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Research Paper Literature

"Malgudi": the Leading Hero of R. K. Narayan's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Malgudi is an imaginative locale created by Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan in his novels and short stories. It forms the setting for most of Narayan's works. The attempt in this Research Paper is made to show, how "Malgudi", a small town has become a perfect setting for R. K. Narayan's fiction. It is a landscape, a locale, imaginative yet alive. It represents India in a subtle, minute, microscopic form. In fact, it is a genuine hero of all his literary works. Narayan has successfully portrayed Malgudi as a microcosm of our country.

KEYWORDS: Fictional Locale, Indian Microcosm, Leading Character

INTRODUCTION:

R. K. Narayan (Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan, 1906-2001) belongs to the age of Indian Freedom Struggle of 20th century.The three bright stars, luminaries of Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao started writing their fiction, largely in this period of great ferment and excitement. Some of their early works truly reflect the conditions and the problems that characterize the early decades of the twentieth Century India and her people. All of them voiced the emotion of their age in their fiction directly or indirectly.

In the novels of R. K. Narayan, one can find the true representation of Contemporary Indian Life, Traditions and Culture in its vivid and realistic form. The Social realism is extensively and minutely described. Narayan is a pure story teller, an artist who portrays reality in its real rare rhythm. Social customs and reality are vividly described with unbiased objectivity and complete detached observation.

FICTION:
The Major Novels of R. K. Narayan:

01.	Swami and Friends	(1935)
02.	The Bachelor of Arts	(1936)
03.	The Dark Room	(1938)
04.	The English Teacher	(1945)
05.	Mr. Sampath	(1949)
06.	The Financial Expert	(1952)
07.	Waiting for the Mahatma	(1955)
08.	The Guide	(1958)
09.	The Man Eater of Malgudi	(1962)
10.	The Vendor of Sweets	(1967)
11.	The Painter of Sign	(1976)
12.	A Tiger for Malgudi	(1977)
13.	Talkative Man	(1986)
14.	The World of Nagaraj	(1990)
15.	Grand Mother's Tale	(1992)

In short he wrote Fifteen Novels, Five Volumes of Short-Stories, a number of Travelogues and Collection of Non-fiction, English Translation of Indian Epics, and the Memoirs "My Days".

MALGUDI- AN IMAGINATIVE, ALIVE LANDSCAPE:

Malgudi is a fictional town imaged in the mind of R. K. Narayan, where his literary works take origin. It's like a landscape as alive and active as a personified character. The fictitious region is woven in such a smooth thread that it creates a fine fabric of inseparable part of Narayan's realistic art. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'Border Countries' of Sir Walter Scott, 'Lake District' of Wordsworth, 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy or 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. It was a town created from Narayan's own experiences, his childhood, and his upbringing. The people in it were people he met every day. He thus created a place which every Indian could relate to. A place, where, you could go "into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us, we know, with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open the door to yet another human existence."(Green Graham)

William Walsh calls Malgudi an imaginative version of Narayan's beloved Mysore, and it is as familiar to his readers as their own suburbs, and infinitely more engaging. For Iyenger, it is Narayan's 'Caster Bridge' whose inhabitants are essentially human, have their kinship with all humanity and thus Malgudi is everywhere. Malgudi is an imaginary south Indian town around which Narayan has woven the complex pattern of the lives of his characters. He takes us Malgudi to laugh, to sympathise and to share the vicissitudes of its inhabitants. Narayan has successfully portrayed Malgudi as a microcosm of our Country. It is a landscape, a locale, imaginative yet alive. It represents India in a subtle, minute, microscopic form. In fact, it is a genuine hero of all the literary works of Narayan.

While describing how he conceptualized Malgudi, Narayan says,

"Malgudi was an earth-shaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that, which would be necessary in writing about Malgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banyan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town: The train had just arrived in Malgudi Station." (Narayan R. K. "*My Days*")

Narayan's first novel 'Swami and Friends' introduces us to this town called Malgudi on the border of the states of Mysore and Madras. Malgudi has a municipality, a Town Hall, a club and two schools-The Albert Mission School and the Border high school. We hear of motor cars in which Swami rides to the club even in 1935. Malgudi had a theatre, 'The Palace Talkies'. The other considerable landmarks of Malgudi are Malgudi station, the central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, The Bombay Anand Bhavan, Kabir Street, the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley, the office of 'The Banner', The Saryu River', Nallappa's Groves, Mempi Hills, Hotels, Cinemas, and Colleges which make it a story of social framework.

