BOOK ONE

R.K. NARAYAN & HIS MALGUDI
Chapter One

R. K. NARAYAN

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Introduction:

The present study does not aim at either emphasizing or establishing a sociological or an economic theory about Narayan's Malgudi. That is not possible because Malgudi is but a fictional entity.

Instead, it is proposed to demonstrate Narayan's social awareness as part of his artistic quality. His contribution to Indian writing in English is assessed by examining how and how far the changing Indian life as observed by him has helped him define the special quality of his creative writing.

Socio-economic transformation of Indian life is a compelling presence in R.K. Narayan's fiction. But this concern is so perfectly consummated in his art that to isolate it as a separate entity is fraught with dangers. From his first novel: 'Swami and Friends' to his latest work: 'The Painter of Signs' marks an impressive literary array spread over four decades. Over this period Indian life has undergone many pressures and compulsions. Narayan's fiction has faithfully drawn from these phases. This achievement has won for him the trite appellation, "a social historian". Nevertheless, the fact is an essential aspect of his authenticity as an artist. He is primarily an artist. Not to isolate the compelling concern of the art which is a primary quality of it and yet to show its special role in defining this quality is a task this study undertakes. The chapter deals with these dilemmas and establishes the methodology adopted to bring out this integral concept.
Life:

The present study of Narayan intends to demonstrate his social awareness as a part of his artistic quality. An adequate knowledge of his life and social background, therefore, is a necessary prelude to the life he so adequately depicts in his fiction.

Rasipuram, a taluq in the Salem District of Tamil Nadu, happens to be Narayan's ancestral place. Just prior to Narayan's birth, the family had moved to Madras. It was here that Narayan was born on the 10th day of October, 1906.¹

Narayan comes from a middle-class white-collar background. The son of Krishnaswamy Iyer and Gnanambal—a family of Tamil Smartha Brahmins (regional equivalent of Hindu Shaivite²) —, Narayan, nicknamed Kunjappa (meaning, 'the little one') became the apple of his Granny's eye. Ammani — Narayan's Granny — lived in Madras and took him under her care in his boyhood. Apart from Srinivasan, Narayan's elder brother and Janaki, his elder sister, whom

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Sundaram\textsuperscript{1} refers, the inimitable and illustrious younger brother - R.K. Laxman, the Cartoonist - Narayan has two more brothers including Pattabhi.

Narayan had his education entirely in South India. He was a student of Maharaja's College, Mysore, where, "after several failures in Intermediate and Degree Examinations",\textsuperscript{2} he completed his B.A., at 24, with History, Economics and Politics as options.

The marital life of Narayan was too short. Rajam, daughter of Nageswara Iyer, whom Narayan was wedded to, entered his life in 1934 and vacated in the first week of June 1939, "within a hundred days of her arrival\textsuperscript{3} from her parents' home in Coimbatore. As the symbol of this brief but very meaningful and loving association, is left Hema, Narayan's daughter. She has gifted her father with a grandson who, at eleven, is an "exact copy of Swami in 'Swami and Friends'\textsuperscript{4}.

Before Narayan established himself as a novelist, his was a career with chequered fortunes. He tried his

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1.] op. His "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India)
  \item[2.] op. cit. above, p.18.
  \item[4.] R.K. Narayan - "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India), September 15, 1974, p.41.
\end{itemize}
hand at teaching in the village school in Channarayapattana in Karnataka and also worked in the then Mysore Secretariat. "After some hand-to-mouth journalism", he was convinced that neither civil service nor journalism suited him. Narayan resolved not to "sell himself" but "simply to write novels and live off the joint family system."2

Narayan has settled down in Karnataka. In the quiet surroundings of Krishnamurtipuram in Mysore, he has been able to create fiction of great range and quality. A short survey will follow.

For his "The Guide", Narayan won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. Incidentally, the novel which has since been translated into ten languages, has also been filmed and dramatised. Padma Bhushan was conferred on him in 1964. The University of Leeds and of Delhi honoured him with Hon. D.Litt., in 1967 and 1973 respectively. In 1973 Narayan received two honours for his "My Days". An award of $2000 from the English Speaking Union of the United States and the honour of being made the Honorary Fellow of the Department of English Literature at the American University, Washington (D.C.) were his. These two honours were in recognition of his outstanding contribution to English Literature, through novels, short stories and essays.

Writings:

M. Rama Rao, commenting on the artistic integrity of Narayan suggests that Narayan abandoned attempts at all genres other than the narrative knowing his inadequacy with them. According to Rama Rao, Narayan is in surer command of fiction and other prose narrative.

However, on the authority of Narayan himself, it is seen that Narayan's was not a solitary experiment at dramatic writing in the shape of "The Watchman of the Lake" which finds a place both in Rama Rao's article and Dr. Iyengar's study.

Two other plays - "Prince Yazid" and "The Home of Thunder" are mentioned by Narayan himself.

"Divine Music" is perhaps the solitary effort at poetic composition by Narayan.

One therefore doubts if a theory of "praise-worthy artistic integrity" put forth by Rama Rao can logically emerge from the above known facts.

2. Ibid., Rama Rao mentions that the Kannada version of this Play was said to have been broadcast from Akashvani, Mysore, soon after it was written.
Narayan has tried his hand and with distinct success too at all kinds of English prose narrative. He is the author of three travelogues: "Mysore" published in 1939, "My Dateless Diary" and the recent "The Emerald Route" for all of which he has earned laurels.

"Friendship", a ten-page essay in flamboyant poetic prose, marks the beginning of Narayan's attempt at the English essay. There is another, "How to write an Indian novel?" and then two collections of Essays: "Next Sunday" and "Reluctant Guru".

He had a spell of journalism as can be gathered by his own mention of humorous articles in Merry Magazine and of sketches or stories published in the Sunday supplement of "The Hindu", January 1939 onwards. For some time during the early forties, he also edited a journal: "Indian Thought".

Recently, Narayan translated Kamban's Tamil "Ramayana" into English.


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1. See His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) p.41 (11th August, 1974).
This study concerns itself with Narayan's fiction.

For the purpose of systematic analysis, logical observation and sound conclusions as also for seeing the development of the novelist in Narayan, his novels* have been chronologically arranged thus:

Swami and Friends — Published: Oct., 1935
The Bachelor of Arts — " 1936
The Dark Room — " 1938
The English Teacher — " 1944
Mr. Sampath — " 1949
The Financial Expert — " 1952
Waiting for the Mahatma — " 1955
The Guide — " 1959
The Man-eater of Malgudi — " 1961
The Vendor of Sweets — " 1967
The Painter of Signs — " 1976

* This list does not include, "My Days" (1974) which, though taking the shape of the novel, is the story of Narayan's own life, hence an autobiographical novel.


2. Published in the USA in 1953 under the title: "Grateful to Life and Death".

3. Published in the USA in 1957 under the title: "The Printer of Malgudi".

A brief analysis of the theme of each of the eleven novels Narayan has written so far is in the fitness of things.

"Swami and Friends" is the first of Narayan's novels with a Malgudi setting. It revolves around young Swaminathan and school friends most of whom shudder at the very thought of school. Teachers who bore and the iron discipline of the school are the causes of their distaste for studies. Swaminathan has a kind granny but an authoritarian father. He is sandwiched between the two friends - Rajam (son of the newly arrived D.S.P.) and Mani. It is a new experience for Swami to have a new baby-brother at home and also to see Rajam command the constables in his home. Examination holds a terror to Swami and, after a heroic participation in the school-strike when he is forced to attend to his books, he runs away from home. After an unsuccessful retreat from the unknown road, he is unconscious but retrieved by Ranga, the cartman, coming from the Nempi Forest. Though the family of Swami is relieved to find him alive and with them, this absence of his breaks his friendship with Rajam who failed to get Swami for the prestigious cricket match. Ten days later, Rajam leaves the place without rapprochement with Swami who ends up tearfully dejected on the Malgudi Railway Station.

In "Swami and Friends", Narayan has succeeded in giving "a capital account of a boy's life in India" and also "the psychological rebirth" that Swaminathan undergoes.

The intimacy of knowledge with which the "irresponsible boyhood" is treated makes every one to relive "a forgotten page of our own lives". It incidentally pictures the contemporary social life especially in South India, viz., the educational set up, the missionary activities, the political struggle, and "the traditional domestic life". Despite this, H.M. Williams feels that the Indian background is deftly but unobtrusively sketched in. The novel which "revolves round the home and the family" shows how Indians feel secure only when they are supported by them. Narayan comes to be estimated as "one of the handful of writers who can describe the Indian scene with accuracy and a constant sense of humour". This, perhaps, tempts Graham Greene to say that "Swami and Friends" is a book in ten thousand, and Compton Mackenzie to think that he has never read any other book about India in the least like it.

