

R.K. Narayan: A Writer Lingered Between the Nation and the Region in the Void of the Indian Literary Arena**Dr. S Varadharaj**

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Mail id varadhus2011@gmail.com**Article Received:** 24/02/2025**Article Accepted:** 29/03/2025**Published Online:** 30/03/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.19.05.538**Abstract**

This article investigates the geopolitical and cultural marginality that surrounds R.K. Narayan's imaginative cartography in his pioneering works *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The Guide* (1958). It propose that Narayan's structuring imaginary the mythic locale that is embodied in Malgudi occupies an ideological void between the totalizing universalizing edifice of the Indian nation-state and the grounded, lived, embodied experiences of the vernacular territorial (the Tamil and Kannada landscapes, specifically).

Though Narayan is admired often uncritically, in a number of post-colonial schools of literary theory as a founding member of a normative canon of a 'national' Indian mainstream, this article provides a materialist analysis suggesting a wilful sanitisation of the country, the vernacular, the agrarian, the rustic and the subaltern dimensions of this landscape.

Through a deconstruction of the texts' cultural semiotics - encompassing cuisine, sartorial conventions, domestics arrangements, spatial arrangements etc. - this paper demonstrates the construction by Narayan of an specifically contained, bounded bourgeois, English educated and exclusive Brahminical sense of nationalism which addresses solely the 'domestic', vernacular language, regional -reading public and at the expense of effacing the radical cleavages of class, caste and regions.

Keywords: Geopolitical Marginality; Vernacular Nationalism; Caste and Class.**Introduction: The Topographical Dilemma of Malgudi**

Early Indian English Fiction as a Field of Nationalist Writing has historically been constituted around a trio: Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan. Anand's attempt was at representing through socialist realism, the visceral indignities and disjuncture's of the subaltern subject, where Raja Rao consciously laboured to create a mythical Puranic idiom

to encapsulate the vast, dispersed Indian nation consciousness, Narayan has, at least until now, typically enjoyed a reception associated with quietism, gentle irony and the self-contained universe of Malgudi. But the apparent transparency in this case masks an ideational rupture. For neither is Narayan's narrative landscape authentic vernacular, rural, regional India, nor a successful allegorical representation of the emerging postcolonial Indian nation-state, but, rather, a critically maintained aesthetic vacuum a space poised precariously between the overarching narrative of the nation and the localized, complex specifics of the region.

As Meenakshi Mukherjee eloquently puts it in her book *The Perishable Empire*: 'the early Indian novel in English would grapple with a triple negotiation – that of multiplicity and the monolingual; fragmentation and unity; of global space and vernacular experience. The writer in English must negotiate a double audience, a dual geography, and a linguistic medium that is always already inflected by a colonial genealogy. In doing so, the temptation to homogenize the local into a palatable "Indianness" is structural rather than merely accidental.' (Mukherjee: 124) In Narayan's works this homogenization operates through Malgudi as an analogue for the nation, but it is an aesthetic construct so selectively assembled that the messy, violent presence of the agrarian subaltern, the acute discrimination on the basis of caste and the specific tamil and Kannada nuances in language become increasingly effaced.

This paper addresses a unique double-bind. It addresses an audience in an international metropolitan centre of consumption along with one at home – the double address pointed out by Michael Gorra's introduction to *The Guide*, "All three were published in London before they appeared in India, and their Indian reputation was at first predicated on metropolitan acceptance... Narayan's work was from the start well-received in England, where he acquired an advocate in the young Graham Greene." (Michael Gorra, 15) This paper aims to reread the material and spatiality's of Narayan's novels *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The Guide* (1958) by arguing that the codes of food, clothing and domesticity contained in them do not represent some pan-Indian essence or some honest slice of regional rustic life but the specific formulation of Brahminical nationalism catering precisely to an elite and a domestic, English-reading public, but strikingly disconnected to its own vernacular-speaking population.

Theoretical Grounding: The Nation, the Region, and Brahminical Nationalism

Finding Narayan within the 'vacuum' of the Indian literary field necessitates an engagement with theorists of the nation and region in subalternist and materialist criticism. The political theorist, Partha Chatterjee, famously writes of the Indian nationalist imagination split between two areas: the material and the spiritual. The material was the external sphere – the state, science, economy, the west – a sphere in which India was to develop and catch up with.

