Narayan's "special brand of comic criticism of our society" which does not pain though it pricks consists in the flavour of authenticity and relevance that he is able to lend to his fiction. It is for this reason that Narayan, who has neither "the earthy vitality of Anand nor the poetic symbolism of Raja Rao" preserves a unique place for himself in Indo-Anglian writing. The last pattern of life which Narayan observes in the kaleidoscope of Malgudi of his making is the growth of polity and public life in India. With detached and unbiased amusement does Narayan observe, the passive municipal administration, the politician who is active only to bag the votes, the mounting inefficiency, the proverbial red-tapism, the corrupt officials, misuse of public property - all of which make the honest and conscientious citizen to lose hope for the future and faith in the democratic set up of this country and its leadership.

Malgudi has to be content only with having its own municipality. But Narayan observes the working of the municipality which is not much dissimilar to that of the others elsewhere in the country: Malgudi had earned notoriety for its municipal affairs. The management was in the hands of a Council with a president, a vice-president and ten elected members. They met on the last Saturday of every month and battled against each other. One constantly read of disputed elections, walk-outs and no-confidence motions. Otherwise they seemed to do little by way of municipal work. However,

2. Ibid.
when a distinguished visitor came to the town, the president and members led him up the stairs of a tower in the municipal building and from there pointed out to him with great pride, Sarayu.¹

Municipal services in Malgudi are as inefficient as they are rare: Anderson Lane was forgotten by the Malgudi municipality. Carpenters, tinmiths, egg-sellers and a miscellaneous lot of artisans and traders seemed gathered there. The street was littered with all kinds of things - wood shavings, egg-shells, tin-pieces and drying leaves. Dust was ankle deep. Krishna was afraid to allow his daughter to walk there as he felt she would catch all kinds of dreadful diseases. The Lane seemed to maintain a certain degree of sanitation mainly with the help of the Sun, wind and rain.² Malgudi municipality had not extended its services to the Sweepers' Colony though they were all employed by it for scavenging work in the town.³

The awful place called Sweepers' Colony receives thorough municipal care when Gandhi pays a surprise visit to it: In the presence of Gandhi the Sweepers' Colony was cleaned by the municipal authorities who were surprised by Gandhi's unannounced visit to the Colony. All that night municipal and other employees kept working with the aid of petrol lamps. Light there was such a rarity that the children kept dancing all night around the lamps.⁴

With the expansion of Malgudi, the City has Extensions. The Lawley Extension almost reaches the fields nearby and P.S. Sundaram comments on the state of sanitation: "Hundreds of people make use for months together a lavatory in a newly-built house which has not been flushed even once during

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1. ET - pp.160-161  
2. ET - pp.160-161  
3. WM - p.23  
4. WM - p.34
all that time. Well, if one dies of it, it just can't be helped."\(^1\)

Narayan recognises that even in such Malgudi public attitude to sanitation turns towards a favourable direction: The main business of the sanitary inspector was to keep the city clean - a hard job for a man in a place like Malgudi where the individual jealously guarded his right to independent action.\(^2\) A joint petition signed by half-a-dozen neighbours of Nataraj was presented to the municipal authorities pointing out that the tanning and curing of skins should be prohibited in a residential area.\(^3\)

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The atmosphere of independent India is in Malgudi too because its women and men aspire for political leadership and various other offices: Gangu hoped to be elected to various municipal and legislative bodies and to become a Congress leader.\(^4\)

Gandhiji's arrival in Malgudi and his advocacy of triple purity has little impression on the people who follow him but in name: Gandhiji asked the people to make sure that only love resided in their hearts and no residue of bitterness of past history was there, before they could ask the British to leave India.\(^5\) As an unwavering member of the Congress Party the Municipal Chairman always wore a Gandhi cap.\(^6\)

This is how the Municipal Chairman plans to please Gandhiji: Natesh had effected a few alterations in his house such as substituting Khaddar-hangings for the gaudy chintz. He had even the temerity to remove the picture of George V's wedding and substitute pictures of Moulana Azada, Jawaharlal