2. See 1 above
7. Graham Greene quoted on the blurb of the book mentioned in 1 above.
8. Compton Mackenzie quoted on the blurb of the book mentioned on 1 above.
Chandran is the jobless "Bachelor of Arts" in Narayan's second novel of identical name. The growth of Chandran is observed in four parts. Chandran's early days in the Albert Mission College, his dislike of many of our social customs and his fancy for easy, irresponsible life are juxtaposed with his hectic activity as Secretary of the History Association and frantic preparation for the ordeal of the year. It is in this part itself that he encounters Veeraswami, the radical and Mohan, the poet. Part two deals with the fifty per cent love of Chandran for Malathi which accidently starts on the Sarayu after his graduation and before he could secure a job. The effort ends abortively and the persons to blame are the family astrologers and the elders on either side who believe in the efficacy of horoscopy. A frustrated man, he leaves for Madras for having a benign change, meets Kailas, a master of all vices, in a lodge. Disillusioned and uncomfortable even in Madras, he transforms himself into a sanyasin in part three. Chandran knows he cannot be happy, separated thus from home and family. Finally he returns home, takes to journalism, marries and life returns to normalcy.

Home and family are still the centres of Indian life in this novel. The characters dare not dissociate from them altogether. For reasons more than one, this is "a charming book"¹ yielding "first class entertainment for any one"². It is "a first hand account of Indian life"³ where

1. Phyllis Bentley quoted on the blurb of 1973 reprint of the "Bachelor or Arts" - Indian Thought Publications, Mysore.
Narayan attempts to show how an Indian "comes to terms with life in youth" and achieves "psychological rebirth". In this "first hand picture of young India" Narayan depicts, through the changing middle class social life of the South Indian fictional city, Malgudi, the changing India itself. Chandran, the hero, is helplessly struggling to react to the social conditions like "the obscure caste divisions and sub-divisions, class snobberies, sex taboos, absurd marriage customs, blind superstitions and the tyranny of Astrology". It also deals with the defective educational system in the pre-independence period which wasted and floored the intelligence and ambition of youth by forcing them to seek jobs unsuitable for their education. The young who were already frustrated faced a rot amidst these "unlucky national conditions of India". Though Chandran is up against this, "the lasting values of the Indian national tradition" help him to reconcile himself to life. It is thus that "The Bachelor of Arts" becomes a novel that can be unreservedly recommended to every class of reader.

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5. Ibid., p.21.

"The Dark Room" is a heart-rending tale of a middle-aged Indian woman. She is Savitri, who has a mountainous capacity to sustain ungrudgingly the petty tyrannies inflicted upon her by Ramani, her selfish, self-opinionated and bullying husband. Because of this, Ramani's planned family, made up of a son and two daughters, which should otherwise have been an enviably happy one, will be an intolerable mess. The tragic acme strikes when Ramani, as the head of Malgudi's Eldadia Insurance Co., takes Shantha Bai, a hysteric widow with a doubtful past but educated, as an employee in his Company. He brazenly flaunts before Savitri his affair with her. This is the point of explosion for Savitri who defies convention and runs away in misery. She attempts to drown herself but is rescued. What shocks one is to read that Savitri prefers to return home after this temporary adventure to be bored and tormented by her husband even more.

Though Narayan's "The Dark Room" still uses the canvas of the home and the family to paint the picture of an Indian woman who finds it difficult to separate from them, the attention of the novelist "is now occupied by the two most important problems of modern age, viz., money and sex".1 If on one hand it shows the economic awakening of the normal middle class Indian family in the late thirties when the novel was written, on the other, it "dramatises the psychological tragedy of a conventional wife".2 Through the most careful organisation of his resources Narayan has

produced here "an Indian variation of Ibsen's 'Doll's House'. India has been understood as the place where Gods dwell, because women here are worshipped. But this is a novel about "the almost unlimited capacity for suffering of a woman in a traditional Indian household." Narayan, who was 32 when he wrote this novel, expectedly satirises an Indian theme which may now appear to be irrelevant. All the same, many of the Indian homes still have Savitris and we have it as our everyday experience that most of them try to "come to terms with life" in the way Savitri does and are "psychologically re-born". That explains the relevance of this novel even to our generation.

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Krishna, a Lecturer in English in the Albert Mission College is the central figure in Narayan's next novel, "The English Teacher". Krishna appears, as it were, Swami and Chandran reincarnate. We are happy to see him as a popular teacher of English in his Alma Mater. He wants to set up his home, a south-ward house is his requisite. A bungalow is fixed and his mother arrives for the initial


arrangements leading Krishna to speculate about the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship that might develop in consequence. The wife arrives with the babe in arm to join Krishna and life is a happy episode till a letter from Krishna's father indicating the latter's willingness to advance money for the purchase of a house starts an ominous turn in Krishna's life. Susila and Krishna approve of a bungalow in the Lawley Extension but it is during their inspection of this bungalow that Susila is infected in the closet and bids adieu to the good earth for some time. The second part of the novel which starts almost half way in print too, shows a shocked Krishna who has nothing else to worry or interest him in life. In the company of his newly introduced friend who is an adept at spirit-rapping he masters the technique of getting into communion with Susila's soul, doing in his leisure his only duty - upbringing of his lone daughter Leela. The spiritual effort at its height of perfection brings Krishna a moment of rare and immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death.

Narayan himself has much to say about this novel which, he feels, is more autobiographical in content than any of his other books: "She (Rajam) collapsed in the first week of June, 1939... I have described this part of my experience of her sickness and death in 'The English Teacher' so fully that I do not and perhaps cannot go over it again... (Krishna) goes through the same experience I had gone through and he calls his wife Susila, and the child is Leela, instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed with a child to look after and the psychic adjustments are based on my own experience.... The dedication of the book to the memory of my wife, should, to some extent, give the reader a clue that the book may not be all
Compton Mackenzie calls this novel a wonderfully painted miniature of India where many a man like Krishna here bears a convincing testimony to the fact that "eternity, not temporality is the central chord of the Indian national consciousness". Through his detailed account of spirit rapping, Narayan appears to examine Indian theosophy. Although he concentrates on the effort of Krishna at conquering death and his "spiritual rebirth" he has also given in this novel his assessment of the Indian educational effort and has painted vividly the conditions of housing and sanitation, family and religion, and the state of the Indian economy, among other things. H.H. Annaiah Gowda says that this novel tells much "about the society Narayan moved and grew up".

"Mr. Sampath" is Narayan's next novel woven round this character who dominates even Srinivas, the otherwise central character of the novel. Srinivas, the tragi-comical hero is the editor of 'The Banner' - a Malgudi Journal - and is, very early in the novel, taken complete charge of together with his troubles, by the strange and mysterious Mr. Sampath,

2. Quoted on the blurb of 1973 reprint of "The Bachelor of Arts" - Indian Thought Publications, Mysore.
the printer. The plot, which for the most part revolves around the offices of the Journal, takes a sudden turn for the worse as Sampath persuade and causes Srinivas to abandon his journalistic venture. Sampath persuades Srinivas to write a script for a film company. Srinivas, Sampath and their film - all fail.

It is interesting to note what Narayan himself has to say about this novel: "Mr. Sampath, who was my printer, .. became a character in one novel". In a novel of mine Mr. Sampath became a film director. Narayan's printer - Sampath - did not mind Narayan's visits daily to his press and allowed Narayan to treat the place as his own office. Narayan took him at his word and spent morning and evening at Sampath's parlour. It was here, he says, he picked up a lot of printing jargon, many characters for his novels and a general idea of the business of mankind in Mysore: "All its citizens converging on the market at Sayyaji Rao Road every day and being ultimately drawn to Sampath for a variety of reasons." With the specific reference to Sampath, the author's remarks apply more to this novel and are a pointer to the authenticity of this novel as declared by Narayan himself. It is, perhaps, because of this that the reviewer in The Spectator calls Narayan an Indian Writer who can place the Orient into focus for Occidental eyes. Narayan concentrates less on the traditional Indian home and the

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1. op. Narayan's "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) September 1, 1974, p.32.
2. Ibid., p.33.
3. Ibid., p.33.
4. Quoted on the blurb of 1971 reprint of Mr. Sampath - Indian Thought Publications, Mysore.
family but busies himself with the "treatment of the zany film industry"¹ and "the world of small industries, businessmen and the rise and fall of entrepreneurs within it".² This is quite reasonable as, by 1949, when this novel took shape, independent India was through its teething troubles and the sprouts of planned economic activity had begun to make their appearance encroaching even upon the quiet surroundings of Mysore. Through the veil of Sampath's cinematographic efforts Narayan also responds to "the myth of birth and rebirth and the time cycle of the gods which finally resolves good and evil".³ No wonder, then, that Narayan also concentrates on money and sex.⁴ Margaret Berry⁵ feels that the novel exemplifies the famous saying of the Upanishad that it is better to do one's own duty badly than to do another's well.