The spiritual was the inner core of national identity; a sphere not touched by the colonizing force and which housed the Indian identity within: "The nationalism which fought

colonial rule located its truest, most authentic identity in the inner domain of culture in her home, the family, the language, the religion. Here, the postcolonial elite did not allow the colonial state to interfere, fashioning instead a modern but distinctly indigenous sovereignty.” (Chatterjee 6) Narayan's *Malgudi* is perhaps the finest aestheticization of this 'inner domain'. It is a place insulates itself from the disruptions and violence of history, and even when history visits *Malgudi* in the form of the nationalist movement or modernity post-independence, it arrives in the gentlest ironic guises that strip it of any radical potentiality. But this seclusion and insularity is not class/caste neutral.

The *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*, an overtly polemical work, by Tabish Khair notes of how, by its very structural alienation from local India, the Indian English writer's perception of the subaltern and the rural must necessarily be filtered through class and caste biases: “The absolute majority of Indian English novels have been written by people from the upper and middle classes, and more often than not, from upper-caste backgrounds.

“The ‘rural’ or ‘regional’ space they construct is viewed through the window of the urban, educated elite, reducing the subaltern to a quaint, ironic or pathetic silhouette.” (Khair 43). With regard to Narayan, the above observation reveals how his regionalism actually functions.

It is a curtailed regionalism that cuts out the linguistic specificities of the region, its folk cultures, and more importantly its radical movements against caste hegemony, such as the Self-Respect movement which was actively churning the Presidency during the very decades in which Narayan wrote. *The Dark Room*. By replacing these fluid regional realities with a static, Brahminical order constituted around a temple, a river (the Sarayu) and a middle-class household, Narayan creates a notion of the region that is directly readable in national, bourgeois terms.

Spatial politics and caste mappings in *The Dark Room* and *The Guide*

The *Malgudi* space, then, is one of the locations where upper-class Brahminical values gain a semblance of nativeness through spatially mapped hierarchies that mimic social divisions between and amongst classes and caste groups. It is not an undifferentiated space, but one which is constructed through relations of property ownership, and a deliberate, regulated spatial ordering that reinforces caste hierarchies

The Domestic and Urban Topography of *The Dark Room*

In *The Dark Room*, the patriarchal spatial organization of the house on Vinayak Mudali Street represents early twentieth century middle-class patriarchal and domestic orthodoxies in South India. Ramani is representative of this nascent colonial-bourgeois class as an employee with the Englandia Insurance Company. The division of his house follows his authority and is organized in gendered and functional spaces: “The house in Vinayak

Mudali Street was a model of modern comfort blended with traditional durability. The front veranda was Ramani's domain, where he received visitors and asserted his public persona, while the interior kitchen and the dark room under the stairs remained the silent, interiorized spaces of domestic labour and feminine retreat" (Narayan, *The Dark Room* 14)

The 'dark room' is a critical symbol that, when taken in conjunction with Savitri's response to her husband's brazen affairs with his new typist Shanta Bai, represents Savitri's failure to achieve the sort of direct, public, political challenge she might have offered. Instead, Savitri retreats into this windowless, dusty store-room - the space conventionally associated with women's retreat in the traditional orthodox Hindu home in periods of grief, contamination, or even pollution. As Savitri flees the house and **her Brahminical** identity (as previously discussed, but see, e.g., "a place of pure Hindu orthodoxies where a woman can have a status if she be pure and decent: it is not a home for woman like your wife", Narayan, *The Dark Room* 149), she departs from the neatly charted geographies of middle class Malgudi, to the outer world of the country town of Sukkur village. Here, Narayan had the opportunity to capture the essential regional character of rural South India.

Yet, the scene is rendered with a condescending, bourgeois-Brahminic frame.

The villager folk that Savitri meets Mari, the robber and locksmith, and his wife Ponni are, as they should be from this perspective, depicted through a comic primitivism. The hut occupied by Mari is less an illustration of rural poverty or exploitation than a quaint, exotic space: "The hut was small, with a thatch that had seen many monsoons, smelling of damp earth, dried cow-dung, and wood smoke. To Savitri, accustomed to the scrubbed floors of Vinayak Mudali Street, it was a wild, alien world, yet filled with a simple, uncritical charity that only the poor could afford." (Narayan, *The Dark Room* 112)

Romanticising of rural poverty in the way that the village becomes a pastoral refuge designed to allow Savitri's psychological crisis, before returning to patriarchal order is an ideologically motivated one. It deliberately avoids engaging with any of the critical, structural inequalities of land distribution or caste control, for instance, that characterises the rural economy of Madras Presidency.

