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Affirmation of Indian Culture in R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Ashutosh Kumar Mandal has completed his thesis entitled "**Affirmation of Indian Culture in R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man***", under my supervision. He carried out his research from 1 November 2012 to 5 April 2013. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "**Affirmation of Indian Culture in R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man***" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by **Mr. Ashutosh Kumar Mandal** has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to focus on R. K. Naryan's novel *Talkative Man* as an affirmation of native Indian culture. The text has been analyzed as a cultural novel focusing on locale of the novel, Malgudi, a metaphor of Indian culture. The study provides an insight into the cultural milieu of Malgudi using Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias. The study explores a significant conflict between native Indian culture and Western values. In the novel, Dr. Rann epitomizes the incursion of an outside force—western intrusion—into the Malgudi cultural values. The study ultimately employs the strategy of evoking the culture of humanity, an important characteristics of native Indian culture, so as to undermine the influence of Western culture on native culture. The significance of juxtaposing tradition and modernity as assessed as strategies for the affirmation of native India culture has been brought out in this brief research study.

Contents

	Page No.
Letter of Recommendation	
Approval Letter	
Acknowledgement	
Abstract	
I. Introduction	1-16
Talkative Man: A Novel of Malgudi	1
II. Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity	17-27
III. Affirmation of Indian Culture	28-44
IV. Conclusion	45-46
Works Cited	

Introduction

Talkative Man: A Novel of Malgudi

The present research undertakes to examine R.K Narayan's novel *Talkative Man* as an affirmation of native Indian culture. An attempt has also been made to observe Narayan's choice of setting, place, mythological reference and characters. This study endeavours to identify the social and personal contexts that inform Narayan's novel, with view to pinpointing what constitutes their uniqueness. In particular, it explores the importance of native culture which is often found in Narayan's scholarship. On the surface, novel appears to be a text related with the description of Dr. Rann leaving little room for cultural literary analysis. However drawing upon the notion of cultural studies and cultural criticism, this research asserts that affirmation of the native cultural ethos lies at the heart of the novel as the title character offers us critical position to undermine the influence of western culture on native culture. R.K. Narayan has beautifully created his imaginary town of Malgudi in which the action of the novel *Talkative Man* takes place. R.K. Narayan's novel may appear to be regional at outset but they transcend their limit and acquire universality. Malgudi, the locale of *Talkative Man*, as of all novels, is metaphor of India. Whatever happens in the one happens in the other, but also the reader begins to believe, whatever happens there happens everywhere.

The fictional world develops into a universal hue and it embraces the heart of humanity which is the essence of native Indian culture. As a writer, R.K. Narayan has no ambitions and pretensions to be dubbed as a crusader or an idealist. K.R.S. Iyengar in his work *Indian Writing in English* has remarked "Narayan's is the art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration: he is content, like Jane Austen, with his 'little bit of irony' (360). He prefers to work within the small compass of his

fictional town of Malgudi. He has found sufficient material to build the edifice of more than a dozen novels and numerous short stories.

With each of his novels, Malgudi unfolds new vistas of life. Its inhabitants may have their local trappings but one thing is certainly true that they are essentially human and have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense, Malgudi transcends its limits and barriers. It provides an ideal setting to the human drama that Narayan has successfully unfolded through his novels.

Narayan's novel *Talkative Man*, first appeared in the glossy fortnightly news magazine *Frontline* from Madras. This short novel was serialized in it and it took almost a year to complete the serials. The character Talkative Man is not a new figure for the readers of Narayan's fiction. He appears in many of his short stories but as a narrator of a novel this is his first appearance. It is the thinnest novel from his pen. By way of introduction TM says in the opening lines of the novel *Talkative Man*, TM is the teller of the tale:

They call me Talkative Man. Some affectionately shorten it to TM: I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulses to share an experience with others are irresistible, even if they sneer at my back.... I only try to interest my listener or listeners. (1)

The enchanting story of the novel is told by TM to Varma, the owner of The Boardless. He is the chief narrator of the story of mysterious Dr. Rann. He relates the story of a wife's attempt to reclaim her erratic husband who is illusive also. The husband is a wanderer coming in contact with different types of women. He is in the habit of abandoning them right and left. The story comes to a halt when Rann is found seducing and abducting a young but innocent school girl known to TM. While sharing the story with his listener TM remembers his constant struggles to establish

himself as a journalist. One he suddenly encounters Dr. Rann in the library. A fair-haired Indian in his stylish three piece suit, Dr. Rann comes to Malgudi to work on a project for UN. Impressed by this powerful stranger TM rescues him from the Malgudi Railway Station Waiting Room where he is putting up and takes him into his own home on Kabir Street.