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The next novel which Narayan presents is "The Financial Expert". Margayya - the path-finder - has his office under a banyan tree; his office furniture is only an old tin box. It is from this tree that Margayya graduates to publishing "The Bed Life" and then to more elaborate and innocently crooked banking. Dr. Pal, the journalist,

3. Ibid., p.58.
correspondent and author, hastens the fall of both Balu, Margayya's only son, and of Margayya himself. Balu symbolises the widening gap between the generations and the spoilt and frustrated manhood of our country at the time the novel was written. Margayya's character becomes and he reverts to the huge banyan opposite the Central Cooperative Land Mortgage Bank of Malgudi. Life returns to normalcy.

The reviewer of Spectator opines that this is the best story about India he has read. Though this comment is very apt, it is better to see this novel as the universalisation of a common Indian banker. Lakshmi Holmstrom says that Margayya's attitude to money is what makes him what he is. Money gives him both a meaning in life and a station in the universe. His habit of metaphysical speculation arises only from "the mystic feeling that money engendered" and from no other experience. Free India was just five year old in 1952 and was it then but natural for her people - young and old - to be starry-eyed about the so-called Western virtues - uninhibited sex, freely flowing liquor, individuality, inter-racial marriages etc., which Narayan is at pains to show are utterly unsuitable to our social conditions where, age-old convention still has a large say. It is thus that Margayya with the modern entrepreneurial temperament still is forced to see Goddess Lakshmi in milk, whom he has to find and propitiate through a red lotus pounded in milk drawn from a


smoke-coloured cow. John B. Alfonso-Karkala\(^1\) dwells in detail about the symbolic value of the novel. In fire, milk, the lotus, Lakshmi and Saraswati he sees the minor symbols and in the huge banyan tree, the major. Margayya returns to the banyan tree - the protective umbrella of Indian culture and tradition.

P.S. Sundaram adds to the authenticity of this novel by describing how Margayya grew out of Narayan: "There was in the 1940's a financial expert in Bangalore who, like Margayya, took huge deposits paying interest at high rates. Even a man like Sir C.V. Raman was stung when there was a run on the money lender and he filed an insolvency petition. Narayan must, of course, be knowing this real-life story".\(^2\)

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"Waiting for the Mahatma" which Narayan penned in 1955 is a class by itself, as it is perhaps the only novel of his which has a political background in the main. Nothing better can be done than reproducing parts of the print on the blurb of the book to learn what the novel is. Sriram, the hero, is 20. As a mark of his coming of age, his grandmother allows him the pass book to his savings in the local bank, but Sriram is growing up in other ways too. His evolution into manhood is, for himself, a strange and bewildering process. In his weakest hour, Bharati, the enchanting and unpredictable Gandhian volunteer, impresses him and Sriram has no other go but to be a disciple of Gandhi, to possess her. With all her


2. op. His, "R.K. Narayan" - Arnold Heinemann (India) - New Delhi, 1973, p.78.
devotion to Gandhi and dedication to Gandhism, Bharati favourably responds to Sriram. The fact that many Indians accept Gandhian ideas only out of enthusiasm and not out of realisation is represented very clearly by what Sriram - the representative of millions of his countrymen - does. Though, inspired by Gandhi he is too easily influenced by glamorous patriots of the type of Jagadish, a terrorist. Gandhi, who is so much greater than the rest promises to officiate as the priest at the wedding of Sriram and Bharati but has a faint premonition that he had been too rash to promise thus. The novel closes with the touching assassination of Gandhi.

That this novel has "a definite political background"1 is clarified by Narayan himself: "Between the era of British Rule and the present we might note a middle period when subject matter became inescapably political."2 In this novel therefore he attempts to depict that middle period "with great artistry",3 a period of roughly thirty years - that between 1920 and 1950. Thus it is that we find here the after-effects of the First and Second World Wars in India, "the growing chasm between the Hindu and Muslim communities and between India and Britain, the Quit India Movement",4 "the ironic and sophisticated though sympathetic"

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picture of "the Satyagraha Movement", "an accepted portrait of Bapu" as millions of Indians would have wished to be drawn, and the indelible impress that is left on the Indian mind of Gandhi and Gandhian thought. At the same time, there is the usual and realistic description of India and her people. An image of "the condition of Indian villages and villagers, untouchables, Indian prisons, their officers and prisoners" is here. Apart from this, this is "one major novel in English in which Gandhi figures far more prominently than the rest.

However, there is no lack of people who take just the opposite stand in regard to this novel. Metro, an American friend of Narayan's and novelist himself, felt that "Nothing is learnt about Mahatma Gandhi" from 'Waiting for the Mahatma'. C.D. Narasimhaiah comments that Narayan has made a muddle of the Gandhian principle. A.N. Kaul is disappointed to opine that to the extent to which it is a

2. Ibid., p.87.
political novel, it has not enlarged our awareness of Gandhi or his era one bit. Margaret Berry\(^1\) has her own interpretation. She says that Sriman suffers for the dereliction of duty, which was to voluntarily court imprisonment with Bharati. Having died a death in the shape of his arrest and jail term, he is reborn - an enlightened man, returning with renewed spirit to join Bharati in rebuilding their lives and the lives of India.

It is painful to note that Narayan's novel in question which is depicting the impact of Gandhi and Gandhism on traditional Malgudi has been mistaken for a political novel. That it is not so and hence there is no cause for disappointment is pointed out by P.S. Sundaram.\(^2\) He says that Narayan probably never even met Gandhi and certainly did not know him intimately. His concern is not at all to project a Gandhi image.\(^3\) It is perhaps because of identical considerations that William Walsh\(^4\) reckons this novel among Narayan's triumphs.

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Narayan's next novel, "The Guide" is once again set in and around Malgudi. Raju, formerly a guide to tourists has just been released from prison and has taken refuge in an old temple by the river. While sitting on the steps one

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3. Ibid., p.84.

evening, a peasant takes him for a priest, and asks his advice on a domestic problem. By uttering a few platitudes, Raju helps him to find a solution and soon acquires a reputation as a holyman. When a drought comes to the district, the peasants turn to him for help and he reluctantly undertakes a 14-day fast to propitiate the rain-gods. It is at this point that he confesses to one of his followers that he is an imposter and tells the story of his previous life — his love for Rosie, the dancer, and of money, status and power through her, her desertion of Marco, her absent-minded and unfashionable epigraphist and archaeologist husband, the tale of his rising fortunes which finally and unexpectedly land him in the prison as a punishment for his miscalculated and reckless single adultery.

Narayan explains the starting point of "The Guide", thus: "In October 1956, I had been thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about some one suffering enforced sainthood. A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story. A severe drought had dried up all the rivers and tanks; Krishnaraja Sagar, an enormous reservoir feeding channels that irrigated thousands of acres, had also become dry and its bed, a hundred and fifty feet deep, was now exposed to the sky with fissures and cracks, revealing an ancient temple, coconut stumps and dehydrated crocodiles. As a desperate measure the municipal council organised a prayer for rains. A group of Brahmans stood knee-deep in water (procured at great cost) on the dry bed of the Kaveri, fasted, prayed and chanted certain 'mantras' continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day it rained and brought relief to the countryside... During my travels in America, the idea crystallised... I stopped in Berkeley for three months...and wrote my novel."¹

¹. cp. His, "My Days" (Serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India) September 8, 1974, p.45.
It is amusing to see how Narayan seems to forgetfully contradict himself: "One member asked as usual whether I had based my novel (The Guide) on some actual experience or if it was pure fiction. A familiar question which I generally answer evasively, since I myself do not know; and also I don't see how it should make any difference to the reader."¹ He clarifies that his novel was not about the saints or the pseudo-saints of India but about a particular person.² C.D. Narasimhaiah gives a new dimension to the thinking on this novel: "Raju's death viewed symbolically means that the individual by losing his life in water brings rain (and life) to his fellowmen, and his death is just 'death by water' - which is really not death but a means of self-purification and self-realisation. It is the triumph of traditional way of living over natural and man-made catastrophes. It is not surprising when known that at all times Narayan writes not merely with an intense social awareness of his own age but with the past of India in his bones and thanks to him our social sympathies are broadened and our moral being considerably heightened."³ Narayan appears to provide prominence to sex also in this novel. It is quite disturbing to see extra-marital relationship in the traditional and orthodox Malgudi. It indeed tickles the Malgudian. But Narayan appears to write for the pleasure of an American society or an English society where sex is not viewed with stern eye of an Indian. Hence are present the usual

2. Ibid., p.10.
"properties" the Western associates with India - caves, cobras, dancing girls, swamis.¹

There are other angles too. Echoing the efforts of Sagara, who brought down the Ganga, this novel declares "the relevance of the classical myths to modern life."²

"The myth of the popular sadhu"³ which is autochthonous to the Indian soil and the castigation of "Hindu superstition"⁴ have provided the theme. There is also the reflection of the author's belief in the "sublimity of the Indian religion that recognises the humanity of the most wretched person and promises redemption if he thinks of 'dharma' even for once and shows a gesture of sacrifice at any time."⁵ This makes 'The Guide' "at once a lively tale of teeming modern India and a thought-provoking fable."⁶ Narayan draws the picture of the Indian completely freed from home and family and engaged in the struggle to gain money and sex mostly through tourism and public entertainment.

