2.1 Life and Works

"India's greatest writer in English in the 20th century," "absolutely authentic sans pomposity," "a lean, lucid and understated but wonderfully expressive style", "a writer's writer" such were the phrases used to describe the man who created the immortal town of Malgudi - R.K.Narayan.

Birth

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanaswami was born in Chennai, India on October 10, 1906. His father, Rasipuram Venkatarama Krishnaswami Iyer, was a provincial head-master. He was the third of eight surviving children. In south India, the given names are usually written last. His first name is a toponym and his second name is a patronym. For this reason, all of Narayan's brothers have the same first two names. See, for example, R. K. Laxman. The writer became R. K. Narayan at the suggestion of Graham Greene, who felt his full name was simply too long.

Childhood

Narayan's mother, Gnanambal, was quite ill after his birth and enlisted a wet nurse to feed her young son. When she became pregnant again, the two-year-old Narayan was sent to Madras to live with his maternal grandmother, Parvati, who was called "Ammani". He lived with her and one of his uncles, T. N. Seshachalam, until he was a teenager. He only spent a few weeks each summer visiting his parents and siblings. Narayan grew up speaking Tamil and learned English at school. In his autobiography, My Days, Narayan writes of visiting his parents in Mysore and being unable to understand the shopkeepers, who spoke Kannada, a language he later learned.
Education

After completing eight years of education at the Lutheran Mission School near his grandmother’s house in Madras, he studied for a short time at the CRC High School. When his father was appointed headmaster of the Maharaja’s High School in Mysore, Narayan moved back in with his parents. To his father’s consternation, Narayan was an indifferent student and after graduating high school, he failed the college entrance exam in English because he found the primary textbook to be too boring to read. He took the exam again a year later and eventually obtained his bachelor’s degree from the University of Mysore.

‘Purposive’ Writing

Everyone thinks he’s a writer with a mission. Myself, absolutely not. I write only because I’m interested in a type of character and I’m amused mostly by the seriousness with which each man takes himself. I try to write from the inside, of even a villain, and then see his point of view, that’s all. Some amount of identification… their identity is recognized. I can’t be hostile because I see it from his point of view. That’s why even if I write about a politician, it would be a justification for him (laughs).

Politics is the least interesting aspect of life, in my view. I don’t attach too much importance to it as literary material. Because most politically inspired novels die in good time. They don’t last. It’s only the human elements which last, not the political concepts or the pressures. They become just insignificant.10

Writing Career

He is one of the few Indian-English writers who spent nearly all his time in India. He went abroad to the United States in 1956 at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation. Narayan’s first published work was the review of a book titled

Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England. He began his literary career with short stories which appeared in The Hindu, and also worked for some time as the Mysore correspondent of Justice, a Madras-based newspaper. He also took up teaching at a government school, but left the job within two days.

His writing career began with Swami and Friends. At first, he could not get the novel published. Eventually, the draft was shown to Graham Greene by a mutual friend, Purna. Greene liked it so much that he arranged for its publication; Greene was to remain a close friend and admirer of Narayan. After that, he published a continuous stream of novels, all set in Malgudi and each dealing with different characters in that fictional place. Autobiographical content forms a significant part of some of his novels. For example, the events surrounding the death of his young wife and how he coped with the loss from the basis of The English Teacher. Mr. Narayan became his own publisher when World War II cut him off from Britain.

Death

R. K. Narayan passed away on May 13, 2001, due to cardio-respiratory failure. He was 94.

Writing Style

Narayan's novels are characterized by Chekhovian simplicity and gentle humour. He told stories of simple folks trying to live their simple lives in a changing world. The characters in his novels were very ordinary, down-to-earth Indians trying to blend tradition with modernization, often resulting in tragic-comic situations. His writing style was simple, unpretentious and witty, with a unique flavor as if he were writing in the native tongue. Many of Narayan's works are rooted in everyday life, though he is not shy of invoking Hindu tales or traditional Indian folklore to
emphasize a point. His easy-going outlook on life has sometimes been criticized, though in general he is viewed as an accomplished, sensitive and reasonably prolific writer.