But the charming Dr. Rann loses all our sympathy when we come across another talkative fellow, an enormous woman who boldly claims that she is the first legal wife of the mysterious man. She tells TM with great patience her sad tale of woe and suffering on account of the elusive Dr. Rann. Own reading a news item and seeing her husband's photograph in the newspaper she made up her mind to visit Malgudi. Her man has been a serial lady-killer and she is the only woman who has survived the onslaughts of time. He is both impressive and attractive. She collects courage to open the closed window on the past life of Dr. Rann.

Talkative Man acquires the tinge of a detective novel. The game of hide and seek becomes quite prominent in it when Mrs. Rann comes to the residence of TM and tries to open the pages of her past life. At this stage TM is very anxious because he apprehends the arrival of his guest, Mr. Rann anytime. Anyway, he deftly manages the affairs. Secondly, he plays the spy when Rann is away by opening his room with a duplicate key. From the private papers in his room he gets further exposure of Rann who is a superb artist in the game of deception.

Talkative Man is a delightful short novel. It is a fine piece of literary art. The situation demands drastic action if at all Malgudi is to be saved from such knaves who practice the art of deception. Here Narayan goes out of his fictional town in search of his two important characters, Rann and Rosa. These characters enact their human

drama mostly in Malgudi. The novelist has made his sincere efforts to do justice to them.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan (1906-2001), one of the founding pillars of Indian Writing in English is an institution in himself. Born and brought up in a traditional South Indian family, Narayan is a true Indian both in spirit and thought. Much has been said about Narayan as an outstanding and unassailable story-teller. Volumes of research have been published on his eye-catching narrative style and his art of characterization. If Raja Rao is termed as a novelist of metaphysics, Narayan is often applauded as a painter of vivid Malgudi, a microcosm of Indian social milieu. He has also been claimed as a novelist par excellence in matters of social criticism of India.

In *Interview with R.K. Narayan: A Critical Spectrum*, an interview with Susan E. Craft Narayan remarks, “There are so many stories, so much symbolism, so much imagery. That’s where we should start” (27). R.K. Narayan has translated and published shortened prose versions of the two great Indian epics, *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* and a few Hindu mythical tales in *Gods, Demons and Others*. A traditional South Indian Brahmin, Narayan used to start his day with meditation, a little bit of reading of the Puranas and recitation of ‘Gayatri Mantra’. His knowledge of Indian classical literature, philosophy, religion and ethics permeates his writing, but a simple man that he was, he does not unnecessarily burden his readers with discourse with on abstract philosophy and metaphysics. He does not employ the genre of novel as a vehicle for propaganda for any social or political cause, nor does he pour too much philosophy and theory in his writing like his peers. Jayant K. Biswal in *A Critical Study of Novels of R.K. Narayan* opines: “R.K. Narayan views life’s lapses not with any missionary benevolence or zeal but with understanding and wisdom of

an artist who acknowledges various compulsions, complexities of life behind his chimeric narrative modes” (44).

Behind the narrative façade of his novels, Narayan attempts at vision of life--- a life of opposing dualities, of appearance and reality, beliefs and betrayals. Narayan’s fiction includes a series of books about people and their interactions in an imagined town in South India. He is one of the four leading figures of early Indian literature in English, along with Mulk Raj Anand, Ahmed Ali and Raja Rao. Narayan is credited with bringing Indian literature in English to the rest of the world, and is regarded as one of India’s greatest English language novelists.

Narayan wrote his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, in 1935, after short, uninspiring stints as a teacher, an editorial assistant, and a newspaperman. In it, he invented the small south Indian city of Malgudi, a literary microcosm that critics later compared to William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. More than a dozen novels and many short stories that followed were set in Malgudi. His writing style has been compared to that of Guy de Maupassant as they both have an ability to compress the narrative without losing out on elements of the story. Narayan implies much in few events.

Narayan’s stories begin with realistic settings and everyday happenings in the lives of a cross-section of Indian society, with characters of all classes. Gradually fate or chance, oversight or blunder, transforms mundane events to preposterous happenings. Unexpected disasters befall the hero as easily as unforeseen good fortune. The characters accept their fates with an equanimity that suggests the faith that things will somehow turn out happily, whatever their own motivations of actions. Progress, in the form of Western-imported goods and attitudes, combined with bureaucratic institutions, meets in Malgudi with long-held conventions, beliefs, and ways of doing

things. The modern world can never win a clear-cut victory because Malgudi accepts only what it wants, according to its own private logic.

