



R.K.Narayan's 'The Financial Expert' as a Regional Novel

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Abstract : R.K.Narayan was a renowned fiction writer born in South India in 1906. Along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, he was an honoured novelist during the early Indian literature in English. He was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960, Padma Bhushan in 1964 and Padma Vibhushan in 2000. He is regarded as a regional novelist who wrote about Malgudi, an imaginative region. He is compared to William Faulkner in his creation of an imaginary region. Regionalism in literature is the writing that focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, culture, topography and other features particular to a specific region. Malgudi forms the fictional setting in his novels. It is typically South Indian town symbolizing Indian culture and society.

Index Terms - Regionalism, Society, Culture, Realism, Symbol

The Financial 'Expert' is one of the greatest novels of R.K.Narayan. It is the first novel in which R.K.Narayan finds himself structurally sound. The Financial Expert is the first novel in which for the first time he tightens the structure. R.K.Narayan's Malgudi is a simple affair and yet it is complex. It is complex because it is incomprehensible to most of the readers. It is incomprehensible because, like the Negative capability of Shakespeare, it is many-sided. Sometimes it is merely the back-ground, merely the setting for the story, sometimes it is the atmosphere which like the London fog, lovers above and around the action, sometimes, it merely reflects itself, sometimes it is steeped deep, sometimes it acts as a character, a villain or a hero, sometimes it is merely a town, sometimes something outside town, sometimes it is the Wordsworthian mysterious Nature which can, and does utterly transform a human being, and sometimes men and women with their manners, humours, tradition and culture, become the part of Malgudi are Malgudi as merely "the city and its environment". R.K.Narayan regards it as a small part of South India : "it has served my purpose admirably, of conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of personalities, who flourish in a small town named Malgudi supposed to be located in a corner of South India". The implication is that even "the thought and acts of personalities" are also Malgudi. And yet, like Charles Lamb, he mystifies by using the words supposed to be located : Then again he regards it not only a part of a corner of South India but a miniature version of the whole country. As a matter of fact, because his personages are universal in their fundamental human feelings Malgudi becomes a part of the whole world.

As a matter of fact Malgudi is everywhere because it is nowhere. Malgudi is extremely rich. It is roads, streets, the new extensions, the schools, colleges, hotels, restaurants, clubs, the Mempi forests, the

tea-estates, the ruined temples, the new extensions, the avenues. All these along with so many other things including also the men and women are the soul of Malgudi, are Malgudi themselves.

Thus, Malgudi is to Narayan what Wessex is to Thomas Hardy. Hardy's Wessex is not only a background to the action but in reality a character that influences the action. So it is the case with Narayan's Malgudi. The spirit of Malgudi influences action and characters as does Egdon Heath in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. The flowing saryu, the ruined temples and the stone slabs placed as if for the seat of a god influence Raju in *The Guide* and contribute to his sainthood. It is the spirit of the region which helps him to face the ordeal of the fast in right earnest. In 'The Dark Room' the river and the ruined temple leave a benign influence on Savitri. In 'The Vendor of Sweets' it is the retreat across the river that almost transforms Japan. Iyengar regards Malgudi not only as a character but also the hero of Malgudi. It would be interesting to advance the theory that Malgudi is the real 'hero' of the ten novels and the many short stories.

The Malgudi, in 'The Financial Expert' plays an important role in all its aspects, physical, spiritual and symbolical. Even the stars in the novel are the Malgudi stars. They are significant in so far as they sense the characters to think and mediate as they do in 'The Vendor of Sweets'.

The whole region in which the action takes place lies revealed to us. In the very beginning of the novel the whole scene where Margayya transacts his business under the banyan tree in front of the Co-operative bank, surrounded by the clients, has been picturised here : All the principles of co-operation for which he had sacrificed his life were dissolved under his eyes, if he could look beyond the portals of the bank itself, right across the little stretch of lawn under the banyan tree, in whose shade Margayya sat and transacted his business. There was always a semi-circle of peasants sitting around him and by the attitude and expression one might easily guess that they were suppliants.

Narayan does not only describe the locale, he describes the very life that briskly ran all through the surroundings :

He moved to the side of the road, as cyclists rang their bells and dodged him,

Jutkamen shouted at him and pedestrians collided against him.

It is not only the life but the very life, the spirit of Malgudi, that is to say, which comes revealed to us. We feel as if we are ourselves there sharing the business and boom of Malgudi. Here is such a live description :

He saw at a Market Fourtain a white sheet covering some object stretched on the pavement. It was about six in the evening and the street was lit up with a blaze of sunlight from the west. Pedestrians, donkeys and Jutkas were transformed with the gold of the setting sun. Margayya stood dazzled by the sight. A ragged fellow with matted hair thrust before him a mud tray.

Here we witness the interplay of the physical and the spiritual words. He gives us a similar description here :

Margayya sat down on a park bench. The Municipality had made a very tiny park at the angle where the Market Road branched off to lowly Extension. They had put up a cement bench and grown a clump of strong ferns, fencing them off with a railing. He passed through the stile and sat on the bench. Cars were being driven towards lowly extension.

Huge cars A cool breeze was blowing. The sun had set. Lights were lit up here and there.

One of the peculiarities of Narayan is that he does not only describe the locale. He irradiates it with the play of Nature and intermingles both of them with the life as it is lived. Narayan's Malgudi is thus a harmonious fusion of the locale, the Nature and the life as it is lived. This is perfectly evidenced by the above passages. Narayan sometimes takes us away from the town life and introduces us to the tribes in jungles :

"Do you know that there are half a dozen different jungle tribes to be found on the top of the Mempi Hills ? All of them live, breed and die, in the jungles My tourism does not confine itself to telling people, "There is the river, there is the valley and pointing to a few ruined temples - that's not my idea of tourism".