**Awards and Recognition**

Mr. Narayan won numerous awards and honours for his works. He won the National Prize of the Sahitya Academi, the Indian literary academy, for The Guide in 1958. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan, a coveted Indian award, for distinguished service to literature in 1964. In 1980, R.K. Narayan was awarded the AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature. He was an honorary member of the society. He was elected an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1982 and nominated to the Rajya Sabha—the upper house of the Parliament of India—in 1989. In addition, University of Mysore, Delhi University and the University of Leeds conferred honorary doctorates on him. He was awarded Padma Vibhushan in 2000.

**Criticism**

Though Narayan’s writing has been extremely popular amongst the masses, the upper, literary classes never really warmed up to him. It has been said that his writing was pedestrian, with his simple language and stories of village life. One of his most outspoken critics has been Shashi Tharoor.

'R.K.N. had not much books in his room. The walls of his room were bare except one calendar given by a Japanee friend. He avoided visitors. He didn't reply to letters he received. But Raja Rao was a good correspondent. The big trios were so much different from each other in style and presentation, but were good friends.

When Tiger for Malgudi released somebody said (immediate response), R.K.Narayan is dead here and that he must stop writing now. But later number of critics appreciated it.
In a speech R.K.N. said, that he wanted to write a small book but he couldn't
enter the tiger and stop it. We can see a typical R.K.N's sense of humor here in his
response'.

Narayan's works:

Novels
Swami and Friends (1935)
The Bachelor of Arts (1937)
The Dark Room (1938)
The English Teacher (1945)
Mr. Sampath – The Printer of Malgudi (1949)
The Financial Expert (19520
Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)
The Guide (1958)
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961)
The Vendor of Sweets (1967)
The Painter of Signs (1976)
A Tiger for Malgudi (1983)
Talkative Man (1986)
The World of Nagaraj (1990)
The Grandmother's Tale (1992)

Collections

The World of Malgudi (2000)

Short Story Collections
An asterisk indicates a collection published only in India.
Dodu and Other Stories (1943)*
Cyclone and Other Stories (1945)*
An Astrologer's Day and Other Short Stories (1947)
Lawley Road and Other Stories (1956)*
A Horse and two Goats (1970)

*Interview with Dr. C.V.Venugopal 3pm. 27-10-2007. at his residence
Malgudi Days (1982)
Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985)
The Grandmother’s Tale and Selected Stories (1993)
The Watchman
Fruition at Forty

Non-Fiction
Next Sunday (1960)
My Dateless Diary (1964)
My Days (1974)
The Emerald Route (1980)
A Writer’s Nightmare (1988)
Like The Sun

Mythology
Gods, Demons and others (1965)
The Ramayana (1972)
The Mahabharata (1972)

TV and Movie Adaptations

The Guide was made into a film in both English and Hindi by Dev Anand. It was commercially a most successful venture, but Narayan was not happy with the screen adaptation of his novel. His novel Mr.Sampath was made into a film by S.S. Vasan of Gemini Films. Another novel, The Financial Expert was made into the Kannada movie Banker Margayya. Swami and Friends, The Vendor of Sweets and some of Narayan’s short stories were adapted by the late actor-director Shankar Nag into a television series, Malgudi Days. It was shot in the Western Ghats town of Agumbe near the South Karnataka coast. This town served as the backdrop for Malgudi, complete with a statue of the British personage. It was serialized and telecast on Doordarshan, the Indian National Television network.11

As my field of study is R.K.Narayan’s novels, a brief introduction to each novel, would be appropriate here.

2.2 Narayan’s Novels: at a glance

1. Swami and Friends

Swami and Friends is R.K.Narayan’s first and autobiographical novel dealing with Swami’s dreams, friends, cricket and a typical boyish world full of innocence and humours.

A very important theme is introduced in the slim first novel and in the very first paragraph and so unobtrusively we need to take a good look. ‘It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline…….’