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In "The Man-eater of Malgudi" we find Vasu, a creature of demoniac proportions and strength, coupled by devilish wickedness. Though a post-graduate, he had had training in taxidermy and karate. This power-hungry creature

4. Ibid.,
5. Ibid., in 3 above, p.67.
disturbs the tranquility of Malgudi where the good printer Nataraj and his close friends, a poet and a journalist, carry on their mundane activities. Vasu gets Nataraj to let out his upstairs where he moves in with his stuffed hyenas and pythons and even brings Rangi and Padma, the dancing women. When Vasu, in search of larger game threatens the life of the temple elephant that Nataraj has befriended, complications ensue. A not unwelcome death occurs; murder is indicated and there is the search for the guilty party. But every one is relieved to learn that Vasu, the modern Indian 'Bhasmasura', has himself been the victim of his Titanic strength in that he dies of concussion while battering an army of mosquitoes running for his blood. Life is normal again in Malgudi.

Narayan believes, like the Hindu society, in the eternal application of Hindu mythology to life. He adds in this novel, a third malady - physical power - to the two - money and sex - which lead man to his doom. One has a chance to witness the conflict between the good and the evil which ends in the upholding of goodness. About the novel which "is a parable"¹ William Walsh says: "This novel definitely turns away from the problems of modern India."² However, it seems better to view this novel as a study of "The impact of modernity on tradition-bound backward community of Malgudi."³ This can be seen in the way the people of Malgudi look down upon certain classes of entrepreneurs,

e.g., taxidermy which requires great organisational ability and skill both of which Vasu, otherwise a Rakshasa, has. It is perhaps because of such prejudices of the backward people of India that they see Vasu as only a demon. Vasu's destruction may be an ethical gain but it certainly is an economic loss. To that extent social welfare is lessened.

"The Vendor of Sweets" gets published after six years of the publication of 'The Man-eater', i.e., in 1967. It centres round Jagan, who, at sixty, is a prosperous widower, a sweet-vendor who contrives to combine handsome profits with high-minded Gandhian principles. The apple of his eye is his son Mali, for whom he feels a deep but absurdly embarrassed affection, which appears to go unrequited. When Mali coolly announces that he is abandoning school to go to America to become a writer, Jagan's fatherly feelings are thrown into still greater confusion. And when, a year or two later, Mali returns with a half-Korean, half-American wife and a grandiose scheme for marketing a novel-writing machine, Jagan is utterly at sea. He fails to adjust to Mali and the changed surroundings. When the cup of maladjustment is full he decides to escape to the nearby Mempi Forest in search of mental peace and succeeds in conquering the galling chains of paternal love.

Unlike most novels of Narayan the family becomes not only "subsidiary but it even hinders the main character." Again there is the intolerable impact of the Western modernity on the traditional Indian setting. Jagan

is representing good businessmen who neglect their family and "owing to the lack of proper contact between father and son" become bad fathers. He, like many in the sixties in our country, shudders at the dissolution of his cherished notions of marriage and morals. This, aided by the yawning gap of the generations makes way for the exit of Jagan to the nearby forest. Those people of Malgudi who cannot adjust to changes necessitated by time, like Jagan, are therefore forced to renounce life's ties. Not change, which is a must, but their conservative outlook and temperament are to blame. Jagan struggles to combine Western business habits and efficiency with Oriental manners and morals. The result, no doubt, is tragic.

Ved Mehta gives the background for the novel in question: "The story (Sweet Vendor) had begun to form in his head when one of his friends, a lawyer, was handling a lawsuit that a wasteful son had brought against his indulgent father, a prosperous sweet-meat dealer, to get more money from him." M.K. Naik refers to this novel as Narayan's failure and going a step ahead, Margaret Berry has this to say about it: "Narayan, himself sixty in the year of this novel's publication, possibly saw in this work, his novelistic sign-off, unless another and last, Sanyasi book, should develop." As though Narayan hurried to disprove her

contention made in July 1976, his next novel, "The Painter of Signs", was published in 1976 itself. The fact that Narayan had been at it since 1973 and that it was being serialised in the Illustrated Weekly of India from June, 1976, seems to be unknown to Margaret Berry. Neither has "The Painter of Signs" been a "Sanyasi Novel", as anticipated by her.

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"The Painter of Signs" is, for the present, the last of Narayan's novels. It concerns with Raman, the Painter of Signs, practising his trade in the backyard of his house. He shares the house with his aunt who has totally dedicated her life to his well-being. Raman prides himself on being a rationalist and is inclined to believe that he is immune to the wiles of women. Daisy, a slender young girl, arrives in Malgudi to set up a Family Planning Centre, to disturb the quietus of the place and to throw Raman into love-fever. Raman tours the villages with her, writing at her instance, slogans to spread the gospel of controlled families. At the end of the trip they part on a distinctly unfriendly note, and, despite Raman's determination never to see this woman with the aura and herbal fragrance, he loves her. He is married to her by Gandharva rites and spends nights in her company. His locality whispers about this affair and the orthodox aunt is ashamed to know that her nephew has decided to marry a girl whose caste and past are unknown and questionable. She decides to go on a pilgrimage to Kashi and breathe her last there. Raman, through grudgingly, arranges for the same but misses her much. Raman wants to set up his house with his wife Daisy. The complication develops, Daisy leaves the people and the place, orphaning Raman, on an errand of family planning.

A disillusioned and repentant Raman returns to his favourite 'Boardless' Hotel and all is normal again in Malgudi.

Clearly, Narayan's 'The Painter of Signs' "deals with family planning" as inflicted upon the traditional Malgudi, though there are strong indications of its growth. Here is the picture of the growth of the Indian womanhood contrasting itself diagonally with that represented by Savitri of 'The Dark Room'. The 'New Woman' wants to be a person rather than a biological robot in a docile mass. She has been able to discover her identity at the cost of all the values that traditionally the Indian woman has held most dear to her heart. May be the spread of education and the social conditions helping or forcing woman to leave her shell are responsible for this. It is interesting to see a slender girl waking up to the urgency of population control and seeming ready to cope with the problem almost single-handedly. Narayan has this to say on this point: "I myself felt uneasy when my novel 'The Painter of Signs' appeared in the Weekly in serial form... Luckily censors do not seem to read books with the same ease that they scan cartoons. Otherwise, I might have been suspected of making fun of family planning through my novels... I began the book, as one might guess, three years before it actually appeared in print, at a time when family planning had not assumed monstrous proportions. To this day I cannot explain how or why the theme found its way... Daisy, the arch-priestess of birth-control... entered the books at some point and dominated it... It seems as if a character like Daisy had been in search of an author and found one at last." The above


2. cp. His, "Permitted Laughter" - The Illustrated Weekly of India, 10th July, 1977, p.29.
itself shows clearly how much is Narayan alive to the contemporary problems of India. Though in 1973, 'Population' had not been 'a monstrous problem' that it was in the direction of being one was recognised by Narayan. All the same, how many of the Indians would recognise it as he does and, having recognised, how they would react to it is pictured in this novel. Narayan also makes use of the popular story of the ancient King Shantanu of the Mahabharata. Daisy with the herbal fragrance around her always, is the prototype of Matsya-gandha who had taken a promise from Shantanu that he would question neither her past nor her actions. If and when he would do so, she would desert him. Raman promises to be like Shantanu, as neither power nor money but sex, has possessed him. However the association is too short lived because Daisy thinks she could not live except alone. By entering Raman's life she has helped at least one woman to free herself from a life time of domestic slavery - she is Raman's aunt.