The Structural Transitions of The Guide

The setting in *The Guide* changes from the confined space of the home into the expansive exterior world of modernization, but the same caste and class divisions of the earlier novel operate with the same unforgiving rigidity. The career of Raju, from his beginning as the son of a shopkeeper to his arrival at the Malgudi Railway Station and from this to an impresario with a trained female star, and to a starvation-induced mahatma housed in the abandoned temple of a forsaken village, maps a journey through a post-colonial India which is only a pale imitation of its former glory. The railway station, a symbol of the arrival of the national, imperial-colonial modernity in this regional idyll "cut through the old grazing

grounds of the town, bringing with it the smoke of the engines, the clutter of the print-medium, and a new race of men who talked of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras as if they were just around the corner.”

As Raju becomes wealthy by managing the career of Rosie/Nalini he moves from this symbolic centre into a different geographic space within the confines of Malgudi.

This space is Lawley Extension, a neighbourhood which functions as another demarcated, elite residential area. Lawley Extension is “a zone with its privileged Anglo-Indian nomenclature... Clearly to be read as 'English speaking upper-caste elite’ :”(13) “We moved into a house in Lawley Extension that cost me two hundred rupees a month. It was an independent bungalow with a large compound, surrounded by the residences of retired district judges, senior advocates, and high-ranking government officials.” (14) But across the city from Lawley Extension lies the village of Mangala, where Raju finds solace upon release from prison.

The village is situated on the banks of the Sarayu River which is typically treated by Narayan as timeless and sacred.

Mangala is inhabited by a nameless, undifferentiated peasantry personified by the village idiot, Velan. Unlike his 20th century counterparts, Velan and his community have “no experience of debt, debt- bondage or landlords... [and] nothing to report in the way of protest movements and social agitations against the local mirasdars.” 15 On the contrary, the peasantry is mythified as being profoundly pious and hopelessly credulous; “They sat in a circle around the temple steps, their faces illuminated by the dim oil lamp, looking up at Raju with a gaze that surrendered all intellectual agency. To them, he was not a displaced urban criminal, but an empty vessel through which the divine will of the cosmos was to be articulated.” (16) Narayan's depiction of the villagers as a static and pastoral entity has been criticized for intentionally obscuring the realities of rural India and serving only as “an unarticulated, a-historical backcloth to Raju's personal crisis.” (17)

Semiotics of the Bourgeoisie: Food, Dress, and Cultural Codes

The nationalist consciousness in Narayan's work is further reinforced through a semiotics of material culture. In both *The Dark Room* and *The Guide*, codes of food, dress, and bodily consumption provide markers of upper-caste, middle-class status.

The Semiotics of Domestic Consumption in *The Dark Room*

In *The Dark Room*, domestic food production is presented as a site of continual performance of patriarchal dominance and caste purity. Narayan devotes much attention to the preparations of meals by Savitri, to satisfy the discriminating tastes of her husband, Ramani:

“The coffee had to be of a precise temperature and strength, the rice boiled to a specific softness, and the savouries crisp enough to satisfy his erratic palate. If the sambar lacked the

exact proportion of tamarind, the entire household was thrown into a state of terror.” (Narayan, *The Dark Room*42)

Filter coffee is a specifically South Indian Brahminical marker of domestic space: a daily ritual that polices the boundaries of the clean, elite home. As Ramani returns home from the office, the serving of coffee by his wife becomes a re-ordering and stabilizing force: “He threw off his heavy western coat, loosened his tie, and sat cross-legged on the wooden plank in the dining hall. Savitri approached him silently, holding the silver tumbler and dabarah, pouring the steaming, frothy coffee from a height with a practiced grace that reestablished the traditional equilibrium of the home.” (Narayan, *The Dark Room* 55)

This is the colonial economy vs. Indian home; Ramani sheds his outer, colonial identity by stripping off his western coat and tie and assuming a cross-legged position from which to consume a culturally defined and loaded marker of his own status. Savitri's social identity is constructed in large part through the semiotic codes of dress. When she goes out with Ramani to the cinema-a rare occasion for such public exposure-it is the choice of her clothing that signifies her place in society:

“She chose her heavy, dark-blue Bangalore silk saree with a wide gold border. It was a garment that spoke of dignity, of inherited status, and of a quiet, unassailable respectability that shielded her from the vulgar curiosity of the public streets.” (Narayan, *The Dark Room* 78)

As we shall see later, as Savitri leaves her home, she consciously casts off the material accoutrements (including her extra sarees) of her servile domestic position. However, even during her attempt to lead a more independent existence at the temple in Sukkur, her lack of comfort with the coarse cotton clothes and minimal diet of the priest points to the difficulty of reconstituting subjectivity in the absence of an earlier caste and class status.