We see Swami throughout, at home or at school, resisting ‘discipline’, asserting ‘freedom’. Freedom is a genetic mutant especially in the heroes of Narayan’s early novels. Swami’s rejection of two schools is more than mere impulsive action: it is an assertion of his spirit of freedom.12

The role of the family is also introduced in Swami and Friends. More than any other character in Swami and Friends, it is granny who symbolizes the enduring family ties. Swami’s bond with his grandmother lends considerable grace to the novel.13

A quiet confidence marks Narayan’s handling of the language in his first novel. Consider a monologue of the inimitable granny.14

Swami and Friends also establishes Malgudi. Narayan recalls the magic moment of its arrival on his imaginative landscape.

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12 Rao, Ranga. p60.
13 Ibid. pp60, 61.
2. The Bachelor of Arts

The Bachelor of Arts is a novel in which the hero remains Bachelor of Arts though many times he thinks of higher education. The family plays a more significant role in Narayan’s first novel. Childhood is presented in dynamic though subtle transience; in the second novel we witness youth in full flow, a young man on the move. The theme is the education of a young man. Love and friendship, the two attractions of youth, both came under review in this novel. Chandran graduates at college, at home and in the world at large; he matures throughout psychologically; he does a Bachelor’s in life. This modest book is elegantly planned.  

3. The Dark Room

First published in Great Britain in 1938 by Macmillan and co.Ltd., London. Republished by William Heinmann in 1978. The Dark Room completely concentrated on Savitri depicts her craving for freedom from the tyranny of her husband and ends with her acceptance of the helplessness and the captivity of the dark room.

The Dark Room is the only novel of Narayan’s with a woman holding the center, until A Grandmother’s Tale (1993), Narayan’s last book, which is a novella. After the delicate weaver of familial rapport of the first two novels, we witness in The Dark Room a spectacle of domestic discord rising to a rage of violence unique in Narayan’s early comedy, a painful experience for the reader coming from Narayan’s first two novels. The Bachelor of Arts ends on a note of marital harmony of engaging youth; the crisis in The Dark Room is built on adultery. To cap it all, the heroine, having quit her home in protest against infidelity, of all Narayan’s characters pushed closest to suicide, returns home in a helpless compromise, with more than a residue of bitterness that makes the ending of the novel unique in Narayan, far from ‘happy’ or...

15 P64 line8-15.
'comedic'. The heroine is left trapped in a predicament of unrequited moral struggle, close to life in death'.

Narayan tells the story of Savitri and Ramani with economy and with impressive psychological and social realism. Narayan said: 'I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of Woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the 'women's Lib' movement....A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances'. The Dark Room is the only novel in which we find Narayan obsessed-as much as the central character is.

4. The English Teacher

First published in Great Britain in 1946 by Eyre and Spottiswoode, London First Indian Edition 1955. '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. More than any other book the English teacher if the novel, Krishna, is a fictional city of Malgudi; but he 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 reunion at the end is in fact the marriage of the 'lovers' -all over again; they achieve now a submergence of psyches: 'The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved'. Krishna offers the garland to her spirit: 'For you as ever'.

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17 P67, lines5, 6.
18 P67, lines15-19.
21 The English Teacher p96, lines9, 10.
That is the motto of this love story, this Indian story; but a human miracle: the human spirit is able to embrace life as a whole, to integrate life, death and the hereafter: as only a Gunas hero can do. I was very much attracted towards the title ‘The English Teacher’. It is autobiographical. Reading it, is reading R.K. Narayan.

5. Mr. Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi

The English Teacher and Mr. Sampath, the two post-crisis novels, are outstanding for preoccupation with self-education. Mr. Sampath enlarges and concludes it.

The narrative technique of Mr. Sampath makes it distinctive. Analysis of the structure convinces us that Mr. Sampath is the story of Srinivas. Srinivas comes to Malgudi, and starts his own magazine, gets involved with various people and things and when enough is enough, identifies with what he now discovers to be his real interests. What is unique to Mr. Sampath is that the narrative focus generally follows Srinivas’s fortunes, Mr. Sampath, his restless rajasic friend, captures our imagination equally.