Notwithstanding the above, the novel is a failure according to M.K. Naik who says: "Will R.K. Narayan ever again reach the heights he scaled in 'The Guide' and 'The Man-eater of Malgudi'? The failure of 'The Vendor of Sweets' prompted this disquieting question. Nine years have passed since then and the recent 'The Painter of Signs' shows that the question has now become an 'overwhelming' one."¹ In Naik's view, neither in characterisation nor in changing the spirit of the place has Narayan succeeded. He feels that the only character worth the name is the aged aunt of Raman - a sharply drawn specimen of the old, traditional Hindu widow.²

² Ibid., p.112.
This section aims to establish Narayan as a novelist of authentic India. Prior to doing so, a survey of the following seems pertinent. Starting with the consideration of fiction as a genre of literature and its purpose, a discussion on the nature and purpose, the audience and the themes of Indo-Anglian fiction follows leading to its assessment. Then is taken up a general appreciation of Narayan. It is purported to study his achievements by comparison and contrast together with an analysis of how far is Narayan aware of Indian life and whether he presents only south India in his fiction. Finally there is an attempt to see whether one finds social satire in Narayan's novels.

Fiction as a genre of literature and its purpose:

The birth of the modern English novel is placed roughly at 1880. From the eighteenth century, novel appears as a serious rival to poetry and drama. During the nineteenth its status grew rapidly. In our century, it has gained an undoubted ascendancy over all the other genres of literature. This has necessitated a serious study of the art of the novelist.

What the novel pictures and how it does it depends upon who writes the novel. The novelists who belong to the upper middle and middle classes are likely to depict this society and see the poor as a class lower than they are. Through the novel, its author may wish to advocate a particular philosophy in which he believes or may carry on propaganda for a social problem as he views it. It may take the shape

of a romance dealing with the exciting, the exotic, the unusual and the remote. Then there may be regional fiction dealing with life in a particular region. But recently, the novel has added a special role to literature. This, which Forster recognised, is 'portrayal of life by time.'¹ This is in place of 'portrayal by values.'² Novel, of all the literary forms, is 'most vitally concerned with social conditions and values'³ especially of the country of which the novelist forms a part. While dealing with the society around, and weaving a plot employing a few characters to do so, the novel tries to study 'man in his relation to society, in his relation to himself and in his relation to God.'⁴ But this need not be done always to bring about social change or reformation, for social criticism or caricature, for social propaganda or flattery. It may also be done for its own sake. That is social realism or social authenticity - the presentation of life with detached, photographic attitude, regardless of moral or ideological considerations, only for the sake of aesthetic pleasure. The type of novel that a person writes, however, is dependent upon so many factors - his life, his likes and dislikes, his greatness and smallness; life around and its growth; life in the past in his country of which he has knowledge; life elsewhere; the purpose of his art as he understands it; the political conditions that may compel him to do something for which, left alone, he would have been unprepared, etc.

2. Ibid.
The Nature and Purpose of Indo-Anglian Fiction:

The English novel has a great tradition. We never wanted that the Indo-Anglian novel should imitate all that its inspirer stands for. Its aim must be to be the Indian replica of the English novel. Only when it is 'firmly rooted in the social and cultural ethos of India' it can assert its independence as 'Indian Literature in English.'

Indians writing in English drew upon the Western habit of looking to society as the source of inspiration for their fiction. They have the advantage of seeing and depicting a society that is both vast and dynamic. But Indo-Anglian fiction need not necessarily be totally mistaken as 'a file of documents of sociology or anthropology or educational theory.' It aims at projecting the tradition and culture, the past and the present India and comically examines what will happen when the past and the present meet. In sum, all the writers are inspired by the ever-changing society in India which they want to picture as they see it. This is what is called 'progressive realism.'

The Indo-Anglian novelist, the responsible citizen as he is, takes up his art purposefully. The fiction he creates is the symbol of 'his involvement with the changing national scene and concern for the destiny of the country.'

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., in 1 above, p.215.
4. Ibid., in 1 above, p.206.
5. Ibid., in 1 above, p.34.
K. R. S. Iyengar divides the history of Indo-Anglian literature roughly into five periods:

1820-1870 - The Age of the Great Pioneers
1870-1900 - The Age of Literary Awakening
1900-1920 - The Age of Political Awakening
1920-1947 - The Age of Modern Heroism
1947 onwards - The Era of Independence

Novels by Indians in English concerned themselves with 'large public issues and national or social problems.' Indian novels in English wanted to spread political education and so they preoccupied themselves with 'patriotism in one form or another.' Before independence they could not engage in much of a social criticism as they were either forced to be governmental mouthpieces or to sever themselves from their art. With the dawn of independence, they were free to write about India as they really felt - 'to criticize and explore, to be frank about Indian weakness, and to be just to the British.' They were also able to attempt a realistic social documentation, showing clearly their awareness of the 'inexorable change from the traditional values of the agrarian society to those of agro-industrial modern age.'

1. op. His, "Indian Writing in English" - Contemporary Indian Literature (p.38) quoted by C.V. Venugopal, "The Indian Short Story in English: A Critical Study" - Ph.D., Thesis - Karnata University, Dharwar, 1972, p.52-53.


5. Ibid., in 2 above, p.209.
India is a vast country with 'diverse linguistic groups'. The novel written in English about India, is read by at least the small group of English-knowing Indians and succeeds in creating 'a sense of national identity' as also to help the non-Indians to know our country in its true colours. By doing so it also helps to correct "the Westerners' version of India acquired by writings on India by non-Indians and makes them feel 'that Kipling seems guilty of nothing but plain falsification.'

No society is completely stagnant. But with dynamism you may not get what you wished for and when the novelist, depending upon what he wished for, thinks that we have failed, may have a mildly satirical comment or a problem to pose. His responsibility as a citizen makes him do that. There is neither a motive for social reformation nor satire in mind. The comment is some-thing mentioned for the serious consideration of the fellow countrymen and for the information of the rest. Some, if not all, may use the society for fulfilling their commitment to it. Broadly, the Indo-Anglian fiction has the aim of photographic social documentation for the benefit of the reader - whoever he is.

The audience for Indo-Anglian fiction:

For whom is the Indian novel in English written? This question is pertinent because the Indian novelist in

2. Ibid.
English has to face the 'problem of heterogeneous audience.' To a small intellectual community of English-knowing Indians and to the Europeans and Americans he addresses his novels. But it is just possible that he keeps his non-Indian audience more in his mind because 'book-buying is not a common habit in our country.' Despite their material advancement, numerous Westerners still appear to be 'determined to find wisdom in Brahmins and light from the East' for whom the Indian novel is supposed to be written.

The themes of Indo-Anglian fiction:

The heterogeneous audience whom the Indo-Anglian novelist faces pose a doubt as to the sincerity with which he takes up his art. Supposing that social realism is his business, how realistically he does it is worth noting. It may be that just to please foreign readers some novelists give the kind of image of India which the former are 'supposed to want or expect' though it may not always be a true image of India. It is art for the sake of personal profit. Sometimes, though they try to write about India, they may end up seeing 'their country and society in the way Englishmen or Americans do.' This shows either their light-heartedness

or lack of a comprehensive view. It may also be true that at times, that part of the picture of India though divorced from reality not completely, 'which the novelist likes or thinks that the native or foreign readers like', 1 may be given by him. This artistic imbalance is owing to the novelist's personal views and is incidentally motivated by commercial considerations. Those novelists who fail to represent All-India may try to picture 'Eternal India or the Soul of India' 2 which mean the moral and vital principles of Indian life.

But the essence of the Indo-Anglian novel consists in something different. It is in the social documentation of India i.e., an authentic picturisation of Indian life, which itself is the flow of tradition into unwanted modernity, which however, as time passes becomes the new tradition. It is here that the India of the past mingles with the India of the present to result into a more meaningful and better existence. The West looks at India and at what happens in it with curious eyes and the novelists meet the needs of the Western readers. No wonder, the subject matter sells the book.

True, India is a vast country, 'full of vagaries and varieties.' 3 While, on the one hand, it seems to help the Indian novelist in English, in that it serves as an inexhaustible material to write about, on the other, it handicaps him because, the life pictured by him may not necessarily be seen all-over India as 'there is a great deal of regional

2. Ibid., p.2.
variation in social structure, values and customs... in different parts of India.\(^1\) Hence the need to choose themes 'of pan-India nature.'\(^2\) It is with the help of such common themes and situations that the Indo-Anglian novelist is able to image 'total life'\(^3\) which is the result of the traditional Indian past overlapped by the modern life ending in a new picture of India, liked, disliked or hated, depending upon who sees it.

If it is agreed that the Indo-Anglian novelist aims at presenting an authentic picture of the totality of Indian life, it is needless to point out that Indian philosophy, tradition and culture; ethics and religion; myths, epics and legends; mysticism, theosophy and moral codes; varnashrama dharma, purushartha, cycle of birth and death based on Karma Theory; superstition; the economic, political and social tensions arising out of the East-West encounter; regionalism, the fading norms of public life and leadership; the impact of the West; the generation gap; the caste system as also class conflicts; all these are mirrored in the novel. That only can be a true and total picture of Indian society.

