is the first vice and it is rarely that one finds sweet vendors like Jagan, who "though not averse to making money, never adulterates the food he sells, using the purest ghee."\(^2\) A hotel-man told Sriram how difficult it was to get rice, pure food and unadulterated oil soon after independence.\(^3\) Jagan resisted the use of essences for flavouring or colouring sweets though it was easy to deceive the most fastidious customer.\(^4\) The people at Anand Bhavan used dehydrogenated vegetable oil in unlabelled tins in place of pure ghee.\(^5\)

Narayan has created the unforgettable Margayya who symbolises the people who amassed fortunes, specially after the war by way of hoarding, black-marketing and allied anti-social activities.

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1. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.40 (15th September, 1974)
2. cp. P.S. Sundaram, "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India) - 1975 - p.111
3. WM - p.150
4. VS - p.46
5. VS - p.48
A very truthful statement is the following: Learning from the Cousin that Mali was after the hoardings Jagan considered transferring the cash hoarded in the loft to a casket behind the family gods in the Pooja Room.¹

Instances of cornering goods bought somehow are not also rare: The Cousin referred to a fight at the market owing to the jaggery merchant's cornering the stock.² In Solur, the shopkeeper had stocked the best English biscuits which he had got through a friend in the army as they were supplied only to army people.³

Black-marketing, Narayan reminds, has a pre-independence origin. Jagadish dreamt of attacking the beggars soon after the country got independence for they were black-marketing spools.⁴ Nataraj knew that a dollar was equivalent to seven rupees on the black-market.⁵

Malgudi so develops that smuggled goods are sold openly: Lounging about Market Road, Raman found an arcade of some interesting little shops in an abandoned alley down the road displaying smuggled goods where the traders were strangers constantly disappearing and reappearing under new names.⁶

This is how Margayya worships money: "If I get twenty thousand rupees deposit each day and pay fifteen in interest, I have still five thousand a day left in my hands as my own."⁷ But Margayya did not lack friends such as, "the rice merchant in a certain back street who hoarded rice in a secret godown, whose frontage was stuffed with innocent-looking rag and old paper collected for the paper mills, who

1. ITS - p.55
2. VS - p.76
3. WM - p.78
4. WM - p.98
5. VS - p.58
6. PS - p.45 (11 Jul 76)
7. FB - p.160
sold rice at about a rupee for half-a-'seer' to needy people, and made an enormous quantity of money each day; the man who supplied office glue to the army and hoarded enough cash by showing a joint-stock firm with imaginary partners. There were drug stockists who did not show their stock but bargained when it was a matter of life and death to a customer... the town was reeking with money."

As years roll on, such illicit activities increase and make everybody to list them. Raman thinks over a few of them: What about the American milk powder meant for the orphans of India and sold in the black-market? What about the Government Hospital surgeon who flourished his knife like an assassin and made money and acquired the much coveted building sites beyond the railway crossing? And that wholesale grain merchant who cornered all the rationed articles and ran the co-operative stores meant for the poor?

It is proper to close this topic with what Dr. Iyengar has to say about the authenticity of Narayan's writing in respect of 'The Financial Expert' which, however, applies to all of Narayan's novels: "There 'was' three decades ago the original of Margayya whose rates of interest lured princes and professors, scientists and civil servants and made fools of them all. Narayan's art lies in giving such a financier an actuality of his own by setting him in a background as fantastic as his personality and career."

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1. FE - p.158  
2. PS - p.33 (27 Jun 76)  