



# Malgudi in R. K. Narayan's Novels

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## Abstract

Rasipuram Krishna swami Iyer Narayanaswami, a leading author of early Indian literature in English was famous for his work set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. Malgudi is R. K. Narayan's imaginary locale like 'Lake District' of Wordsworth and 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. It is the eternal source of pleasure and sorrows of the characters of the novel. This article contains four parts; such as, introduction, setting, people, and structure. It will have its own limitations but it is hoped that it will help those leading the same path. It analyses and interprets the life portrayed in this town. It distinguishes the author's approach to Indian life from that of some western writers. It also demonstrates a vivid picture of setting of Malgudi. Furthermore; it focuses on people and structure of Malgudi.

Key Words: Literature, Malgudi, Fictional Town, Lake District and Structure

## **1. Introduction:**

R.K. Narayan's first work 'Swami and Friends' was published in the year of 1935 and his book 'Guide' was published in 1958. He has also penned a good number of short stories which have been appearing in the Sunday issue of the esteemed daily 'The Hindu of Madras/Chennai'.

All his novels and most of his short stories have the depiction of an imaginary small town, Malgudi. It is an old and peaceful town. The inhabitants of this town are very simple and sincere. They have much in common, their social status, their pride of caste, and their pretty quarrels. They always regard their customs and traditions but the contract with the foreign elements has disturbed their tradition pattern.

Narayan is not a modernist. He believes in tradition. He never gives any scope to be blown off his feet by the foreign winds. Unlike his contemporary novelist, Mulk Raj Anand, he has not introduced any ism into his novels. All his novels are entirely free from politics. The condemnatory town is one of the prominent features of his novels written during the Swaraj Movement. All his novels are written in English and published in England and America. They are also translated into different European languages. But no critical evaluation has been seen yet.

## 2. Setting:

Malgudi, purely an imaginary location created by R. K. Narayan, stands for a small South Indian town. It becomes the setting for all his novels. His fictional world becomes the world of Malgudi. It is like the Wessex of Thomas Hardy and Lake District of Wordsworth.

Once he was asked how Malgudi struck his mind. He said:

I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadashami, the day on which the goddess of learning is celebrated. Malgudi was an shocking 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 banyana tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijayadashmi, I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town; the train had just arrived at Malgudi station.

Hatri, Chote Lal, R. K. Narayan: Reflections and Revolutions (Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, 2006 (62)

Malgudi is nowhere located in the map of India. It is originally Lalgudi, situated in the district of Trichinopoly on the river Kaveri. It shares the features such as rivers on one side, forests on another side, Albert Mission School headed by Principal.Brown, the Cooperative Bank, the newly built bungalows in the Lawlay Extension, the Engladia Banking Cooperation etc.

It is the Malgudi of Sampath and Margaya. It is the Malgudi of Swami and Rajam, Chandran and Krishna, which has the heart of setting of the fictional town of Narayan. It is always alive. It is always real. Its lanes and streets are very familiar like one's home town.

But it is not a true picture of Malgudi. It has also another dark side, the area beyond Nallapa Grove, the location where the untouchable live. Another prominent feature of the setting of Malgudi is the Sarayu. It is the pride of Malgudi. It reflects the cultural life of this town. The senior citizens of Malgudi take bath here before sunrise and offer water to Surya Devata. The generation of Krishna and Chandran are not very much interested in these activities. It is the centre of setting of R. K. Narayan's 'Swami and Friends'. Where Mani waits for Rajam and plans to throw him into the river. It is the place where Chandran steals a look of his beloved Malati, Protagonist of R. K. Narayan's ' The Bachelor of Arts'.

Narayan is the only artist, who has portrayed a vivid picture of life in India. His depiction of joys and sorrow, the warmth of human relationship paints the world of Malgudi with colour of a real place.

