R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi and his timeless characters

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Abstract- Malgudi is an imaginary town around the South Indian village. It is an extraordinary place in English literature as Scott's 'Boarder countries' Arnold Bennet's 'The Five Towns' and Wordsworth's 'Lake District'. Narayan carries us to Malgudi to sympathise and share the difficulties of its inhabitants. He has displayed short and simple lives of his characters. Narayan is expert in creating lively characters who belong to the middle class Indian family. He has presented the lives, actions, philosophies, aspirations, pleasure and melancholy of men and women who live in Malgudi

Index terms- Imaginary, sympathetic, inhabitants, aspirations

We see no existence of Malgudi on any map of India. Malgudi is Laligudi in the district of Trichinopoly. It is neither a hamlet nor a large town, but it is a town of modest size. It exists in the fancy more precisely than any other district narrated by any Indian writer. Narayan’s Malgudi is the real world charged with everything that is familiar and touching in living beings. Malgudi is connected over and over with the highs and lows and the good and bad time of the heroic characters. Malgudi is the part and parcel of Narayan’s stories. It is the ‘Surroundings of Narayan’s novels and fifty-one short stories.’

Malgudi Days is a collection of short stories written by R.K. Narayan. All the stories of this collection turn around the lives of the people live in the small town, Malgudi. These stories take place in Malgudi which located on the riverside of Sarayu. These carry the scents and sounds of the villages of India. There is a railway station which is an arena of Narayan’s many stories.

Some of the principal landmarks of Malgudi are- ‘Town Hall Park’, ‘Kabir Street’, ‘Vinayak Mudali Street’ ‘The Market Gate’ is a place where various traders and beggars gather to do their business. ‘The Madras-Bangalore Express’ is a train that goes through the region of Malgudi in ‘Fellow Feeling’ ‘Koppal’ is a remote jungle village. ‘Albert Mission College’ in which Iswaran studied as a student. ‘Ellaman Street’, ‘Race Course Road’ and ‘Place Talkies’ are various places in the short stories of R.K. Narayan.

Malgudi is not a topographical expression, it has its own distinguishable personality. Dr. Iyengar realizes Malgudi as a paragon of Narayan’s stories

“It is Narayan 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.”

Even the insignificant things seem the representation of Malgudi

“The smells, sights, sounds, and even the flavours that are all part of the experience of being in Malgudi are conveyed with an ever-extraordinary vividness.

The particular feature of the fictious surrounding of Malgudi is its unwillingness for moderate changes. Here life proceeds at slow motion. Malgudi is entirely uninterrupted by the outer earth, it remains the same with its peculiarities. Malgudians believe in age old customs, deep-rooted traditions and rituals. Each and every sign that we find in it, denote to an industrialised town.

“The labour gangs brought in from other districts, spread themselves out in open spaces. Babies sleeping in hammocks made of odd pieces of cloth, looped over tree branches, women cooking food on the roadside, men sleeping on pavement -these became a common sight in all parts of Malgudi. The place was beginning to look more like a gipsy camp.”
Malgudi’s setting is distinguishing and its mostly part is illustrative. The locations are not shaded by the people of Malgudi. The characters of Malgudi give a perfect definition to the places of it and make them realistic. The sensation of acquaintance with the streets of Malgudi is indigenous. It establishes intense and superior understanding of its people and places bring the readers to be close.

Malgudi is Narayan’s comic creation where people are seen dancing, gossiping, wooing their ladies. Absurdities, weaknesses, follies and foibles portrayed by the writer are his studies in life’s little ironies. This irony is used against bossy wives, cheats and permissive grand-parents. Malgudi is full of ignoramuses, scoundrels, prostitutes, philanderers, drunks, sanyasis and would be gangsters. Disputes of this town relate to a distant past of the time of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. The youngsters are rebelling against their parents and their obsolete ways of leading life. Many husbands are deceived by their partners. The artificial beauty of the female enthrals men. All the heroes and heroines have to suffer good and bad times and they are ultimately reinstated to their predetermined fate. We are forced to welcome amusing and disastrous view of life, despite its laughter and tears.