The Indo-Anglian fiction: an assessment:

The strength and the test of Indo-Anglian fiction, then, rests upon the following: (1) Has the novelist

2. Ibid., p.211.
provided a purely imaginary picture or a true picture of India? (2) Does the picture of Indian life presented by him apply to the whole of the country? (3) Has the painting of India been objective and is done for its own sake? (4) Does it help to know India better— whoever reads it? (5) Is it fiction also, with the capacity to delight?

Narayan: a general appreciation:

At the hands of writers, critics and journalists all over the world, Narayan has been praised for his multiple achievements as an Indo-Anglian novelist. Except those eulogies showered on him for his objective representation of Indian life, others are summarised here to take a round view of his achievements.

Harish Raizada⁴ feels that Narayan's success is owing to the complete aesthetic satisfaction that we derive from him. Lakshmi Holmstrom⁵ considers Narayan mainly as a comic novelist. John B. Alfonso-Karkala⁶ recognises in addition, Narayan's capacity for subtle humour and delightful chuckle. His works are suffused with tender irony.⁷ Rather, he has got the habit of treating every subject matter with an ironic undertone, making us doubt if he is very lighthearted about his job. But Narayan has the ability to show both the smiles and the tears of life, as seldom they can be separated in life. Hence Henry Miller⁸ calls

him a story-teller with a fine sense of tragi-comic. Both P.S. Sundaram and C.D. Narasimharah have tried to disprove that Narayan's novels in English show his botheration more for the Western reader than his Indian counterpart, by showing that his facility of expression in English and desire to write something for the sake of the small section of English-knowing Indians makes him to use English. Anthony Burgess clarifies that the use of English does not imply an acceptance of British values or even British semantics.

Narayan himself says that his main concern is with human character. He depicts the world as that character understands it and he/she is seen to fight, succumb to or get over a difficult situation. H.M. Williams quotes Narayan as viewing India's independence as a liberating development, the way it helped the novelist to indulge in psychological analysis rather than in piping the propaganda of various political drums. Though this view of his own art by Narayan supports P.S. Sundaram's remark that Narayan is not a committed writer, all the same, it supports the view that Narayan projects the Indian society through what he calls the 'difficult situation' which the character, with the background:

of Indian life in his bones, faces. Though incidental, the fact that the criticism of society and the observation of the social predicament are existing in his novels, is also recognised by Lakshmi Holmstrom.¹ He is therefore supposed to be as delightful as A.G. Gardiner without his 'social purpose' — if by that phrase we mean 'social reformation.'² Margaret Berry³ finds Narayan strikingly Hindu in attitude, custom, demeanor, convention and practice. Lakshmi Holmstrom points out that Narayan accepts the classical Hindu concept of the cycle of birth — death — birth. C. Paul Vergaese⁵ shows that Narayan is deeply rooted in the Hindu religion in that he shows that Dharma protects its protector and destroys its destroyer. With all that K. Venkatachari⁶ feels that the subtle realities of the common man are treated in Narayan's novels. C.D. Narasimhaiah⁷ is confident that Narayan can treat tenderly, the lower middle-class domestic life. He is convinced that few writers have been more truly

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4. Ibid., above in 1, p.122.


Indian than Narayan, who was born in the heart of South India, brought up in orthodox surroundings, had the benefit of English education and changing society to mould him, could see India both through the eyes of the outsider as well as his, owing to his frequent flights abroad, is deeply rooted in religion and tradition, and finally, who can speak Tamil at home, Kannada on the streets and English elsewhere. No doubt, this thorough Indian background and his awareness of social change around, inspires him to produce the best stories about India wherein live people wander. Their worth lies in the fact that they are at once both intensely Indian and universally human, which is recognised by Rosanne Archer. C.D. Narasimhaiah opines that Narayan's writings as understood by competent English and American critics, transcend the boundaries of the state of his domicile and the country of his birth but are contributions to English Literature.

H.C. Trivedi and N.C. Soni consider Narayan as perhaps the most distinguished Indo-Anglian novelist with a prolific contribution in the field of art. H.N. Williams goes to the extent of saying that no writer is so well known in the West as Narayan, since Tagore. To K.V. Suryanarayana Murthy it does not therefore appear strange that Narayan

3. Ibid., in 1 above, p.67.
could win Sahitya Akademi Trophy, several American awards and fellowships, warm tributes from Europe and America, and the splendid applause of Somerset Maugham (who paid a personal visit to Narayan in India at Mysore), Graham Greene and I.A. Richards in particular. It is however disturbing for William Walsh\(^1\) to know that Narayan, one of the Indo-Anglian novelists who stands high in the estimation of his fellow novelists, yet seems to have received astonishingly little critical attention.

**Narayan: a study by comparison and contrast:**

The human habit of knowing something by comparison is as old as the Sun. For this reason, comparisons need not always be odious. But whether, in the field of literature, as in any other, it pays one to compare two artists is open to question. The plain reason is that every artist has a distinct personality - a combination of the physic, the chemic, the heredity and the environment - which he breathes into his creations and comparing a fraction of one to that of the other becomes a laughable thing. C.D. Narasimhaiah\(^2\) therefore breathes a sigh of relief that at last Narayan is himself.

However, it is worth seeing how Narayan is compared and contrasted with others. Narayan has been called the Indian Chekhov. This is so because Narayan, like the Russian, has an unprejudiced and aesthetic attitude towards life.\(^3\)

sadness, comedy and tragedy that mix up in various combinations in the lives of people creates the same disillusionment about life in Narayan as it does in Chekhov. Perhaps, as a Hindu deeply rooted in religion and tradition, Narayan considers life itself as 'maya' and Literature - twice removed from truth - of Narayan is bound to reflect this attitude. Further Chekhov showed life as it really was in 19th century Russia. He wrote of ordinary people, dealt with the humdrum philistine world of the average man. In Narayan too we get the detached realism of India not necessarily either of the 20th century or philistine. He is inspired by life in India in the past, and, combining both the past and the present, gives hope for the future. The vivid characters whom one meets in Jane Austen and the delicate landscapes one sees in Thomas Coryate are both seen in Narayan. What a Balzac and a Zola had done in France, and, H.G. Wells in England, Narayan is doing in India - grasp of the psychology of the individuals; an intuition of group psychology; and a precise sociological sense, reflected in the study of the society with its two poles: the agricultural, hierarchical and superannuated civilisation encountering the swarming world of commerce, advertising and money. Like the English novelist, Joyce Cary, Narayan transmutes subjective experiences into a novel, understands the problems

of his characters in the contemporary setting and stops to hear with them even through the tick-tock of life the surge and agitation of eternity.¹

But Sundaram² quickly reverses the above by his candid remark that Narayan turned his back on all socio-economic-political developments in India between 1930-1950, as Jane Austen did, on the French Revolution and the Napoleonic War. As this study continues the injustice done to Narayan by the above remark would be brought home. How can Narayan forget life by which he is distinctly inspired to write? And the profiles of life are society, economy and the polity.

H. Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, form the famous trio of Indo-Anglian fiction. Raja Rao is labelled the religious or philosophical novelist stuffed with national self-consciousness.³ Mulk Raj Anand, the Marxist and a committed novelist does not recognise pure art or art for art sake. He advocates art for life’s sake and literature must, according to him, not only supply answers to the problems of contemporary life, but also be abreast of the ideas of the age.⁴ Narayan on the other hand, is the uncommitted novelist of the Indian life, seeing conflicts in the Indian society from as remote a distance as that of the Mahabharata or the Ramayana, and sensing the same even in the objective representation of Indian life and setting and doing it for

³. cp. A.D. Brunton, "India in Fiction: the heritage of Indianness" - Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English - Karnataka University, Dharwar - First Edicition, 1969, p.59
purely aesthetic reasons - Art for Art's sake. It is in this sense that Narayan's fiction becomes complementary to that of both Anand and Raja Rao.¹

Narayan: his awareness of Indian life:

It is proposed to deal now with the awareness of Indian life in Narayan. Indian life, is a blend of its philosophy; its polity; its economy; its semantics; its morals and manners; its conventions and customs; its tradition and modernity; its myths and legends; etc. Narayan demonstrates an artist's approach to Indian life viewed in its totality as a perennial source of inspiration. He is interested in the changing Indian life, to whatever compartment it belongs, because he likes to involve himself with people and their life around him. Neither commitment of any kind nor the prescription of any kind of life for his people is the reason for this involvement but it is the aesthetic pleasure that he derives from this involvement and desires to share the same with his readers.

