

Research Paper

'Malgudi' A Prototypical Town

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ABSTRACT

We know that R.K. Narayan is one of the three most eminent writers of Indo-English fictions. R.K. Narayan created an imaginary village named 'Malgudi' in his literary works. It is created out of the creative imagination of Narayan and embodies in itself the typical features of most of the cities of southern India. The action of all the novels of R.K. Narayan and of the majority of his stories takes place in Malgudi. Narayan described the Malgudi Town so vividly on the imaginary river Sarayu, its market street, railway station, Hair Saloon, college, bank, municipal committee Mempi hills, hotels, cinemas etc. and miniature society of Malgudi men, women, children, families and their relationship with one another.

By reading his novels we feel Malgudi is a real place with which we are as familiar as with our own birth place. We see the whole place pulsating with human activity of the kind that is memorable for its ordinariness.

The place has a reality and a living and growing vitality which no reader of Narayan can fail to notice. The town of Malgudi grows from the early thirties when Narayan began writing novels, to the early eighties. Malgudi is the central theme, the soul and as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, "The real hero of Narayan's novels". In view of Uma Parmeshwaran that Malgudi is the only "Character" that grows, changes reacts to time and circumstance has spirit, a soul. Relatively, other Characters of R.K. Narayan appear to be less dynamic. They are essentially would call "Flat Characters" by F.M. Forster. Indeed Malgudi is never sick or soulless or sleepily. "Malgudi" observes by C.D. Narasimhaiah is the microcosm of traditional Indian society. Malgudi is said to be the microcosm of Hindu India. "Malgudi the locale of all the novels" says William Walsh, is a metaphor of India. Whatever happens in the one happens in the other, but also the reader begins to believe, whatever happens there happens everywhere. Obviously, the people of Malgudi are not confined to the banks of the Sarayu or Market Road and cordoned off from the rest of the nation. They are brought by the novelist into the main stream of Indian Society without losing their identity. Malgudi still bears the stamp of an old Indian Town, which it was half a century ago struggling hard, like the rest of the country, to wriggle out of its traditional took and aspiring and clamouring for modernism.

Malgudi does not exist on any map of India. It is neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. It lives in the imagination more distinctly than any other region described by any Indian writer. Malgudi is a reality charged with all that is intimate and poignant in human life. It is linked again and again with the rise and fall of heroes and heroines and the place Malgudi is everywhere as it is the surroundings of Narayan's novels and hundred and fifty one short stories. R.K. Narayan while introducing the serial 'Malgudi' is no doubt, an imaginary town, yet the people living here can exist every where, the atmosphere that influences this city lies everywhere. The nature and

surroundings of Malgudi is quite universal.

R. K. Narayan makes fictional use of Malgudi not merely as a locale of his novels, but also as a wide canvas to paint on it the social, cultural, and even political history of the last fifty years of ever-changing and ever-growing India, for Malgudi is India-not merely an epitome of South Indian towns. It is on this canvas that we see Narayan's portrayal of human relationships, the impact of Western culture on Eastern ethos (the East-West encounter of ethics), the conflict between convention and revolt, between tradition and modernity, between orthodox faith and reason, between older and younger generations, between the tensions of an individual and those of a patronizing family structure culminating into social tension, between order and disorder in which the latter is invariably subdued and relegated to the background (order-disorder-order pattern of his novels).

R.K. Narayan set his settings in Malgudi in such a manner that he could show the real rural, rustic life of Indian villages and towns and also the changes growing on by the influence of westernization, Malgudi is of all absorbing interest to the reader of Narayan. It is not a mere geographical expression; it has a distinct personality of its own. We always feel the touch of Malgudi, as it appears as familiar as our any village or town. As N. Mukharjee stated in his Book Some Aspects of the Literary Development of R.K. Narayan. "It is Narayan's triumph as an artist that makes us have complete faith in the reality of Malgudi. It is so strongly implanted in our imagination that we wonder whom we are going to meet in this town. The streets and lanes appear to be as familiar as one's home town.

In fact, Malgudi is India, not the microcosm of India but real India, not merely a fictional and fictitious South Indian town but living India, for what happens in Malgudi happens all over India with regional variations. School children and college boys with their likes and dislikes and sincerity and insincerity in friendship, marital harmony and disharmony, love in and out of marriage, love without marriage, love before and after marriage, love-triangles, seduction and promiscuity, matching of horoscopes prior to marriage and marriage possibly within the caste, the education system and its pitfalls, anti-social elements and social menaces, bribe and adulteration, elaborate religious

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rites and rituals, fake Sadhu and genuine Sannyasi, quarrels between brothers, protective paternal love, human relationships, Gandhi's struggle for freedom and its impact on the masses, money-making and money-lending, the joint family system and family-planning, blind faith and superstition, disease and death, humility and humanity, communal tensions and linguistic agitations, exploitation pure and simple, religiosity and spirituality, the philosophy of rebirth and transmigration of the soul, implicit faith in the doctrine of Karma, and the encounter between East and West and the Western influence on traditional Indian society are the common and recurrent features of the Indian social scene. The "West Wind" mentioned by Professor O.P. Mathur does not blow through Malgudi alone; it blows through the length and breadth of India. We can draw the inference that Malgudi is possibly an everywhere in India in every sense, except for the geographical boundaries on the world map. Malgudi is the socio-cultural backbone of the powerful body of India. The underlying situation in the novels of Narayan is real to all Indians, and lies very close to their immediate experience. The novels of R.K. Narayan, as professor A.N. Kaul remarks, make the readers aware of a small though "significant part of the national condition." The material of Narayan's novels observes Professor O.P. Mathur, "broadens out from the family to community and the nation and one notice that modernity is slowly but surely seeping in deeper and deeper."

People of Malgudi are representative of all that is good and bad in Indian society. They have faith in evil spirits. They are equally superstitious. They can believe in the miracles of pseudosaints. Narayan's awareness of the rural life of Malgudi is superb and he has done full justice to it. It seems that he has observed Malgudian life in its minutest details. Malgudians are typical Indians. They are simple and gullible. They can be easily duped by self-styled saints, printers, publishers, financiers and birth control workers. The businessmen, the middle class persons and the rural folks are typical of Malgudi. They have their own ideas and ideals. They are unaffected by the west-oriented culture. Malgudi has typical schools teachers, specimens of which are most convincingly drawn. The snake charmer, the temple the holy men and the worshippers are as real as Malgudi itself. The holy men are really-so called holy-men about whom there is hardly any holiness. Narayan has exposed such pretenders more effectively. The typicalities of Malgudi are its realities. The novelist has an eye even for the trivialities of human life. He is interested in the spirit of persons and objects. In this way Malgudi is not a sage of ideas and Narayan is not a propagandist, he is a realist of reputation. He shows the temper of the time. He limits it to the social conditions and for which he has Malgudi as interpretative medium. He maintains the social climate throughout. It is a sort of historical record for him.

The Indianness of Narayan's art lies in the fact that the entire material of his novels is drawn from the Indian ethos in which he is deeply rooted. Though Malgudi is a fictional town, it represents the typical features of South Indian towns. As a whole, it emerges as a town representative of the whole of India, for the process of modernization has been more or less the same all over the country. "Malgudi typifies Indian towns growing into cities, where pariahs, teachers, clerks, printers, policemen etc. live their routine life," observes Professor R.S. Singh. Narayan's novels are peopled with all sorts of characters from all walks of life and bred in a climate which is essentially Indian and not only South Indian. "So if Malgudi is the microcosm of India in its

multifarious moods, it is also the real hero of his novels, Swami, Chandran, Ramani, Krishnan, Sampath, Sriram,

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