“Mr. Sampath” was first published in 1949 in London, but its Indian edition in 1959. Around that time it was filmed in Tamil and Hindi. The novel is in two parts. The double structure is all too apparent. The first part is devoted to running the story and is organized around Srinivas, the second to film industry in which Mr. Sampath is more significant figure.

Mr. Sampath is R.K. Narayan’s early comedy at its best. Narayn’s success in Sampath, above all, is complete a liar and adulterer wins our hearts, anticipating the post-independence heroes.

23 Ibid. p73.
24 Ibid. P73.
25 Rao Ranga. P76.
6. The Financial Expert (1952)

"The Financial Expert" was Narayan's masterpiece till "The Guide" appeared. The novel tells the story of the rise and fall of Margayya. The first of Narayan's post-independence novels. The Financial Expert has its share of the spirit of the period. Margayya's rajasic guna- with a little mischief from Fate- wouldn't let him be; the greed wouldn't let him.

A morality play in five acts (neatly divided into five parts) the story builds up to a mythic inevitability. The novel is the first of Narayn's synoptic tales with a classical moral balance.26

Margayya is strategically placed between rural India (represented by his early clients, the indebted villagers and Kanda) and urban India (Dr. Pal). Dr. Pal is the first of post-Independence series of modern 'intellectuals' who do not command Narayan's respect. The novelist is not anti-intellectual; he is only anti pseudo-intellectual.27 Himself an orphan, Margayya is also the first of the post- independence failed fathers. The father-son relationship calls for comparison with an early novel, the Bachelor of Arts. The trace of antifeminism in the novel too goes with the rajasic temper of the post-independence hero. The conclusion of the novel is characteristic of the novelist; as the beating up of Dr Pal was the first step in Margayya's reformation, the reaching out for his grandchild at the end is proof of his return to sanity. It is a comedic resolution in the spirit of Gunas Comedy.28

Narayan's greatest single comic creation, is the financial expert. The novel reveals lust for money and it is also a revealing study of the cash nexus in modern life. But Margayya is no more incarnate of greed and wickedness. RKN has shown that despite his lust for money, he is human like all of us.

26 ibid. P76.
27 ibid. Pp76,77.
28 Ibid. p77.
I didn’t care much for some things he preached. I didn’t believe in his handspinning and anti-industrialisation. Nehru was also opposed to those ideas. Gandhi believed that all problems could be solved by just spinning, each enough yarn for his own purpose. And he was opposed to all moderation of the surroundings. He never believed in modern sanitary arrangements, the need for them. He said, “Poor people can’t afford it.”

8. The Guide

The Guide, written entirely in the USA, was the first Indian novel in English to win the Sahitya Akademi Award. Once again in Narayan villagers educate a hero; as we have seen as early as The Bachelor of Arts a young man is reformed and cured of his romanticism. Rural India for a hero of Narayan’s novels is moral India. The post-Independence heroes each suffer, as we have seen, from a rajasic weakness; in Margayya of The Financial Expert it is Avarice; in Waiting for the Mahatma, Sriram’s Sloth. With Raju, as with Sampath earlier, it is overpowering Desire.

The giving up of eating at the end, a conscious decision in response to the simple-minded faith of the villagers, climaxes the transformation of a very human hero. Some of Narayan’s memorable women characters are each associated with fragrance, particular or general; Susila in The English Teacher is rich with jasmine; Bharati of Waiting for the Mahatma with sandalwood; in a much later novel, The Painter of Signs, the heroine Daisy has her own fragrance. Here in The Guide Rosie’s ‘scent-filled presence’ works magic on Raju. The casual introduction of Rosie is in character: her artistic nature and interest as well as marital disharmony are presented

32 Rao Ranga, p83.
33 Ibid, p81, line1-5.
34 Ibid, p81, line23-27.
36 Rao Ranga. p82, line23-29.
unobtrusively. Rosie retains her dignity, humanity in the novel: at the end she realizes her lapse: ‘committed an enormous sin’.  