A.V. Krishnarao² warns the novelist saying that he cannot and should not write sitting in an ivory tower. As though to elucidate the above, John McCormick³ says that to the genuine novelist, war and politics are facts of the real world to be faced, interpreted and imaginatively projected in his work. This surely means that life in a country cannot be separated even from the war the country fights and its politics as they have their impact on life.


Opinion is sharply divided on whether Narayan has the awareness of life around and even if he has, whether he pictures it in his fiction. To Narayan, the only test of fiction is its reality.\textsuperscript{1} To make his fiction answer this self-imposed canon, he derives all influence from life, from the surroundings, a little bus-stop or a street shop, as he himself declares.\textsuperscript{2} It is true that Narayan is not a villager as Ved Mehta\textsuperscript{3} observes. But to say that none of his characters is a villager is not correct. The villagers may not be central characters in Narayan's fiction. Though the central character belongs to urban or suburban society, nothing prevents him from crossing another Indian from the rural areas. While Narayan says that in his view villagers' lives are monotonous or sedentary and there is no story in a village, he is explaining why his novels do not deal purely with the rural setting. To one looking to Indian society and Indian way of life as the only source of inspiration, there can be no rural and urban society as such. Narayan depicts Indian life as he knows that he is also addressing an immense Indian public other than the audience abroad for whom alone he used to think he was writing, at one time.\textsuperscript{5}

Notwithstanding what Narayan has to say about his source of inspiration, there are many who consider him

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} op. Ved Mehta, "R.K. Narayan" - The Illustrated Weekly of India - 23rd January, 1972, p.35.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ibid., in 1 above, p.34.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Ved Mehta quoting Narayan in 1 above, p.34.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid., in 2 above.
\end{itemize}
otherwise. It is said that the great social, economic and political changes that have taken place in the last few decades, seem to have left him untouched.\(^1\) While the nation had waged a crusade against the British, Narayan is supposed to have been interested in the goings on of the middle class family in Malgudi,\(^2\) reflecting the sheltered life he led in Mysore.\(^3\) Unlike Ved Mehta, David McGutchion admits that Narayan does present Indian villagers but his presentation of them is, he feels, patronising and false. It is the picture of the villager as presented by the old Sahib or British official.\(^4\) William Walsh\(^5\) does not consider Narayan a fashionable writer as his themes are not particularly contemporary or provocative. In his summary account of a seminar, A. Wendt\(^6\) observes that one of the participants found Narayan's novels peculiarly 'dated' and seemed to feel that the problems he exposed himself to were not the problems of the current generation. This detachment of Narayan tempted Mulk Raj Anand to the above view in the same seminar.

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As a result of the above views, the Indian encounter with the British in Swami and Friends, the Quit India Movement in Waiting for the Mahatma and the likes become only larks.

There are, however, many who confirm that Narayan has an intense awareness of life in India. He is said not to provide a comprehensive idea of the Indian social life. But this remark, which applies to his short stories will not apply to his novels owing to their wider canvas, larger number of characters and the thickness of the subject matter. But there is no doubt that he presents interesting scenes from life in India as seen by a dispassionate onlooker, even in his stories. This kind of observation of life is adopted by Narayan as he is not concerned with nationalism, socialism or communism for their own sake. P.S. Sundaram rejects the view that Narayan's villagers are fantasies. Narayan is alive to the needs of a novelist and gives to his novels a social texture. But what seems to appeal to Narayan is that contemporary situation in the Indian life which creates tensions between social convention and spontaneity; between the claims of social and economic propriety and those of personal integrity; between tradition and modernity. R.K. Narayan's is supposed to be the best of

2. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.143.
the contemporary Indian literature in English which reflects
the values, the mores and the traditions of the country
whether these traditions are Hindu, Muslim, Christian or
Buddhist.¹ Narayan, who is firmly rooted in his religion
has accustomed himself to seeing the social change in India
as an illusion and his eyes are always towards the old order
of life and things in India where progress, though present,
was not seriously considered. This too is a grand presenta-
tion of Indian life - the meeting of the past with the present
at some point of time. With the social awareness in his blood
and the past of India in his bones, he is able to broaden
our social sympathies and considerably heighten our moral
being.² The combination of the past and the present of Indian
life which is life at present and at all times in India, does
not therefore make Narayan any the less Indian but on the
contrary makes his writings 'distinctly Indian.'³ Graham
Greene therefore says that Narayan's trumpet is India as in
his work 'he sees the sense of the Indian population and the
Indian way of life, alive.'⁴

Now, by way of conclusion: Narayan was speaking
at a Humanities Conference on the Sociological aspects of the
novel, in 1973, in Hawaii. He declared that the novel is the
least satisfactory form for dealing with social ills.⁵ This
only proves that Narayan negates any social significance for

1. cp. Rajiva F. Stanley, "Contemporary Indian Writing in
   English" - Quest, No.60 (Jan-Mar 1969) p.75.
3. cp. H.H. Annaiah Gowda, "R.K. Narayan" - The Literary Half-
4. Ibid., p.39.
5. cp. Margaret Berry, "R.K. Narayan: Lila and Literature" -
   Journal of Indian Writing in English, Gulbarga, Vol.IV,
   No.2 (July 1976), p.2.
the novel but views it as a genre of pure art. Though it may indicate his detachment from social, economic, and political problems from this point of view, it does not show either his ignorance of or detachment from social life in the creation of fiction. This is clear from the way Narayan\textsuperscript{1} answers the question as to what is the relationship between the writer and his community. The writer he says, is both a product of the society and a spokesman of the community enjoying absolute freedom of spirit to keep his own balance between the two.

Narayan feels that the most practical thing for the Indian novelist in English is to write about the facts of the contemporary world. This may be done in two ways: either in the form of reflections, because the author, though an Indian, is settled abroad so that he cannot have the opportunity of seeing Indian life everyday; or by coming and living in India and producing a major work of Indian content.\textsuperscript{2} V.Y. Kantak\textsuperscript{3} quotes Narayan as affirming that nothing could be more useful for the writer of fiction than the rich material, the diversity of situation and background and the extreme individuality of every individual, that is found in India. No wonder, he gets all influence from life and from the surroundings.\textsuperscript{4} Narayan also explains about the choice of his material from Indian life: First, we see life in a greater concentration in a smaller area than in a crowd. In a big city where we are likely to meet a great mass of life,
it is difficult to see the types and forces of human relationship, activities and aspirations of people in greater details.

To Narayan Indian civilisation is as old as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Indian life even in the 20th century draws its inspiration from the myths; legends, and epics. Narayan who depicts this essence of Indian life against the background of contemporary situation, is able to see the world and its affairs through the concepts of these myths and read their symbolism in modern times. This he does for a pleasant change after he has written a number of novels and short stories based on the society around him.2

John Updike,3 reviewing Narayan's 'My Days', draws attention to Narayan's sense of responsibility as a citizen. To his friend Krishnan, Narayan expressed that he thought it one of the best things written about him, as it made him to feel good to know that Updike understood his involvement with people - as individuals and as a community.4

Narayan: does he present only South India in his fiction?

Certain writers contend that though Narayan's fiction is Indian in character it is regional in content.

By choosing to talk on 'Malgudi - the world of R.K. Narayan,' P.S. Sundaram wished recently, to draw the attention of the audience to the limitation that Narayan deliberately set himself possibly because he is not capable of going beyond the limits of Malgudi. Malgudi, which is central to Narayan's work is only a tiny speck of that vast country. The fiction world of Narayan is supposed to have a strong regionalistic base, where life, with its humour and pathos is adjusted to ever unruffled Malgudi and the quiet flowing Sarayu. David McCutchion asserts that Narayan writes novels only for foreigners who cannot know what the people of Mysore are like and so will tend to believe that they are as Narayan depicts them, as seen by him in the small provincial town of Malgudi.

It is further said that Narayan presents only one Westernised South Indian section of the varied Indian population, or the customs and manners of the Tamil people. This South Indian accuracy and authenticity makes Narayan's novels satisfyingly Indian. Narayan's fiction is supposed to handle South Indian middle class and its struggle towards maturity within the accepted religion and social framework.

5. Ibid., in 2 above, p.39.
Sundaram lists typical South Indian themes and customs treated by Narayan. Narayan is supposed to denote through his novels South Indian men with that sharp, trenchant quality as distinct from others elsewhere in India. This he does both for his Western readers and his countrymen. Narayan thus has the knack of communicating the intense pleasure he takes in the foibles of ordinary South Indians.