Narayan's fictional characters have their mooring in Malgudi. This town of Malgudi is a traditional one visited by Lord Rama, Laxman, Sita, Hanuman and Goddess Parvati – the mythical Gods and Goddesses to Buddha, Sankara and Gandhi – from the mythical to the real. These Malgudians invite parallels with Chaucer's Canterbury characters, Shakespeare's fools and Hardy's rustics. Narayan's rustics and fools are controlled and governed by a value system that is enshrined in their culture, tradition, religion and philosophy though their understanding of these systems varies from person to person that acquires a high degree of complexity to these characters. According to P.S. Ramana, Narayan has studied a character first on the test of social order i.e. in the context of his community, set up and social environment, secondly, he studies a character in relation to himself. These parallels in character analysis form the basis of Indian philosophy. The Malgudians achieve the equilibrium between their profession and philosophy and synthesize the concepts of Purusharthas and Ashrama Dharma in their life. An analysis of their life reiterates the claims of their foregrounding in Indian moral and social value system.

Narayan has beautifully created his imaginary town of Malgudi in which the action of his novel takes place. The place has a sense of reality and growing vitality about it. Malgudi shows its growth from the early thirties, when Narayan started writing the novels to the eighties. The writer has attained maturity during his creative career of over half a century. The country has witnessed numerous changes since then. From his first novel *Swami and Friends* to *Talkative Man* is a long journey and Malgudi conveniently records the major changes that have taken place. It is bound to remain alive in the memory of its readers. Professor M.K. Naik has attempted at a

tentative map of Malgudi in his book *The Ironic Vision: A Study of the Fiction of R.K. Narayan*. The map to a great extent functions as a guide to the study of Narayan's fiction. Readers become familiar not only with the principal roads and streets of Malgudi but also with the men and women who inhabit the various houses and huts and feel contented with their surroundings. Obviously, Malgudi is the central theme of the novels. Prof. K.R.S. Iyenagr rightly points out that Malgudi is "the real hero of Narayan's novels" (372). It is not a fictional South Indian town but living India. In such readings Malgudi becomes a metonym for a traditional India, a locus that exists outside time and apart from the forces of modernity a site that the complicitous 'we' used in both passages will immediately recognize as authentic.

Although the critics have tried to reflect on the Indian culture and society through *Talkative Man*, they have failed to address the multiplicity of cultural background of the characters and discourses that constitute the novel. Most of the critics have dealt with the idea of Narayan's craftsmanship, his sense of humor, his autobiography, myth, his choice for novels' setting. These perspectives don't place native Indian culture in the context of the existence of multiplicity of cultures, and therefore these are failed attempts to valorize the native Indian culture over others. Hence the present researcher endeavors to affirm native Indian culture by placing it in heterotopic context. In this sense, the researcher has a more real and critical view to affirm native Indian culture by juxtaposing it with other cultures. The strategy more appropriately defines native Indian culture that constitutes India as it exists today and yesterday.

The critics of the post-Rushdie generation of Indian writers in English claim that Narayan captures 'the ambience of the nation. A consequence of such readings has been that Narayan's 'false geography' has begun to seem quaint, a mythologized

version of the national imaginary which runs the risk of being dismissed by those alert to the multiplicity of India then and now.

Cultural commentator Salman Rushdie also has argued in his *Imaginary Homelands* against essentialist definition of India. He opines that Narayan likens generalizations about the country to the attempts of the five blind men of a traditional Hindu fable to define an elephant. Each describes the particular part that he has touched, a situation that Narayan sees as analogous to writers' implied claims that their piecemeal versions of the puzzle that is India represent the whole and a salutary warning against trying to present one's own world as typical. Malgudi is a composite discursive formation born from Narayan's own highly individual sensibility and his distinctive hybrid upbringing. As such its only existence is on the printed page and yet it is a construct with which generations of readers from varied backgrounds have felt able to identify and which absorbed Narayan's own imagination from the moment when, as he puts it in. Malgudi is seen as heaven for peace. Here are the words from Dr. Rann in the praise of Malgudi: "I learnt that this is a quiet town, where I may collate my material in peace" (*Talkative Man* 10).