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1. op. His, "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India) 1973 p.52
2. MM - p.85
3. MM - p.86
4. DR - p.20
5. WM - p.20
6. MM - p.184
Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Motilal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and Annie Besant. He had also discreetly managed to get a picture of Krishna discoursing to Arjuna on Bhagavad Gita, knowing well Gandhi's bias towards Bhagavad Gita. He had kept on the window-sill and in a few other places a few specimens of 'Charkha'. Natesh had also secured for himself a Khaddar 'jibba' and a white Gandhi cap, for his wife a white Khadi sari and for his son a complete outfit in Khaddar and on his shirt-front he had embroidered the tri-colour and a spinning wheel... He hoped that his wife would emerge in her proper make-up to meet Gandhi: He hoped his wife would have had the good sense to take away the diamond stud not only in her ears but also in their son's.¹

Bharati knew many who promised to serve India in varnished words to win over Gandhiji: Many who met Gandhi told him that they wanted to serve the country, that they were patriots wanting to shed their blood to see the British leave the country. They knew the Mahatma thought it wrong to disbelieve anyone.²

People are naturally disillusioned with such political leadership and public service loses much of its charm: Raman blamed political leadership and the educational system for the people's worship of money because these leaders who ought to mould the taste of the public and help their mind to grow were busy otherwise.³ From the stiff opposition that the scheme of building a bridge across the Sarayu met, Somu, the District Board President, concluded that public life is a thankless job.⁴ Realising that public life is too hard a life for a conscientious man, Somu, relinquished his post as President of Malgudi District Board.⁵

¹ WM - pp.29-30  ² WM - p.47  ³ PS - p.46 (4 Jul 76)  ⁴ MS - 70  ⁵ MS - p.91
A young scientist from Madras narrates to Narayan what he felt about Indian leadership: "Indian academic life is just a career, that is all; no one wants your research, they want only obedience and servility and no more. It is all a feudal attitude, when it is not the worst form of caste behaviour in practice. No one in authority is even prepared to give you a hearing. At one time, I had great hopes of doing something for our country. Now I have none."¹

In Malgudi, people are taught that it is bad to look up to the government for everything: A Congressman argued with Sen that people in India had got into the habit of blaming everything on the Government.²

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The lure of public office has created for some ambitious people a great love for being popular and winning elections. Says Narayan: "Most persons today pursue not greatness but just popularity... It would be more understandable if a man sought popularity for the sake of an election. Kissing slum children on the eve of an election is a familiar democratic practice."³

In Malgudi, as in India, social service is just a prelude to bagging votes: The gutter in Vinayak Mudali Street was wide as a channel. Once in a while, especially before the elections, the Municipal Officials came down and walked along the edge saying something among themselves. But there they left it until the next election. It was a stock cynicism for people to say when they saw anyone inspecting the drains, "They are only looking for the election votes there!"⁴

¹. Op. His, "Reluctant Guru" - Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1974, p.113 (Under: The Young Scientist's Dilemma)
². MM - p.11
⁴. FE - p.33
This sort of a training starts in the college despite elderly wrath: Natesan, the college secretary, purchased every vote with coffee and tiffin thus spending nearly seventy rupees and getting a warning from his father that rupees did not lie scattered in the village street.¹

Meeting private ends through public offices settles down into a familiar practice: Margayya watched for the next election to the managing committee of the school where Balu was put. He did not grudge the expenses. He stepped into the place of a member whom he had persuaded to retire. He felt that no expense was too great for Balu's future.²

Narayan suggests a "two-way democracy": "If I were asked to suggest a scheme for brightening up democracy, I should propose the introduction of a two-way voting system... You elect someone to some public body and there the matter ends. It is not enough. You must have an equal privilege of taking him out. This may be called de-election."³ One of his characters seems to implement it: Sastri who sensed rotting smell somewhere would warn the vote-seeker when he came for votes.⁴

Talking becomes the chief trait of a politician and holder of public office. Narayan says: "The instructor of the masses today is the man who has attained an eminent position through votes and has the energy to harangue the public every evening. This can be a very exhausting piece of work and it is well known that many eminent men are compelled