The Bourgeois Appropriation of Culture in The Guide

In the context of *The Guide*, the semiotics of food and dress undergo a dynamic and almost accelerated transformation mirroring the commodification of national culture in post-colonial India. This is evident in the transformation of Rosie, a local artist of obscure social status, into Nalini, a nationally recognized classical dancer. Rosie, by birth a member of the devadasi community of temple dancers, stands for the stigmatized, localized practice of the old order. The nationalists and social reformers attempted to replace the "degraded" practices of the devadasi through the commodification and standardization of dance as Bharatanatyam, placed in the custody of highly educated, upper-caste women. Narayan's narrative charts this process through Raju's manager role.

When Rosie resides in Raju's home, he encounters fierce opposition from his orthodox mother to the idea of a woman from the devadasi community occupying and "polluting" space within their middle-class household.

"My mother could not tolerate the sight of a woman from that background moving freely within our kitchen. She watched the vessels Rosie touched, insisted on a rigorous scrubbing of the stone floor, and complained that the ancient purity of our home was being compromised by the aroma of strange, unholy cooking." (Narayan, *The Guide* 136)

Raju must re-fashion Rosie into a social and economic commodity, which necessitates a careful management of her public performance of dress and consumption. Rosie, the daughter of an illiterate farmer who sings and dances for his livelihood, must be transformed into Nalini, a refined symbol of Indian womanhood.

"I insisted that she should wear only the finest Kanjivaram silk sarees, heavy with gold zari, and that her hair should be adorned with traditional jasmine strings. We eliminated all traces of modern Western fashion from her public appearances. She had to look like a goddess stepping out of an ancient fresco at Ajanta or Ellora." (Narayan, *The Guide* 162)

These aesthetic directives target a urban, affluent, and Anglophone audience – those who have learned to look at Indian culture with eyes informed by a nationalistic bourgeois sensibility that has stripped the dance of its local, gender-specific history and "classicalized" it into an object of national display.

Raju, too undergoes a process of bourgeois consumption. His early success is characterized by his purchase of imported cigarettes, a stylish motor car, and his visits to elite clubs where he consumes the standard drinks and food of a Western-educated businessman. Once he is cast into the rural wasteland of Mangala village, Raju must perform the opposite transaction. In order to survive and attract followers, he must exchange his tailored trousers and silken shirts for a cotton dhoti and the simple food offered to him by the villagers:

"The villagers brought him gifts of green bananas, vessels of fresh milk, and small bowls of boiled ragi. Raju accepted these offerings with a solemn, majestic nod, though in the privacy of the inner sanctum, his soul cried out for a hot cup of strong filter coffee and a plate of spiced tiffin from the railway station restaurant." (Narayan, *The Guide* 204)

The disparity between Raju's public performances of saintly renunciation and his inner longing for the cultural artifacts of Malgudi expose the distance between the nationalist protagonist's understanding of the rural masses and their actual, political lives. As Michael Gorra points out in his introduction, Narayan avoids physical description: "In a postscript to

his late novel, *Talkative Man* (1986), he writes that in reading he ‘ruthlessly skip[s]’ over all ‘laboured detail and description of dress, deportment, facial features, furniture, food and drinks,’ and has no interest in rendering those details himself.”

The Structural Neglect of Authentic Rustic Regionality

The ‘uncanny’ nature of Narayan’s regional space is achieved, upon closer reading, by a whole series of absences and erasures from his prose. When Narayan’s artistic choices are contextualised by the socio-historical reality of South India in the mid-twentieth century, we can clearly demarcate the ways in which his writing departs from authentic and rustic regionalism associated with vernacular writing traditions.

Absence of the Linguistic and Absence of the Polyphonic

The most obvious fact that stands out when analysing Narayan’s regionalism is his choice of writing medium: the sophisticated, ironical and transparently readable English in which his narrative unfolds, is superimposed on a society who’s organically existing reality is multilingual, to say the least.

As we noted, the subjects of Narayan’s fiction, from his shop-owners, and railway coolies to his municipal commissioners, household women, and illiterates, would normally inhabit the different linguistic registers of Tamil and Kannada in that region.