Malgudi is located on the banks of the river Sarayu. In Swami and Friends, Swami, Mani and Rajam spend most of their evenings playing or chatting by the river. In The Guide, holy-man Raju fasts on the banks of the dry river Sarayu, praying for the rains to come. When Mahatma Gandhi visits Malgudi, the meetings and speeches are held right on the banks of river Sarayu.

The special feature of the fictional setting of Malgudi Locale is its reluctance for gradual changes. Life here moves at slow pace. It is completely undisturbed by the outside world and its speciality remains the same. Here are the people who believed in strongly-rooted traditions and age old customs. This makes them to look upon any new idea with suspicion and distrust.

There are characters that give meaning to the places of Malgudi and make them real and life-like. The sense of familiarity of the streets and lanes of Malgudi is a home-breed. It helps the readers to be intimate. It creates a deeper and better understanding of its people and places establishing a close intimacy. Malgudi is a town where castes and oc-

cupations are quite steady. Marriages are arranged. People believed in Astrology, though it is not always practiced. But the greatest charm of R. K. Narayan lies in making Malgudi and its people and their social values real for the readers. He established this intimate sense of reality through keen observation, sympathy, unfailing humour and gentle satire. The world of Malgudi is thus warm and intimate.

Malgudi is a place where people are not heroic but common middle class lot. There is no control over the events but, it seems as if they control everything. In fact, they are utterly helpless creatures torn by desires and tossed this way or that way by the caprice of fate.

Malgudi has a traditional history of its own. Ram may have passed through this place on his journey to Lanka. Its street may have been touched by the feet of Lord Budhdha. So its past is involved with the past of India.

Malgudi has its own Doctor who on the basis of imagination and without bothering to see the patients, finds out the disease and treats accordingly. He sees no difference between malaria and typhoid. At the time of 'Quit India Movement' Malgudi maintained its position. Its youths actively participated. Malgudi has its common tea-stall, the Muthu's tea-stall, which sell tea in unwashed tumblers. It does not refuse any of its customers. It has its own lawyer, the adjournment lawyer, who has an outstanding credit with his printer's client, Natraj, but wants his own fee in cash every time to move to the court on his client's behalf. His office has the specimen of realistic touch.

In Malgudi there is the Forest Officer with his collection of Golden Thoughts from 'The Bhagvad Geeta'. There is a trace of breaches in the joint family system, in the social setup of Malgudi.

Malgudi is an intense, emotional curiosity of R. K. Narayan. It is not merely a background of his novels- but 'a leading, real hero' which is present in one way or other in most of his novels. In it one can visualize and realize such a locale which is a form of personification of a vivid character.

CONCLUSION:

'Malgudi' is more than a landscape, such a miniature model where culture of real, vivid India exists. It is such a place which is personified as a character to promote the text (story) as well as the characters.

Narayan is noted for the objectivity and detachment of his stand. He is free from desire to preach, to advise and to convert the contemporary society. His plots are built of material and incidents that are neither extraordinary nor heroic. The tone of his novels is quiet and subdued. He is a writer of social novels written in a comic vein. Light in their approach to life, these novels do not claim to stir deep human emotions or to reach tragic heights as the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao do. Narayan's novels keep a uniform quite tone. His backgrounds are absolutely realistic, almost philosophical in their realism.

Thus the Secret of R. K. Narayan's great success and high distinction, lies in the complete aesthetic satisfaction he provides to his readers. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' points of view, maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality. Being an integral setting, "Malgudi" is so interwoven in the main thread of Narayan's fiction, that none can ever imagine the existence of Narayan's literary works in absence of it. It's more than a place, a live Character and a leading hero.

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