R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi is a town where social class and professions are solid. Wedding ceremonies are arranged. Horoscope is normally accepted through it is seldom practiced. Malgudi is as it had been since long. It has undergone slight changes since the 18th century. R.K. Narayan’s significance lies in shaping Malgudi and utilize the values of its inhabitants for the readers. Narayan’s most important tool in developing the close sense of real life are his minute observations, fellow feeling, gentle humour and irony. In the words of Graham Green:

“I wait to go out of my door in to those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainly of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the book, the cinema, the hair-cutting saloon, a stranger who will greet me I know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human existence.”

In the story ‘An Astrologer’s Day’ a tree zone area along a pathway running through the ‘Town Hall Park’ is described as a bustling hub for merchants, magicians and sellers of stolen goods. The roads are flooded with mass of people searching to make their purchases. This spot was lit up by the lights of the shops. There are one or two shopkeepers who had their fizzing gas-lights. Some had uncovered flares struck on the pillar. Like the astrologer, some shop owner managed without lights of their own. The street seems to be a “bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute.” (Narayan,4-5)

He creates an air of magic which amazed everyone with “shrewd guesswork” in foretelling the fortune of his customers.

“The astrologer who said things that pleased and astonished everyone and whose mystical psychology was based on shrewd guesswork and the realization that ‘mankind’s troubles’ could be analysed in terms of ‘marriage’ money and the tangles of human ties.”

Narayan’s another story ‘Missing Mail’ is a mirror of the society of that epoch. It belongs to the first half of the last century. Its setting tells us clearly about the life and psyche of the people of small town for whom the human relationship is always on top priority. In the story the postman takes the unpardonable liberty to hide the telegram of the death of Ramanujam’s father’s brother so that the wedding ceremony of Kamakshi is celebrated peacefully. Postman named Thanappa handed Ramanujam’s a telegram, Ramanujam cried and said uncle is ill, I have to reach there as speedily as possible. Thanappa said, sir ‘I am sorry to hear it’ and handed him another card. Ramanujam shocked to read it and cried; uncle is dead. Thanappa said to Ramanujam sir, notice the date on the card, it was nearly fifteen days before. Thanappa confessed his blunder, and explained it in the following lines–

“Yes sir, and the telegram followed next day – that is, on the day of the marriage. I was unhappy to see it …. ‘But what has happened has happened: I said to myself, and kept it away, fearing that it might interfere with the wedding.’ (Narayan, 18)

In ‘The Doctor’s word’ Dr. Raman is a fictitious physician in the imaginary South Indian city of Malgudi. This story is narrated by an unknown narrator. The reader feels after reading the story that Narayan may be exploring the theme of uncertainty. Dr. Raman is a good friend of Gopal who trusts Raman’s words whether it may be right or wrong and believes everything that his friend tells him. Dr. Raman is told about the serious illness of Gopal by the son of the patient. Doctor goes to his friend with his two assistants and began the treatment. At 8 o’clock evening Gopal regains consciousness and he asks to doctor. “Would he live or not?” Gopal’s words are very touching in the following lines–

“Raman, it is my good fortune that you are here at this moment. I can trust your word. I can’t leave my property unsettled that will mean endless misery for my wife and children. You know all about subbiah and his gang. Let me sign before it is too late. Tell me…”’ (Narayan,24)

‘Lawley Road’ is a story set in the imaginary town of Malgudi. This story is a satire on the selfish politicians who change the names of public places due to their personal political interest. This story pictures fake patriotic enthusiasm of chairman. For many years, the people of Malgudi were not with the Municipal Council because council did not do any work in the welfare of Malgudians. People suffered illness due to the garbage. Dust, rubbish and drains were left to fend for themselves. Suddenly, on the fifteenth Independence Day chairman of the Municipal wanted to celebrate that occasion in grand manner. They decided to nationalize the names of all the roads of Malgudi and to remove the statue of Frederick Lawley. They exposed that Sir Frederick Lawley was a tyrant who mistreated the Indians. Narayan amusingly describes the vigour of the chairman doing these insignific works. The town became unrecognizable with new names. It creates a lot of chaos in the city and a great confusion among the local people. Letters went to the wrong address. People were unable to speak where they were living.
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