## 3. People of Malgudi:

The people in Narayan's Malgudi are real Malgudians. They belong to the middle class. Generally, they just slip rather than wait outside. One of Narayan's Soma Sundram is the best example. He appears as the District Board President even being illiterate. He is an elite. We see him, he is at the door of the Truth Printing Press wearing a coat and a turban. R. K. Narayan introduces us Mr. Natesh, another District Board President in his novel waiting for the Mahatma. He always comes very near to being a caricature. He has keen desire to be the host of Mahatma Gandhi during his stay in Malgudi.

In addition to these characters, we see another elite, he is Rajam's father, a Deputy Superintendent by profession. He represents the officer class during the colonial age. He is seen in Narayan's 'Swami and his Friends'. We don't get any scope to meet Rajam's mother. The only time she appears is when Rajam visits

Swami's house. Rajam's father appears only once in this novel. He has been fixed responsibility to maintain law and order in the society as a senior police officer. Once he considering the peace of Malagudi, orders a lathi charge in a procession organised by Congress party.

Mr. Brown, Principal of Albert Missions College is another living character in Narayan's ' Swami and his Friends', is a rich man who gets one thousand rupees a month. Briefly stated, he does not belong to the social structure of Malgudi. He appears as an outsider and always prefers to remain so.

Narayan's fictional town, Malgudi is not casteless. His people are well concerned with their own duties and responsibilities. They never dream to throw themselves outside. They love to live within the four walls of Malgudi, their hometown. Chandran, the protagonist of the Bachelor of Arts is strongly opposed by his mother when he thinks to marry a girl of outside. His people are very traditional and strong believer of superstitions. R. K. Narayan accepts them as they are. He has never tried to disfigure and criticize their beliefs. It is here that he differs from Mulkraj Anand.

Establishment of Albert Missions College is a blessing for the boys like Chandran and Natesan. They spend four years pursuing their bachelor degree there. They are taught Greek drama, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth etc. They are not taught any Indian language or literature They are never taught about Kalidas and Banabhatt whereas; they are made to give importance to Plato and Aristotle. Almost all the character portrayed in Narayan's novels, are Hindus. He has also portrayed some non Hindu characters like Principal Brown, Gaffer, the taxi driver in the Guide and Aziz, principal's peon.

#### 4. Structure:

Briefly stated, the structure of R. K. Narayan's plot is loose. His plots are far from the impression of diversity but very close to the organic unity. He may not acclaim his popularity as an expert craftsman but he has always displayed his keen understanding on the texture of life. He comes to know his characters Sampath and Chandran from a very close observation. His plots are very simple as well as organic. They are never complicated. He never depends upon accidents as a means of supplying plot links like Thomas Hardy does in his works. His plots are packed with dramatic possibilities.

The plot of the Bachelor of Arts is constructed in a lighter level. Chandran's passion for Malati shows his immortality. The plot is fully determined by these characteristics of the protagonist.

The plot of Malgudi involves three minds and six wild universes. Here, structurally, the role of Srinivas is very important. The structure of 'Waiting for the Mahatma' is one of the loosest plots. The plot of the novel is closely attached with the political events the period. Part one of this novel is excellent. Here is Narayan at his best. Part two takes a stroll out of Malgudi, but part three is almost unnecessary.

The printer of Malgudi is excellent and significant. Its ending is neither comic nor tragic. Here Sampath is too big a character to be contained in a conventional ending. Narayan's 'Swami and his Friends ' is a simple story. It is all about a young Indian boy under the heavy influence of western education. This theme is loosely interwoven.

'The English Teacher' is Narayan's first tragedy. It is the tragedy of his personal loss. The plot of this story is very simple. Its effects are shown with the young couple's everyday life. Its structure is like a jigsaw puzzle. It helps its characters to avail enough freedom to expose themselves, and real men and women.

## 5. Conclusion:

R. K. Narayan's fictional town, Malgudi is of a great significance to both the author and readers. It symbolizes the central focus of his imagination. All his stories are interlinked with this small town. It is the source of both pleasure and sorrow of all his living characters. His works demonstrate a vivid picture of Indian social reality. He believes in ' Art for art's sake'. It does not mean he is a writer without any vision of life.

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