As Trivedi points out in ‘Colonial Transactions,’ ‘an Indian writing in English must perforce be an abstraction that sets itself to represent indigenous, mostly oral or oral and rural or semi oral, and vernacular material . . . To write of Indian people in English inevitably entails a process of translation, abstraction and refinement . . .’ The ‘rough, guttural, and in a sense all the more vital’ idiom of the vernacular is smoothed out in English to a highly generalized and uninflected middle ‘Atlantic. This process results in the total erasure of the polyphonic dimensions of the real world.

Thus, in Narayan, the “bloody quarrels of castes,” “unleavened and earthy,” “peasant wit and crude hilarity”, “specific idioms and expressions of local devotion,” or even local vernacular dialect(s) of speech are all flattened out into a kind of generalized, urbane conversational tone.

Thus the “Fields were parched and cattle dying” and so, “If it does not rain soon, we shall have nothing left but to lay down our bones on the dry earth. Tell us, Master, what must we do to appease the heavens,” is the peasant interlocutor, Velan’s utterance, in *The Guide*, written in a simple, stylized English that has nothing of the regional specificity either in terms of specialized vocabulary, or particular agricultural metaphor, or of any dialect variation, all of which can be seen in, for example, Anantha Murthy in Kannada, or Poomani in Tamil to illustrate the point about local register. Here, of course, the entire process of writing this discourse in a smooth, transparent English represents an effort at stripping the rural subject of any specific historical or cultural embedding.

Avoidance of agrarian and social conflicts

A comparison of the social and political events which were taking place in the Madras presidency from 1937 (the year of *The Dark Room*) up to 1958 (the year of *The Guide*) is crucial to an understanding of what is missing from Narayan's fictional landscape. This period was characterized by intense mobilization: the Non-Brahmin Movement and its demands for social justice; the iconoclastic and radical social thought of Periyar; and the far-reaching peasant struggles carried out by communist cadre, particularly in Thanjavur district against land alienation and exploitation. These historic moments do not enter the narrative space of Malgudi at all.

There is no hint in Narayan's fiction of the challenge to Brahmin hegemony and patriarchal marital structures and their concomitant social restrictions and controls on women, all central to *The Self Respect Movement* and Periyar's reforms.

(The social set up of Malgudi is 'structured' by these norms.) In the occasion where social conflicts take place in Malgudi, these conflicts often resolve themselves as private, personal and comic misunderstandings rather than structural conflicts. Thus, when Raju's mother withdraws from the joint family as a result of Rosie's intrusion, and "sought help from [her] brother in the village," her rescue involves the appearance of her 'Traditional' land-owner brother, who armed with a staff, threatens Raju. Raju's dilemma is solved not through structural rearrangement, nor through an altered form of social organisation but through this geographical dispersion: the mother returns to the village with her brother, leaving Raju in the urban house.

The Vernacular Disconnect and Pedagogical Enforcement

This tension at the center and on the periphery also underlies Narayan's curious reception within the South Asian subcontinent. While he features prominently in many nationalist and international histories of Indian writing in English, within the organic reading communities of the Tamil and Kannada vernacular spheres, his position is strangely marginal.

For readers formed by the rawness, polyphony and intensely political struggles of modern Tamil and Kannada literature, Narayan's imaginary territory of Malgudi might seem strangely un-Indian, indeed almost denatured. Contemporaries of Narayan working in these vernaculars were often at the forefront of interrogating local institutions. In Kannada literature, under the aegis of the Navya (modernist) movement and stalwarts such as U.R. Anantha Murthy, there were explicit denunciations of Brahmanical orthopraxy, and exposure of the moral decay of traditional society:

"The vernacular writer cannot afford the luxury of an idyllic stable landscape. The language itself charged with centuries of caste hierarchy and local oppression force the vernacular writer into an interactive, diagnostic excavation of immediate environment." (Anantha murthy:12) Compared to the ferocious intensity of Ananth Murthy's *Samskara*, or the bleak

subaltern realism that informed the work of many a Tamil writer like Jayakanthan, Narayan's English vision seems anaemic and disengaged. The local readerships in Chennai or Bangalore do not see their lives, language or material experience represented in the bland ironic world of Malgudi; as it turns out, Narayan has historically suffered a form of geographically imposed exilic status in so much as he has historically stood outside of the vitally political literary discourses that took shape within that geographical specificity, even when he wrote concerning it.

How pedagogic enforcement reinforces canonicity.