1. BA - p.7
2. FE - p.87
4. MM - p.61
by sheer stress of work to engage secretaries to draft their speeches.\(^1\) This is echoed in Malgudi: Natesh, the Municipal Chairman had spent a whole week composing the text of the address with the help of a local journalist, adding whatever would show off his patriotism before Gandhi.\(^2\) Sen, the journalist, wrote the Municipal Chairman's speech for the temple-function.\(^3\) The President of the District Board had to deliver a speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the proposed Sarayu Bridge. The speech was a hotch-potch of history, mythology, politics and opinion. It was clear that several hands had written that speech for Mr. Somu.\(^4\)

Speech-making finally becomes a carelessly gone through ritual both for the listener and for the speaker:

"A speech prepared by Soma Sundaram in connection with the opening of a bridge has been modified to suit the new occasion (of the opening of the Sunrise Studio)\(^5\) "The President (the District Judge of Malgudi who had to throw the Sunrise Studio open) turns up late but that does not prevent him from holding forth for an hour against films portraying ancient puranic stories. When someone tells him what the picture is about he makes a neat 'volte face' and emphasises the need to propagate our ancient culture."\(^6\) Sen knew our Government had no lack of funds, but they did not know how to spend properly. He put this idea very strongly in the Chairman's speech he wrote and the Chairman recited it as it was written although he was a Congressman!\(^7\)

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2. WM - p.26
3. MM - p.165
4. MS - p.71
6. Ibid.
7. MM - p.191
Narayan attempts to image through his Malgudi novels the period of transitional anomie - the period in which new social problems are created - in the wake of freedom. Corruption in public life is one such and Narayan presents "the picture of the Indian middle class which is frank but free from moralising on corruption." However, to think that Narayan deals with only the middle class may not be correct for corruption is not the monopoly of this class. Says I.S. Sundaram: "R.K. Narayan brings the whole set up of administration in our country with his deft touches. Aziz, the principal's peon, won't let Chandran into the principal's presence. But as soon as Chandran promises to give the peon an old coat he has, all obstructions vanish and Chandran is let in."2

Even clerical jobs in Malgudi offer lot of chances of bettering oneself through corruption: The clerks of the Malgudi Land Mortgage Bank had their own method of worrying the villagers. Even to know their account they had to placate the clerks with an offering in cash or kind after hanging about the counter for a day or two.3 Raman could understand that his relative who was a clerk in the court was affluent through the money he made out of everyone in trouble.4

Malgudi conductors: ... in the matter... are as corrupt as conductors in other Indian cities: The conductor of the bus in which Jagan's family was journeying allowed fifty passengers in the vehicle expected to accommodate half of the number legally by pocketing the cash and adjusting the records accordingly.5 Malgudi conductors did not account for the fare of extra passengers.6 The bus in

2. op. - His, "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India) 1973 p.36
3. FE - pp.2-3
4. PS - p.42 (29 Aug 76)
5. VS - p.176
6. WM - p.106
which Nataraj was travelling stopped every ten minutes to pick up a wayside passenger. He was a compassionate conductor who filled his pocket with the wayside fare never issuing a ticket - the bus left the highway and darted across devious sidetracks through cornfields in search of passengers. The driver and the conductor seemed to have fixed a target of income for the day and to be determined to reach it.¹

Narayan tells through his characters the how and the why of corruption: Margayya used to show to the peasants that for the sanction of every loan eight annas to the clerk and four annas to the peon of the bank were paid by them.² Policemen were so ill-paid that they did seek favours from shopmen, told the Cousin to Jagan.³

Though illegal gratification helps people to better their standard of living, it is pleasant to learn that integrity and rule of law have still been existing in India: A lot of cash pocked by the conductor would enable him to purchase a baby-taxi by and by.⁴ While the adjournment lawyer could get his earlier case postponed from month to month corruption in the country has not gone so far as to get Raju entirely out of the consequences of his forgery. The DSP, his companion in booze, comes along with the warrant of arrest."⁵

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Another common Indian vice that Narayan refers to, is misuse of public property and misappropriation of money: Narayan recollects how even his intentions were misconstrued in the post office: "I hurried to the nearest post office