Studying the various comments made above one cannot help feeling that most of them, if not all, are the result of lightheartedness or lack of sincerity ending in apparent contradictions. P.S. Sundaram does not seem to realise the infinite potentiality of 'Malgudi, the world of Narayan' - in favour of Narayan - though he spoke of it as Narayan's limitations. It has already been pointed out that Narayan is aware of the totality of Indian life - its past and its present - and that he represents the same. He therefore has made Malgudi his world as he sees in it the inspiring miniature of the totality of Indian life. Malgudi, though a tiny speck of vast India, reflects all that is in Indian life as a crumb of bread represents the loaf. Added, Mysore, which is suggestive of Malgudi cannot be a tiny speck of India.

References:
It is amusing to see many Indian commentators, like some here, mistake South Indian society for Tamil society and South Indian life as that led by people born in South India only. South India and North India, are only geographical terms and have no significance in so far as Indian life is concerned, thanks to the constitutional guarantee given to us to move anywhere in India, do what we like for our bread and establish ourselves in any part of the country. Even Malgudi must reflect this pleasant aspect of Indian homogeneity - hence it is the world of Narayan. It is debatable, how in India, where everyone knows the value of money or is forced to know it, bargaining with a jutka-man or with the buyer of newspaper; or where bus transport is either absent or inadequate, a description of vagaries of private bus, become typically South Indian as Sundaram points out. Hence, it is not just to pin the regional label - the South Indian - on Narayan. He is rather the reflector of Indian life lived in South India.

Narayan: Social Satire in his Fiction:

C.V. Venugopal says that the Indian writer does not, as a rule, consider himself, a social reformer. Berry Margare says Narayan is certainly not one. To her, he repeats the work of the gods - creation-destruction-creation - for mere amusement of the process itself. Harish Raisada considers satirical humour as very rare in Narayan. H.M.

Williams finds Narayan's fiction semi-satirical. Brunton recognises Narayan's strength in his realism and satire.

But Narayan's satire is a class by itself. It is not used to either expose or discourage anything or to advocate or propagandize any principle. Cursed with human weaknesses as we all are, Narayan, who is not able to contain his anger looking at certain things, makes angry remarks. These may be about greedy businessmen and house-owners; corrupt officials; the appalling conditions of Indian transport; the social black sheep; muddle headed legislators; casteism; superstitions; undue attachment to tradition, etc.

Narayan as a novelist of authentic India:

The criterion for literary assessment is an ever-changing thing. The cerebral view of literature deals with the enlightenment that we derive from it. The visceral view judges literature from the power of literature to convert us. But at present, literary assessment has so changed that great literature is understood to be that which creates 'images in the head of society' through the creation of fictitious narrative involving popular ideas and sometimes supernatural persons.

Indo-Anglian novelists provide us a chance to study

two things: the source that inspires their art and the authentic interpretation of the problems facing the growing Indian society. The view that most of these novelists depict the Hindus of India perhaps because most of them are themselves Hindus,¹ may not be of much significance or worth from this point of view.

It is encouraging to read that long before the Indian Sahitya Akademi ['recognised the honest - native craftsmanship of Narayan'² his authentic picturisation of Indian life was known to many.

Though, initially, Narayan thought that Russians and Americans liked his novels best³ he knows that he is writing also for the benefit of the small group of English-knowing Indian intellectuals scattered throughout the country. His works have seen translations into all European languages and Hebrew.

It was sometimes thought that Narayan saw India and her people "from the outsiders' point of view."⁴ But the very universal appeal of his novels and stories proves beyond doubt that Narayan has the capacity to see the goings-on around him closely, and make both Indians and non-Indians

to see them. He writes about Indian life for the purposeful education of Indians and the entertainment of those abroad. Narayan faithfully follows the role the writer in independent India is expected to play, by hoping "to express through his writings, the way of life of the group of people with whose background he is most familiar"\(^1\) which therefore will be the projection of life of individuals in Indian society.

The Era of Independence in India has been both a beneficial and a baneful experience for the writer in India. While it has created an intense social awareness in him he has been made conscious through it, of our triumphant achievements and dismal failures. The writer, like any other responsible citizen of India, has sometimes been in a mood of disillusionment. No wonder, this picture of Indian society is found in writers like Narayan.

Narayan has been able to judge contemporary Indian life because he has an intimate knowledge of his men and their culture. Thus his portrayal of Indian life has authenticity and credibility and is peopled by breathing characters, This accounts for his popularity in India.

The average Indian leads a life, rooted in classical convention. But life is a flow and change is its law. Malgudi also grows and the lives of Malgudians cannot forever be guided by convention without its own time-bound challenges and tradition. The purpose of Narayan's fiction is to build up this picture of changing Malgudi.

Narayan, who practises art for its own sake, sees growth of Indian life with an 'objective perfectly impartial and unbiased' mind which is a token of his artist's approach to social change. Neither an apologist nor an opponent, he has maintained a spectator's outlook. He is a sympathising spectator of the Indian life. Neither there is sentimentality, nor sermonising in him.

His novels are not propagandist of social change in India but they do show 'the breakdown of feudal society', the vanishing of the central character from the convention-ridden and tradition-bound Indian family and 'the conflict between the old and the new'. They reflect the changing attitude of the Indian populace in that the people are shown as being eager to get 'themselves out of the automatism of the past'.

Narayan takes care not to introduce controversial topics in his fiction, thus obviating the need for either defending or attacking them. Even while dealing with the political events leading to India's independence, we never see in him, "political prejudices and 'isms" nor does he "give expression to his personal views." That is why his

2. Ibid., p.158.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid., in 1 above, p.158.
7. Ibid., in 6 above.
description of the Indian people and their ways of life are emulatively authentic and abundantly popular.

But Narayan is a writer with a heart sympathising with the plight of the poor and the wretched of India, though nowhere he either overemphasises this or takes up their cause openly.

The non-Indians look to India as 'a kaleidoscope of ancient races, hoary religions and complex social traditions.' Of all the Indo-Anglian writers, Narayan is supposed by non-Indians as the best, as he helps them to understand the 'core of Indian life' and 'the essence of the Indian soul' without being affected by regionalism or the zeal to propagate any religion or the current habit of taking up the cause of either a caste or a class. His purpose is to picture the members of the Indian middle class as engaged in a struggle. This struggle gets a true Indian colouring because Narayan's heroes are caught in the invincible nets of either family relationships or illusion of progress. It is thus that one gets the picture of family relationship between son and parents; brother and brother; father and daughter; father and son; husband and wife; grand-mother and grand-son; and nephew and aunt.

His novels reflect the common mode of life in the Indian villages showing its innocence and lack of sophistication, and that in the cities where life is 'mechanical and

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid in 1 above
impersonal" owing to life's enlargement and complications there. It is in this context that Narayan deals with problems such as illiteracy and education, journalism, film-making, money-lending, sweet-vending, sign-painting and the likes.

He continues to picture India by showing us poverty, ignorance and beggary; religions and rituals; castes and classes; superstitions and conventions; gods, goddesses, demi-gods and spirits; learning, science and technology; commerce, industry and business; caves, cobras, dancers and sadhus; administration, taxes and citizenship; leadership and polity—all co-existing in India. The social stigmas and socio-economic black sheep, eccentrics, knaves, prostitutes, lechers, adulterers, money-grabbers, drunkards, etc.,—all walk in Malgudi.

Further, Narayan like the others of his creed, has succeeded in familiarising the West with the Hindu mythology centred round Rama and Krishna. The Brahman, the Eternal Absolute, 'Dwaitadwaita', the identity of the male and the female in 'Purusha-Prakriti', are the legacies of Vedantic India which find a place in Narayan.

He does recognise social change and progress, but seems to think that it is all 'Maya.' So it is 'ultimately' insignificant to him. If life is 'lila' to him, so is literature too. Hence he makes his characters play like the shadows of the forest or like the whitecaps, toss their heads on the sea of life. The characters struggle at last to free themselves from their illusion of progress and move back to their automatous life.

Though Narayan shows that the Indian middle class strongly adheres to convention that he does not stop only at that can be seen by the fact that his novels are placed at different points of time. His fiction deals with the impact of modernity on age-old convention and tradition of India. The central character receives the change with great hope and enthusiasm. But the past of India which is in his blood and bones, creates the timely disillusionment and regenerates his faith in the unchanging and absolute values of Indian life. Narayan, in other words, is inspired by the comicality that results from the importation of the Western materialism into the eternal and spiritual culture of India. Behind this comicality there is an underlying sadness owing to the mixture of quick social change and the traditional Indian life. This has been the predicament of the Indian for decades and to Narayan this serves as rich raw material. As a safety valve, Narayan presents Indian philosophy through his social plots giving expression to Indians' innate belief in salvation as the only answer to the unending problems of life. That is the explanation for Narayan's authenticity.

It is now time that one travels to Malgudi to see how life is lived by its people so as to support the conclusions arrived at above. As a first step, in the chapter to follow, Malgudi is introduced

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