9. The Man Eater of Malgudi

In Waiting for the Mahatma, the benign Mahatma spurs change in Sriram. Vasu is the very antithesis of Gandhi; he is Anti-Gandhi, he is a man with a gun. In the placid pool of Malgudi Vasu is nemesis as well as catalyst; but Vasu is no effigy: scenes with him are invariably engaging. In a certain mood, he even makes sense: ‘It would be boring to be steadfastly good night and day’.

The novel has a well-marked chorus: Nataraj’s assistant, Sastri alone had maintained a haughty aloofness’. And ‘Sastri proved to be the shrewdest’. When things get too uncomfortable, Sastri goes on a long pilgrimage, a tactical retreat Mao would have approved; once Vasu dies accidentally by his own hand, Sastri returns quietly to Nataraj. It is the retiring Sastri who gets the curtain line. The conclusion is typical of Narayan’s religious optimism in the later novels. It is an Indian story: the myth of Bhasmasura modernized, yet another ‘detached, synoptic view’.

10. The Vendor of Sweets

The theme of generation gap is central to The Vendor of Sweets. Jagan is a tremendous success as a sweet-vendor, but fails dismally as a father. He recovers from his private sorrows by the end to initiate patronage of a religious sculptor. What the novelist achieves in the novel, among other things, is a parody of Gandhian philosophy. A former satyagrahi, Jagan quotes Gandhi on tax to support his unaccounted, hence untaxed income of ‘immaculate conception’! Mahatma in Narayan’s later novels has an occasional presence through a seriocomic allusion and assimilation of his values. Jagan over the decades has evolved a ‘delicate balance’.

37 Ibid, p82, line18-22.
38 Ibid.p83
39 Ibid. p84.
As long as the frying and sizzling noise in the kitchen continued and the trays passed, Jagan noticed nothing, his gaze unflinchingly fixed on the Sanskrit lines in a red bound copy of the Bhagavad Gita, but if there was the slightest pause in the sizzling, he cried out, without lifting his eyes from the sacred text, 'what is happening?' Jagan has managed to achieve an intricate alliance in equal measure of iham and param (this world and the next), cash and scripture. 40

11. The Painter of Signs

The Painter of Signs is the biggest surprise of Narayan's career. Two idealists fall in love; one of them, the 'weaker' one, lands in trouble. Bewilderment and retreat to a simpler life; modernity produces the same reactions in The Painter of Signs(1977), where Daisy, a young woman, comes to Malgudi-the time is Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency- with a fanatical mission to control India's population. Raman, another of Narayan's post-independence young drifters, is both attracted and perplexed by her sense of individuality and high responsibility, and attaches himself to her as she travels around the countryside, impatiently trying to root out what she sees as superstitious prejudices against contraception among illiterate villagers. Raman keeps anxiously hoping to win her over even as he is alienated by her coldness, her all-excluding focus on family planning, the government-enforced program whose slogans (Hum Do, Hamare Do, “Two of us, two we have”) he paints all over the countryside with as little effect as Sriram had once painted “Quit India”.

12. A Tiger for Malgudi


40 Rao Ranga, p85.
Six years after the Painter of Signs, we have A Tiger for Malgudi. The 'hero' of this slender novella is a tiger, who is trapped by a circus owner. The harassed beast kills him accidentally, terrorizes Malgudi until a sage adopts him as a disciple. A Tiger for Malgudi charts the extraordinary spiritual transformation of a ferocious tiger, 'an unmitigated animal', into a spiritual adept. The 'hero' is no ordinary run-of-the-mill beast; he is a tiger 'almost human in understanding' who is trapped by a man: 'I had let myself into ultimate slavery'. The hermit assures the crowd: 'inside he is no different from you and me.' He progresses further: 'my tiger is godly...'