Although the method of his novels is more indebted to the comic conventions of a certain kind of social realism than an anticipation of postmodernist deferral, Narayan's open endings are the logical conclusion to works written in a discursive mode that is as hard to place generally as Malgudi is cartographically. The passage in which he ironically levels the charge of open-endedness against himself goes on to relate this to the moral indeterminacy of the writing. Answering his inquisitors' complaint that he should be taking more pains to make virtue triumph and evil suffer John Thieme quotes in his book *R.K.Narayan Contemporary World Writers*, him replying:

‘How can I?’ [...] when God himself seems unable to arrange things that way. In any case I can’t undertake it because I do not understand what is evil and what is good in my various characters. They interest me only as individuals and not as symbols or embodiments of this or that. (qtd. in 4)

The concept of heterotopias provides a basic for the assessment for the transformation of Malgudian culture and its retainment of the native Indian culture. Heterotopia is the manner in which society and culture, having power on the one hand and the interest of realizing this power on the other, define the subject through its differentiation from general society. The formation of heterotopias is a social construction in the formation of social life. A heterotopia allows for the consolidation of a mass into distinguished society. This process of social construction has the capacity of differentiation the local (normal) from the outer (abnormal) and through this to constitute a group identity as well as the private identity of each of its members. In this sense, the notion of heterotopias offers a theoretical ground for the affirmation of Malgudian culture --- native Indian culture in the context of the existence of multiple cultures at a given time and space.

With reference to Michel Foucault’s thinking on heterotopias, it attempts to reassess exactly what Malgudi can be seen to represent, arguing that far from serving as a metonym for a settled, secure India, the town is the product of a particular coming together of social, religious and above all psychic forces, which undergo transformations as they interact with one another. In varying ways in the different novels, it is seen to be a cultural crossroads, transforming itself in response to a range of incursions, many of which are associated with aspects of modernity. Malgudi also emerges as a liminal location, because of the seemingly discrepant admixture of

genres which its creator draws upon. Built on the fault-lines, where classical Hindu discourse and the more 'realistic', supposedly Western form of the novel collide, it ushers new forms of fiction into being. So this study endeavours to identify the range of discursive intertexts, as well as some of the social and personal contexts that inform Narayan's novels, with a view to pinpointing what constitutes their uniqueness.

Narayan's novels frequently introduce heterotopias. His choice for the locations serve to define heterotopia through contradiction. Malgudi is the ultimate heterotopia of his texts. Malgudi is an invented space where fantasies can be played out in the imagination that offers its inhabitants release into a world raptured by cultures that are not life enhancing. Malgudi, therefore, can be seen as a utopian place. It invites the readers to live within an alternative space – an escape from humdrum quotidian reality.

Narayan offers a kind of grounded and circumstantial vision of place and people that commonly has the label 'realistic' attached to it. The world of Malgudi is comfortingly familiar to native Indian people. It invites into the reality of its local world. John Thieme in his book *R.K. Narayan : Contemporary World Writers* writes:

The act of trying to transcribe the physicality of lives lived in particular locations always involves an element of fantasy, if only because of the slippage that occurs between signified and signifier. Moreover, our notions of other nations are often said to be caught in the amber of the tourist gaze: Switzerland is a country of cuckoo clocks; Italy is variously the home of Machavelli and the Renaissance, and India ... ? Well India has always been many things to many people ... (193-94)

The extract makes it clear that Malgudi remains a landscape of imagination, sustained by its own internal dynamics. The familiar characters reappear in the novel *Talkative Man* reassuring the regularity of native Indian culture. But at the same time, Narayan remains sensitive to the dynamic transformative nature of place. Malgudi is a trope of uncertainty, openness and on going secular struggle.

Narayan maps the human and physical geography of Malgudi, which is always in flux, changing with the passage of time. In *Talkative Man*, the protagonist TM lives in Kabir street which is well known for its hospitality, but it is also a location with the descendents who seek the comfort of urban life and educate their children at Albert Mission. Within Malgudi, there is a sense of shifting tectonic plates as the forces of modernity begin to destabilize traditional value-systems where conflicting discourses interact under the impact of secular modernism. Foucault puts it in *other spaces* as:

The space in which we live is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (19)

In this sense Foucault ascribes to the heterotopias as capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. In this respect the researcher argues that Malgudi as a settled site offers an opportunity for achieving self-definition through contradiction and in heterotopia of compensation, takes the form of a promise of stability and familiarity. Narayan renders a site of struggle and subtly affirms native Indian culture by highlighting its humanitarian values. The theory of heterotopias provides a crucial tropes with regard to the relative merits of different approaches to life. In the novel *Talkative Man*, Dr. Rann's run-

away at the end of the novel indicates that his values are marginalized in the present and no longer integral to the transitional site of the small town.