But how does he contrive to retain a strong presence in the overall pantheon of Indian literature? It has to do with the nature of the institutionalization of higher education in the Indian state, that leads to the privileging of Indian English writing (and Narayan specifically) within English departments of city universities in India. As Aijaz Ahmad says of the ways in which Indian English canonicity has been produced in "Theory: Nations, Literatures classes, Nation: Literature: classes nations 'literatures': "The institutional selection of text for teaching syllabi is ideological. Nationalism in India does, not lend itself easily to the kind of destructive criticism which the teaching of English literatures in Indian universities have the power to encourage. In fact, to the contrary. "It encourages the teaching of works which consolidate a unified nonsubversive and homogenous image of the national." (74)

Narayan is ideally situated within this structure, his clear prose serving the needs of pedagogical simplicity and cross linguistic compatibility at the expense of a more politicised form of engagement with specific materialities, regional antagonisms and forms of violence (e.g. Of the caste, of land loss). Most importantly, students who followed many syllabi in the two Southern states will learn about Narayan not in any homes they may belong to or by virtue of buying local copies, but because his texts have systematically been mandated by university syllabi, giving an impression of national unity where in actual fact the cracks are all too visible.

Conclusion: The Permanent Vacuum of the Liminal Writer

In this sense, the work of R.K. Narayan can neither be national nor regional but forever remains poised in an ideologically liminal space between the two, Malgudi itself becomes, especially through his selection of locations within the novels (as seen in 'The Dark Room' and 'The Guide'), a fictional haven for a domestically consumed and English-reading population longing for a homogeneous sense of 'Indianness'.

By smoothing over the edges and the rough contours of this particular region, be it in terms of language or politics or the particular oppressions associated with the region or its ideologies, Narayan builds for us an accessible literary landscape.

But it is at the cost of several very important exclusions, and when the ideology of those exclusions is seen from the perspective of a materialist critique, we start seeing a much more troubling form of ideological mimicry. In his own formal choices, Narayan becomes

perhaps unconsciously, the embodiment of Macaulay's colonizing agenda for subcontinental – "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." The painstaking application of a refined, translucent, English idiomatic form to represent the inner landscape of South India is, in fact, an unacknowledged, perhaps even unintentional manifestation of that dictum; in terms of blood and colour we recognize an India represented, in terms of the particular space and terrain described and of the thematics, and the rest is very English in terms of aesthetic reserve and in terms of structure that are marked by a particular kind of restfulness or quietism. In this choice of the structural arrangement of discourse through a single, monolingual and a largely elite liberal, bourgeois framework we also witness a similar epistemological blind spot shared between the colonizer and the post-colonial writer.

It seems neither Narayan, in his conscious attempt, nor Macaulay as his unconscious agent, possess sufficient cognizance of the multifaceted Ness and the fluidities that are inherently untranslatable of subcontinental traditions.

The presumption on the part of either that the massive nexus of local traditions, subaltern epistemology and the manifold polyphony of the various languages of the subcontinent could be summarily collapsed into a monolithic linguistic space is a serious misjudgement of the enduring tenacity of the local. Homi Bhabha rightly observes: "The mimicry of postcolonial authority always produces a split entry; it exposes a hybridity that threatens the totalizing gaze of the civilizing mission or the nationalist archive." Narayan's text is precisely such a split entry in which its desire to homogenize into an Indian Nation is arrested by the resistant, untranslatable region.

This critical essay here tries to demonstrate that while Narayan makes a deliberate choice to cater for a variety of audiences – both domestically (the English-speaking Indian bourgeoisie) and globally (the international readers), due to the choice of his medium he will fail to produce such a seamless whole. His imposition of a unified linguistic construct (of standard written English) onto an inherently fluid and polyvocal space of South Indian terrains is bound to be an over-refinement of local sensibilities and its rich texture, since the arbitrary sign system of English language is unable to grasp, 'translate' effectively the gutter polyphony of its local context. Thus, while it is intended for a broad nationalist agenda, and even for international reach, Narayan's textual project remains critically fractured because of the inherited colonial baggage of the choice of his preferred medium and also his deliberate attempts at producing an 'homogenised Indianness' is, as critic Meenakshi Mukherjee aptly points out, not accidental but structural "The writer in English has to negotiate a double audience, a dual geography, and a linguistic medium that is always already inflected by a colonial genealogy. In doing so, the temptation to homogenize the local into a palatable 'Indianness' is structural rather than merely accidental."

Ultimately, Narayan's artistic effort falls short of his aspirations due to his entrapment in the historically and ideologically predetermined literary conventions and choices, and remains 'the most alienated', as Homi Bhabha puts it, 'representative writer' for the contemporary post-colonial intellectual discourse.

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