The spiritual progress of the tiger seems to have been charted from the novelist's own personal memories of the post-Rajam ordeal. "There were the stages of knowing attained through suffering... I can hardly describe that kind of suffering, an emptiness, a helplessness, and a hopelessness behind the bars.' But Hindu humanism comprehends one's karma: 'That's the natural law of life, as inevitable as the ripening of a mango in its season or the fall of a withered leaf.' After The Vendor of Sweets, we have in this novel finally sanyasa in total spirit and content: time to 'shed purpose of every kind'; and move from time to timelessness. 41

13. Talkative Man

First published in Great Britain by William Heinemann, London in 1983 and in the US by Viking Press Inc., New York. First Indian Edition came out in 1983. A splendid contrast to A Tiger for Malgudi, as amusing as The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Narayan's Talkative Man, a novella, is the tale of Dr Rann, a compulsive womanizer. He is also yet another rogue in the post-Independence gallery. If 'The spruce tailor-dummy called Rann', the 'slippery Rann' is 'a regular lady-killer', and his wife is another New Woman of the post-Independence era: she is 'the Delhi woman'; she is another New Woman of the post-Independence era: she is 'the Delhi woman'; she is a

police officer who has an unofficial duty assigned by Fate, tracking down a promiscuous husband: "Husband-hunting is a fatiguing business..." The lady comments on Rann's intellectual profile: 'All wrong ideas and misleading notions. I tell you he had unsuspected depths of duplicity"; she has no doubt that he is 'an expert really in the art of deception.' An intellectual, with a book in the making, Dr Rann confesses perceptively: 'Again and again I seem to fall into the same trap like a brainless rat.' There cannot be a better image to describe this post-Independence Gunas character. 42

The Talkative Man himself belongs to a vanishing breed, the declining upper-class Brahmin gentry of Kabir Street. He identifies himself: 'I belonged to Kabir Street aristocracy, which was well known for its lofty, patronizing hospitality, cost what it may.' Sambu, the Talkative Man's neighbour is another specimen: Sambu 'spent more and more of his time reading'. But confess the narrator, 'This sort of existence did not appeal to me.' As he himself says later, he offers asylum to Dr Rann 'for no clear reason': we recall that Nataraj of The Man-eater of Malgudi buys trouble similarly with Vasu.43

Talkative Man is in many of the short stories: where some incredible experience has to be narrated it's the talkate Man who talks. He's a good link he can link people up, he's a man who goes through the city like breeze everywhere, who knoes lots of peple. He links up a lot of background and personalities and landmarks very convinicingly. Everybody is his friend.44

14. The World Of Nagaraj


42 ibid. p96.
43 Rao Ranga. p98.
Nagaraj, yet another member of Kabir Street 'aristocracy' after the narrator of Talkative Man, is childless. His brother's son rebels, quits his parents and home in the village and comes to Malgudi and lives with Nagaraj. This guardian, however, can neither guide nor guard his new found ward and his wife. Things set themselves right, more or less.

Published within just four years after Talkative Man, Narayan's The World of Nagaraj confirms one socio-economic impression of Narayan's later post-Independence novels: the upper class is in decline. Narayan presents the Kabir Street residents as 'people who were considered aristocratic inheritors of vast rice fields in the village'. Marked by 'supreme contentment', this too is by inference the Brahmin world. The degeneration is more patent than ever in this novel.

Jagan's wife in The Vendor of Sweets; and Nagaraj's wife Sita in this novel are sisters in suffering. The autobiographical elements suggest self-parody in the characterization of Nagaraj. 'No wonder I failed in BA and scraped through a third class later...' Nagaraj's placidity seems to hint a self-mocking novelist.  

15. The Grandmother's Tale

First Indian Edition came out in 1992. This novella was the novelist's last book. It is a thriller, though not as much as The Talkative Man. This slim book tells us the story of a determined young woman who goes searching for her husband missing for years; she succeeds in her mission, with unexpected consequences. Narayan attempts to reconstruct in this book the story narrated by his own maternal grandmother Ammani about her mother.  

46 ibid. p104.
2.3 Malgudi

"After all, Malgudi is a small town, everyone is within shouting distance".\(^{47}\) Malgudi is a fictitious town in India created by R.K. Narayan's works. Starting with his first novel, Swami and Friends, all but one of his fifteen novels and most of his short stories take place here. Narayan has successfully portrayed Malgudi as a microcosm of India.