Narayan was effectively negotiating the terms of his project by inventing the heterotopias of Malgudi. In the novel *Talkative Man*, R.K. Narayan provides a succinct history about the heterotopias of Malgudi:

From this soil arose Rann of double N. He had blonde hair, a touch of greenish-blue in his eyes, and borderline complexion--- unusual for an Indian of these parts. My private view on his ethnic origin might sound naughty, but is quite an historic possibility. A company of British, French or Portuguese soldiers must have camped at Maniyur or in its vicinity in the days when they were fighting for colonial supremacy and, in the intervals of fighting, relaxed by philandering among the local population. (*Talkative Man* 3)

The passage chronicles a succinct history of a quiet town Maniyur that was in the past camped by the foreigners and mixed up their blood with the locals. Dr. Rann is the product of the same cultural crossroad. Dr. Rann is an olddity – as his name and complexion indicates. This historic possibility forms multiple spaces within the landscape of Malgudi.

The notion of difference and the resentment for the different from one's own is evident in *Talkative Man* as TM narrates:

A man dressed in full suit was sitting on my stool. He looked so important that the librarian, as I could see, was nervous and deferential, which he showed by sitting forward and not leaning back with his legs stretched under the table as was his custom. He looked relieved at the sight of me, and cried, "Here is a man waiting for you." The other

made a slight movement, acknowledging the introduction. I threw a brief glance at him and decided he was an oddity --- dressed as he was in a blue suit, tie, and shining shoes, and holding a felt hat in hand. He sat without uttering a word. Somehow I resented his presence and suppressed an impulse to say, "Why do you sit there dumb?"(6).

In the extract the presence of Dr. Rann is seen as an outsider because of his Western dress. TM resents his odd presence because of his cultural difference. This outlook can be seen as an instance for the affirmation of one's own culture. Malgudian culture prohibits the incursion of alien oddities.

The complications and tensions that recur from novel to novel have much to do with their unstable geography - Malgudi is a world in flux - but in addition to attesting to a broader social experience of change, they can be seen as a product of Narayan's own personal and professional experience. As a schoolboy and student, he received an education that divided him between colonial and Tamil influences. As a writer, he drew on a similarly disparate range of intertexts and despite his choice of English as the preferred medium of his fiction and his early adaptation of his material for an English audience, there are classical Hindu (particularly Tamil) elements running through all his work.

Narayan's protagonists' scribal professions represent a version of brahmin life, adapted to the print culture that had taken hold in South India in the late nineteenth century. Characteristically, and this is often assumed rather than explicit in the novels, they search for a *dharma* appropriate to their situation in a changing world. This is frequently the unifying element in what may seem to be loosely structured narratives.

Malgudi is a highly local environment and bearing in mind Narayan's 'Self-Obituary' comment on his resistance to his characters' being seen as 'symbols or

embodiments of this or that', one should be wary of reducing his fictional world to a microcosm of India, Nevertheless from the moment when its contours are first outlined in *Swami and Friends*, Malgudi offers a series of pictures of South India in transition, which relates to Narayan's recurrent concern with the situation of the Indian writer. Although he has been widely discussed, in fairly straightforward terms, as either a 'realistic' or 'mythic' writer, the issue of how to write India, what kind of discourse is appropriate for the task, recurs again and again in his fiction, to a point, where although his writing is a world away from the self-consciousness of Western postmodern novelists, it has a distinctive metafictional ring to it.

Malgudi has been compared with such fictional landscapes as Hardy's Wessex and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, both of which can be seen as mythologized versions of the social worlds they construct that verge on elegy, because they dramatize the conflict between the old and the new: the rural past and the increasingly mechanized present in Hardy; the conservative Sartoris and the parvenu Snopeses in Faulkner. In both cases the old is preferred and the opposition involved is predicated on the nostalgic assumption that the old offers stability. Putting this another way, pre-industrial Wessex and pre-Snopes Yoknapatawpha County what Michel Foucault has termed heterotopias, *other* places that exist as alternatives to familiar, everyday spaces. Like Wessex and Yoknapatawpha County, Malgudi offers the illusion of a recognizable transcribed reality, but in fact is an imagined world that ministers to fantasies of what India has been or should be like; and like Wessex and Yoknapatawpha County, it is a site where the old and the new join battle.