The last passage shows that it is not only that town life that Narayan describes. He also describes Nature. The town life keeps Narayan's men and women engrossed in materialism. The world is too much with them. But it is the Nature that strikes awe among them and possesses the capacity to transform them. The Nature is mostly associated with the temples, mostly ruined Savitri in The Dark Room, Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets and Raju in The Guide undergo an utter transformation in the contact of the wild, mysterious Nature. Something happens to them so that they are no longer what they were.

They are in a world, spiritualised. There is no such transformation about the characters in The Financial Expert. But still, Nature influences. It influences Margayya. There is the description of a lotus in a far-off pond by the side of a garden and the ruined temple where the Sarayu river flows :

"Our world is going to pieces because we have no more lotus about. It's a great flower - the influence it has on human being is incalculable. Beyond Sarayu towards the Worth, there is a garden where there is a ruined temple with a pond."

Here is a description of Nature, away from the city life, and an essential part of Malgudi.

"He cut across the field and walked half a mile and came upon a garden hedged off with brambles and thorns. His legs ached with this unaccustomed tramping and his feet smarted with the touch of thorns. He passed the thicket expecting any moment a cobra to dart across and nip at him".

Here we don't have solitary nature. As here, we have mostly the wild Nature in communication with human beings and their activities. Not only this, we have sometimes merely the activities of nature. Narayan wants to emphasize that nature which is the essential part of Malgudi, like human beings is busy in its activity. She is in no way different from them. Here is an example :

"A breeze stirred the leaves and sent a few ripples rolling and striking against the stone steps. Casuarina trees which loomed over the little mantapa murmured. Brilliant sun from the west made the entire garden glitter.

Even the stars in the novel are Malgudian stars, themselves the part of Nature, the spiritual aspect of Malgudi. No one has ever thought of them. The stars, like Nature, exert tremendous influence on the characters. They make the characters ponder and mediate sagaciously. In 'The Vendor of Sweets' whenever Jagan sees the stars, he becomes spiritually awakening becomes unworldly. In 'The Financial Expert' we often come across them throughout the novel, making Margayya somewhat meditative. Here are a few examples :

"Margayya paused for a moment to admire the starry sky. The implication is clear. Margayya forgets at least for a moment the worldly affair. This is the implication of the word pauses. It is clear that he becomes unworldly for a moment.

"A couple of coconut trees waves against the stars in the sky. The only noise in the world now seemed to be crunching of coconut between Margayya's jaws".

The stars here express the stillness that lies in things spiritual. Even though margayya craves to be a wealthy man and wants to propitiate the goddess Lakshmi, he seems to be a different man in the face of the stars.

Malgudi is a symbol of the transitional india shedding the age-old traditions and accepting the modern western civilization. So Malgudi connects the East and the West, the ancient and the modern. Malgudi is neither village nor city but a town of modest size in the novel 'Swami and Friends'. With each new novel we advance in time, Malgudi grows in importance. The major landmarks, however, remain. The

river sarayu flows by its side. There are nallappa's Mango Grove and the Memphi forest reached by the Grove street and the forest road respectively. One can board the train from Madras to the malgudi station. There is a trunk road to Trichinopoly. Within the town of Malgudi, there is a market road which is described as the life-line of Malgudi. So Malgudi symbolizes the transitional phase of India moving towards modernization. It is not only the physical side of Malgudi that attracts narayan. The land may be a real or imaginary; but it is the land of his heart's desire. He loves its people and portrays in his novels not only the men and their manners but also the spirit and inner essence of its people. The habits, fashions, superstitions, activities, educational, social, economical, religious, domestic are all portrayed with minute detail and in a realistic manner by the novelist.

Malgudi is not only a background of the story, not only the atmosphere in which the action takes place; but the very character. In 'The Vendor of Sweets' and 'The Guide', the mystic nature as character transforms Jagan and Raju respectively. In 'The Financial Expert', the gutter in front of Vinayak Mudali Street acts as a character. Iyengar has spoken of Malgudi as hero. Surely it is the hero which transforms the main characters utterly. Yet, the Malgudi also acts as a villain. The gutter in 'The Financial Expert', destroys Morgayya. As a child Balu throws the red bound account book of Margayya in the gutter which makes it difficult for him to solvage his money he had advanced to his clients. Ultimately, he has to leave his banking business he used to transact under the banyan tree. On another occasion Balu throws his S.S.L.C. register into the gutter which makes it impossible for him to seek admission in any school. This shatters the dreams of Margayya who went to send his son Balu to Europe for higher studies. Thus, the gutter a part of Malgudi acts as a villain and destroys Margayya.

R.K.Narayan is considered to be a regional novelist in true sense. All his stories take place in Malgudi, an imaginary world, a small south Indian town. This imaginary Malgudi provides the setting of all his novels and short stories. Narayan lived in a spacious house built in the orchard garden in the charming and scenic town of Mysore, in which he spent most of his successful years. As mentioned by Shiv K. Gilra a superficial look at the Malgudi world gives one an impression of narrowness and circumscriptions. It does have an element of local or regional colour.

One may regard Narayan's portrayal of life in Malgudi as pre-ordained and tailor made and so deficient in veracity and comprehensiveness. Narayan is known for his objectivity and detachment. He is free from desire to preach, to advise and to convert the contemporary society. The backgrounds in his novels are absolutely realistic and philosophical in their realism. Narayan provides complete aesthetic satisfaction. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' point of view maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality like any other regional novelist he presented all the topographical details dealing with its physical features.

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