It is certain that it is located in south India, for Narayan himself says in an interview: "I must be absolutely certain about the psychology of the character I am writing about, and I must be equally sure of the background, I know the Tamil and Kannada speaking people most. I know their background. I know how their minds work and almost as if it is happening to me, I know exactly what will happen to them in certain circumstances. And I know how they will react".

The exact location, however, is a matter of speculation. Many are of the opinion that it may be Coimbatore, with river on one side, forest on the other, and many similar buildings and lanes as Malgudi. It is also speculated that it may be Lalgudi on the river Kaveri, or Yadavgiri in the erstwhile state of Mysore.

Agumbe, a small village on the Western Ghats served the screening of most of the episodes of Malgudi Days, a TV serial based on Narayan's works. The movie Guide, based on Narayan's novel of the same name, was filmed in Rajasthan, instead of South India, a fact that Narayan was not very happy about.\(^{48}\) Maps of Malgudi are available at.....

http://www.malgudidays.com/aboutmalgudi.htm
http://www.flickr.com/photos/32573704@N00/6061045/

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\(^{47}\) Jagan in vendor of sweets.  
\(^{48}\) Malgudi – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malgudi
R.K. Narayan, so far as possible, keeps himself confined to Malgudi and the middle class people of this region in all his novels and short stories. "His province was the South Indian middle class which he knew how to handle in fiction—a fiction not for an audience, six thousand miles away (as his jealous detractors writing in the regional languages accuse him) but largely for his own English knowing country men." Observes C. D. Narasimhaih.  

R.K. Narayan's Malgudi has its own laws and regulations. It knows no change, Gandhiji no doubt comes here and addresses meetings. For this reception donations are also accepted and Bharati is one of the girl volunteers who is seen engaged in this work. But for this passing wind of political awakening, Malgudi is otherwise quiet. There is neither economic exploitation nor curse of untouchability socially however, women are at the complete mercy of their whimsical and wayward husbands like Ramani. There are faithful wives as well as butterfly type home-breaking women. It is free from those problems which face Nandpur, Kanthapur and Kedaram.

On the creation of Malgudi R.K.N himself said, "I really can't explain its persistence, you know. Because it was just a casual idea. It's not a fixation, a fixed geography. It has grown, developed. I think it has very elastic borders, elastic frontiers, elastic everything—with a few fixed points, that's all. .......

I had an idea of a railway station, a very small railway station. You've seen the kind of thing, with a platform and trees and a station-master. The railway station to which Swami goes to watch the trains arrive and depart:that was the original idea with which I started Swami and Friends. But in the actual book it comes last, it's at the end of the story.

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50 Unity in Diversity. Ibid. p126.
And then what happened was thinking of a name for the railway station. It should have a name-board. And I didn’t want to have an actual name which could be found in a railway time-table. I wanted to avoid that, because some busybody was likely to say, “This place is not there, that shop he has mentioned is not there.” If it’s a real town it’s a nuisance for a writer.

And while I was worrying about this problem, the idea came to me-Malgudi just seemed to hurl into view. It has no meaning. There is a place called Laligudi near Trchy and a place called Malgudi near Kumbakonam or somewhere. But Malgudi is nowhere. So that was very helpful. It satisfied my requirement.”51

2.4 Narayan and English

For both cultural and linguistic reasons Indian writers in English write a variety of English which differs in certain respects from the English of the native speakers. No doubt, Narayan retains in his writings a high standard of 'Englishness' for which he has received encomium from Allan Warner, but he often deviates from the rules of syntax, and uses words and expressions which defy English usage.

Narayan himself has told us why he chose to use English as the vehicle for his expression: “English has proved that if a language has flexibility any experience can be communicated through it, even if it has to be paraphrased sometimes rather than conveyed, and even if the factual detail is partially understood—I may straight away explain what we do not attempt to do. We are not attempting to write Anglo-Saxon English. The English language—is now undergoing a process of Indianization in the same manner as it adopted U.S. citizenship over a century ago, -- I cannot say whether the process of transmutation is to be viewed as an enrichment of the English language or a debasement of it. All that I am able to confirm is that it has served my purpose


35
admirably, of conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities who flourish in a small town located in a corner of South India."