Though, Narayan has always been seen as the chronicler of Malgudi: the inventor, populator and developer of perhaps the best-known fictional space in Indian fiction in English. Malgudi remains poised between the conurbations that are

increasingly dominating the Indian scene in the age of globalization and the village India that contained the soul of the country. John Thieme quotes Maurice Tate saying:

Oh, historians will probably say that your tales were of an earlier era and more innocent world, and I needed to wake up anyway. To hell with them, I say, what do they know, they are useless mischief-makers who deserve to be slaughtered anyway, For myself, I know that, thanks to your company, I haven't wandered and practiced in vain, that somewhere there are unplayed unlost cricket dreams where I would be Tate. Thank you, Talkative Man. (qtd. in *Thieme 192*)

The extract puts focus on understanding one's own culture and tradition and calls for a plea to preserve them against the 'mischief-makers'.

In some ways, for example in his representation of Dr. Rann's philosophy of 'Futurology' in *Talkative Man*, he anticipates the seismic changes that have been occurring on the subcontinent.

Maurice Tate directly addressing the issue of whether Malgudi is remote from present, a metaphor for an older India, says:

I am wandering through Mempi forest in the twilight, eager, lost and frightened, heart pounding at with [sic] every snapping twig and twittering bird. The forest is my refuge from perplexing, heartless world and a place where I dream to grow. In my dream I am Tate of the MCC, spinning my team to victory with a web of hat tricks. [...] Outside time and history move on, linear and provincial and vicious. In the name of history, members of 'one community' plot and execute murder against members of 'another community' and harmless short round men in tucked up dhotis hurry to catch the train but die bloodily

in back alleys, and Attila whimpers piteously over the corpses. I wish I could dream on, worshipfully watching you sculpt chipped perfection while I practice off-breaks. But time runs out, processes dies and dreams end [...] (*qtd in Thieme* 191-192)

The extract offers more than a hint of nostalgia. It admirably maps the geography of Malgudi as an older India. However, it is not seen as a stable place but a transitional site. The reality of the novel *Talkative Man*, as the study has argued is a transitional site. The changes being wrought in the town seem to speak to the tension between tradition and modernity.

Juxtaposition of Tradition and Modernity

R.K Narayan's novel *Talkative Man* underlines the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. The present researcher places the two side by side with the view to unfold the cultural values corresponding to them and to valorize the native Indian culture which is endowed with the culture of humanity and universality. In the novel, TM the main narrative voice, talks about the intrusion of foreign into the familiar milieu of the small town, Malgudi. This affair makes Malgudi as a liminal space where tradition and modernity interact. R.K. Narayan intends to make the inhabitants of Malgudi people aware of the intrusions and wounds, placed in the native Indian culture.

Universal as his themes are, Narayan's books are in many respects exotically Indian. Graham Greene in his *Introduction to R.K.Narayan, The Bachelor of Arts* has written, "without him, I could never have known what it is to be Indian"(1). Narayan's India is a place where ancient native traditions survive side by side with the trappings of contemporary western culture. The statement also seems to have lent an air of legitimacy to views of Narayan's fiction which have seen it as offering some kind of guide to the essence of Indianness.

Foucault's notion of heterotopia provides a useful framework for a consideration of cultural milieu of the novel. Narayan's choice of English as a medium for this novel meant that he was metaphorically moving between cultures at a time when travel was far less common than today.

In a 1967 talk, 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault had expressed the view that:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are

at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (252).

The extract views the existence of multiple cultures at a place at the same time which is the reality of the present world. The multiple cultures interact and conflict with each other. However, the existence of multiple cultures at a place does not mean the equality of all. Cultures must be judged by their values for life – their life-enhancing capacity.

Thus a reassertion of space cannot be isolated from its relationship with culture. In Doreen Massey in her book *Space, Place and Gender* expresses: “social relations are never still; they are inherently dynamic’ and so it is necessary to ‘move beyond a view of place as bounded, as in various ways a site of authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity’.(11) In her view, the identities of places are always unfixed, contested and multiple and so attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identities of places are no more than attempts to get to grips with the unutterable mobility and contingency of space-time. This has immediate relevance to Narayan, whose Malgudi has frequently been seen as a timeless zone, where traditional Indian values are being preserved in amber, in much the same way as.

Generally the term ‘value’ is defined in terms of worth. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines value “The equivalent (in material worth) of a specified sum or amount”(179). The term ‘value’ has maintained two related but more or less distinct senses. One is material or monetary equivalent in exchange of something. In the broad sense ‘value’ is not monetary, but a more abstract matter of relative quantity or measure. In the context of culture, value refers to cultural values, mores, customs,

traditions and above all ideological interest. The present research work undertakes to juxtapose the native Malgudian value system with the western values with the aim to highlight life-giving capacity of native Indian culture. The evaluation of values i.e. instrumental in the affirmation of culture.