1. MM - p.55  2. FE - p.36
3. VS - p.189  4. MM - p.50
counter and asked for a form. The man at the counter hesitated just for a second - perhaps he had a feeling that I might be making a collection of forms or using them (in official language) as 'one-side paper'.¹

Malgudians have the above habit, however: Through the favour of some friend in the Revenue Department Krishna's father had secured memo pads on which he used to write letters from times immemorial.² Mali wanted to teach the college librarian, a lesson and so was in the habit of cutting portions from magazines with a blade under the very nose of the librarian risking punishment and humiliation.³ The drivers and conductors of Malgudi were habituated to taking out money for tea, from the cash bag.⁴ Villagers near Malgudi wanted some concession in the bus fare and they refused to pay the regular fare.⁵

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Red-tapism is another important defect of our administration which is treated by Narayan. He says about the PWD: "It means to most persons, red-tapism at its knottiest." This is exemplified thus: "An additional maternity ward in a hospital was urgently needed. But no one who was responsible for getting the building work through seemed to be aware of its importance or purpose."⁶ The common form is this: "An ordinary citizen who wishes to present a petition or protest will be forwarded with compliments from table to table."⁷

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2. ET - p.15
3. VS - p.45
4. MM - p.48
5. ET - p.110
6. Ibid., in 1 above, p.137 (Under: The PWD)
7. Ibid., in 1 above, p.138
8. Ibid., in 1 above, p.31 (Under: Protests)
The above echoes in his fiction: The sanitary inspector told Nataraj that he would acknowledge the complaint of Nataraj's neighbours and say that it was receiving attention, to silence them.¹

The experience with postal dealings is similar: Srinivas mused that it was difficult to get any money even of living people out of the Post Office Savings Bank.²

Most of the political and municipal decisions suffer from red-tapism: The idea of putting up a bridge over the Sarayu was as old as humanity. ³ Dr. Joshi was not sure when the veterinary college and hospital would be ready as the Deputy Minister did not have any interest in the project.⁴ The small mountain of road-metal heaped on the other side of the narrow bend of Market Road was meant for the improvement of the Market Road, but had remained untouched since 1945.⁵ A heap of stone was kept on the roadside of Market Road since the first municipal body was elected in free India in 1947 and was meant for paving the road.⁶

At times people bring red-tapism to light and help the sufferers with counter measures: Margayya had kept more or less parallel accounts of at least fifty of the members of the bank to clear up by his contrivance what the bank's red-tape obstructed.⁷

Here is a specimen of administrative efficiency: The invitations for the laying of the foundation stone for the veterinary college by a Deputy Minister, went out late and reached most people a day too late with the result that no one turned up at the function except the organisers.⁸

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1. MM - p.87
2. MS - p.167
3. MS - p.71
4. MM - p.122
5. MM - p.209
6. VS - p.21
7. FE - p.3
8. MM - p.119
Malgudi is not lacking persons who unhesitatingly use their position for private profit: "The seat of honour has to be reserved for 'the Circle', the police inspector, who will not pay for his seat and if the seat of honour is not immediately vacated...will impound the entire bus with all its passengers for overcrowding." No one could prevent the elementary school from being housed on the rickety terrace of the Municipal Chairman's sweet mart which was, for that reason, certified to be safe. Nataraj and others asked the Municipal Chairman to preside over the temple-function so that they could easily secure municipal services. When the Chairman's name was announced as president, the roads were swept and watered. Margayya had an unqualified faith in contacting people and getting things done that way. He hoped to use this method to see that Balu got through Matriculation. After Margayya became the secretary of the school, his son Balu never lost his place in the class and the teachers seemed to have adjusted themselves to his way of thinking. Since the Cousin knew the District Collector of Malgudi, he was sure of getting good treatment for Mali in the jail. In preference to existing and prospective applicants for Malgudi Agency of 'The Daily Messenger' Chandran was given the Agency as he had influence with the man at the helm. The merchant selling blankets who was himself a municipal councillor could not get the municipality to move a jaggery shop to avoid the nuisance of flies.

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2. MM - p.212
3. MM - 165
4. FE - p.115
5. FE - p.88
6. VS - p.187
7. BA - pp.138-139
8. FE - p.107