Here is a clear enunciation of the purpose why Narayan chose to write in English. English is a flexible language capable of communicating any experience and it has become sufficiently Indianized. Its usefulness as a general means of communication among populations separated by myriad of indigenous tongues is indisputable. 52

Narayan makes spontaneous use of Indian English idioms: ---- as a matter of fact my legs were paining me. (Emphasis added) 'Mug-up', 'behave like a rowdy', 'I never knew that---' 'taking the temperature' 'I and my----' "What have you done for dinner?", "I never said any such thing---", "He is our District Board President---", 'But many others came whose visits did not mean a paisa to me' are some other examples of Indian English that Narayan does not tire of using. 53

Masti, fifteen years Narayan's senior, was a civil servant in the employ of the Mysore Government. He had an excellent command of English and when he first started writing, it was in English that he wrote. By 1910, however, he had switched to Kannada after a personal experience: during his work he encountered a Kannada farmer who, when asked why he had broken the law, pleaded his ignorance of English in extenuation. In a writing career that would last three quarters of a century, Masti would have a profound influence on Kannada literature.

In his review, Masti began with the hope that Narayan would not misunderstand him for offering a suggestion:

"A writer of Sri Narayan's ability does not need to be told that story-telling is not a matter of the language learnt in the classroom but from daily life and almost any reading. This would be accepted as true anywhere but in our unfortunate country.

53 Ibid. p124.
Writing in the country's language, our author would get one of the highest places in our literature. He would please more people and would, to men like me, be also even more convincing than he is, for trying to picture the life described.

Masti wondered how he had encountered sentences such as 'You have wisdom, old girl' or 'A cuckold's wife is everybody's darling', would be expressed in Kannada or Tamil or Hindustani. His well-meaning suggestion was:

Having written originally in an Indian language, Sri Narayan would be welcome to write in English too. Indeed, if he adopts this course he will find that he has said things in the former which are too racy, of the soil to go into English, and that, in consequence, his English will seem less successful but will have gone deeper into the heart of things.

Narayan would face such criticism and advice from various quarters at least up to the mid-1950s. The same issue came to the fore at the First All-India Writers' Conference held in Jaipur in October 1945 by the Indian centre of the P.E.N. club. In a piece for The Listener on the meeting, which was attended by, among others, E.M. Forster, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Mulk Raj Anand, Francis Watson considered the rising phenomenon of 'Indo-English'. While Indian literature of the present day was showing 'a high degree of vitality in its many tributaries of language,' English was 'creeping up'. Watson noted the advantage of writing in English:

The contemporary author in India, if he has to make an effort to write in English, has also to make an effort not to do so. English is usually his channel of approach, not only to the literatures and the living ideas of other nations, but even to the regional literatures in his own country. The proceedings of the Jaipur meeting were inevitably conducted in English and Press criticism of this fact was itself...
couched in English. Moreover the economic pressure in favour of English is not inconsiderable upon any writer in India who is anxious for an audience wide enough to support him as a professional.

At the same time, Watson allowed, 'For every Indian working successfully in English there is one talented author lost to his native literature.' This was 'the bilingual dilemma' in India, particularly prominent in the case of Urdu writers but not 'felt to the same extent by a South Indian writer of English like R.K.Narayan.'

Narayan, who did not attend the Jaipur meeting, was not one to get involved in such debates. His response was to sidestep the criticism, with its slightly moralizing overtones. Having made his decision to write in English, he was not about to show cause, let alone change course. However, he found no problem in remaining on good terms with those like Masti who, while praising his abilities as a writer, criticized his choice of language. 54

But Narayan said, on writing in English, "I was not aware that I was writing in a foreign language. All those books (indicating the bookcase), they've influenced me and they're in English. I could write more easily in English and I was fascinated with the London literary life of those days, the Thirties, when Shaw and Belloc and Bennett and Chesterton and a whole lot of others had interesting encounters. News about them would always be there." 55