A literary text bears the features of culture and on the basis of culture; all the texts mark the prior valuing and evaluation. Current conceptions of literary evaluation emphasize two important features of those judgments obscured in traditional analysis. The first is that when we offer a verbal judgment of text, we are always doing so in some social or institutes context. The second is that the force of our judgment in every sense that is, their meaning and interest for other people and their power to effect them current conceptions of evaluation also emphasizes the significance of the tacit assumption evaluators make when producing value judgments.

R.K. Narayan's novel *Talkative Man's* central theme is predicted on a spatial opposition between the familiarity and supposed stability of Malgudi. TM says:

“What does that word Timbuctoo sound like?” I began an article. “It’s a fairy –tale cock-and-bull setting. Sometimes a word of disparagement or ...” I went on for about a hundred words in the same strain, and finally came down to the statement, “Hereafter we must pay more respect to that phrase. For I realize today that Timbuctoo is very real, as real as our Malgudi. I have actually shaken hands with a man from Timbuctoo. You will be right if you guess that I poked his side with my finger to make sure that he was real.... He has come on vital project on behalf of the UN and it an honour for Malgudi...

(*Talkative Man* 29).

The extract is a clear case for the affirmation of Malgudi by likening it to Timbuctoo, a paradise on the earth, Dr. Rann feels migrating, abandoning his motherland and reside in Malgudi for the completion of his work in peace. Malgudi climate has something in it that is more conducive undertaking a work--- life-affirming capacity.

Critics have tended to underestimate the extent to which *Talkative Man* depicts a transitional world. Taking commentators such as Naipul, M.K. Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee to task for their essentialized view of Malgudi as a harmonious, Hindu upper-caste pan-India[that is] resistant to change, eternal and immutable, Alam argues that Narayan is more interested in recording a Malgudi that is caught in the throes of change than in affirming a conservative or reactionary position. Such a comment has general resonance for the contested representations of place that characterize Narayan's fiction.

However it would be wrong to assess that Malgudi culture has lost its bid to be supreme culture. In the novel *Talkative Man* TM informs:

Our town has not caught up with modern sanitary arrangements, even this is considered a revolutionary concept. The modern Sanitaryware man on market road is going bankrupt--- sitting amidst his unsold porcelain things. Our ancestors bathed and washed and cleansed themselves at the well and the river. With the river running down our door-step, they didn't have to make special arrangements, did not let themselves be obsessed with washing all the time, which is what Western has taught us. Considering that the river flows almost all the year round, although thinning down a bit in summer--- I waxed eloquent and left him no choice (*Talkative Man* 28-29).

It is clear from the extract that though Malgudian lifestyle is challenged by western revolutionary concepts, its belief on life-giving nature is unsurpassed. Highlighting the bankruptcy of Modern Sanitaryware, the passage affirms Malgudian value system. The comparison of the two ideological systems, thus, can be seen as a case for the affirmation of native Indian culture.

R.K. Narayan has expressed the dynamic existence of Malgudi in his novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*:

[...] All these houses were alike; you could see end to end the slender pillars and tiles sloping down as if all of them belonged to a single house. Many changes had occurred since they were built two centuries ago, [...] But there were still one or two houses which maintained a continuity, a link with the past. Number 14 was such a one. There the family lineage began centuries ago and continued still, though reduced to just two members—Sriram and his grandmother. (*WM* 10)

The extract puts particular emphasis on the age of the street's houses and on the varying to which they have been resistant to change. No. 14 where Sriram and his grandmother live, is especially associated with ancestral continuity. Though subject to change, Malgudi culture has its own continuity. The continuity can be explored by juxtaposing cultures in Malgudian climate and shows preservice of the ancestral culture--- the native Indian culture.

Though Malgudi is subject to change itself, it still represents conservative Hindu thinking when personified by the contemporary Narada figure of TM, and an ill-defined complex of external forces, variously associated with technological advances, modernity more generally, the West, travel, changing social codes and other parts of India. After first taking up residence in the seminal Midi site of the

station waiting-room, a liminal location subsequently occupied by Commandant Sarasa, Rann literally invades TM's - and conservative Malgudi's - domestic space when he is admitted into his home.

The concept of heterotopia as a heterogeneous space of places and relationship describe the manner in which defined spaces which surround the subject in social existence can reduce his autonomy and even his sense of identity. Rann's many names may suggest fraudulence, but from another perspective they represent the difficulties inherent in arriving at a definitive version of self, as surely as the Boardless resists conventional labeling. *Talkative Man* is, then, the Narayan novel in which his life-long obsession with the problematics of storytelling is expressed in its most metafictional form. TM's struggle to place the 'real Dr Rann' is a metonym for the text's concern with the problem of narrating identity; and viewed from this angle, far from being a garrulous gossip, TM can be seen as an author surrogate, a figure whose difficulty in constructing a satisfactory biography for Dr Rann reflects the novel's metafictional questionings.

TM's fictional alter ego in *Talkative Man* is identified as Dr Rann, an English sounding name, who has come to Malgudi. He is associated with modernity through his involvement in a UN project. He seems to represent a threat to older Malgudi values, as embodied by conservative Kabir Lane:

I threw a brief glance at him and decided he was an oddity—dressed as he was in a blue suit, tie, and shining shoes, and holding a felt hat in hand. He sat without uttering a word. Somehow, I resented his presence and suppressed an impulse to say, "Why do you sit there dumb? Say something and above all quit my seat. I am not used to standing here." The newspaper addicts at the long table were watching

us, so unused to seeing anyone in a blue suit and hat in the Town Hall.

The old librarian was fidgeting, unable to attend to his routine work.

(*Talkative Man*, 6).

Interestingly, the physical incursions into Malgudi space are suggestive of Malgudi as a liminal space where traditional culture and modern culture encounter John Thieme in his book *R.K. Narayan Contemporary World Writers* recounts:

“I thought it would be best in English, to reach the wide world. After all, I want Narada’s personality to be understood universally, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or religion” and TM supports this by saying that English is less prescriptive grammatically:

“Excellent idea. For this purpose English is the right language - the only language free from the grammarian’s tyranny” (Thieme 176)

The suggestion is that English is both an international language and a language that offers more flexibility. Narayan employs English language to carryout the ancestral values and reach to the world.

Influenced though he may have been by his sense of how India was constructed by Western eyes, it is reductive to see Narayan as having seriously compromised his writing to accommodate Western tastes. From the beginning of his career, his novels bring Western and Hindu—specifically Tamil Brahmin—elements together in a variety of ways, to produce fiction that locates itself in a very specific discursive environment and is minutely attentive to the implications of place, in speaking to an international readership. Although he has often been misrepresented as an ‘authentic’ of a settled Indian world, Narayan’s fiction fuses registers in an act of cultural brokerage that enables it to cross frontiers without losing a sense of Indian specifics, and demonstrates how fluid, fractured and fleeting these specifics can be.

Dr Rann clearly symbolizes the incursion of an outside force into the Malgudi cosmos. The mysterious Dr Rann can be seen as epitomizing modernity generally and more specifically either Western encroachments or the intrusion of another part of India into the South remains a matter for speculation and by the end of the novel Narayan has pointed readers in a completely different direction. The main story-line of the novel involves a reworking of an archetypal Hindu pattern. This is underscored by various mythological references which can be read as an attempt to valorize and affirm native Indian culture.

Dr. Rann is sketched as a crook a regular ladykiller, an international scholar, a versatile character to impress a girl. This mixed identity is despised from Malgudian perspective: “No girl will be safe in this country unless we act. Young scamps like him must be taught a lesson” (*Talkative Man* 69) as it goes against moral construction of Malgudi. The problem of identity, thus, can be seen as a case for the affirmation of Malgudi culture which acts as a measuring rod for the affirmation or negation of identity.

In the novel *Talkative Man*, Narayan hints at the problem of providing reliable identity of Varma as well. TM narrates:

It was no use arguing with that man Varma; he was self-made, rising from a menial job to his present stature as the proprietor of The Boardless, which fact proved, according to him, that he knew his mind and could never be wrong. I never tried to correct him, but listened even appreciatively, to his spasmodic reminiscences. Fortunately he was not much of a talker, but a born listener, an ideal target for a monologist: even while counting cash, he listened, without missing a word, as I sat beside his desk and narrated my story. (*Talkative Man* 2)

As TM tells his story of Varma, the proprietor of the Boardless Hotel and a ‘born listener’ (2) whose taciturn nature complements TM’s loquaciousness, the novel seems to be wrestling with the problematics of providing reliable biographical information. Once again the Boardless is a site that resists naming within a recognizable sign system and using it as the setting in which TM tell his tale seems highly appropriate for the kind of account he provides.

In its engagement with the possibility that classical Hindu discourse may provide an infrastructure for contemporary South Indian experience, *Talkative Man* is typical of Narayan’s practice in this period of his fiction. His interest in orthodox Hindu culture, based on classic Sanskrit and Tamil texts, drives him into a greater engagement with his Brahmin heritage and ancient myths and beliefs provide possible bedrock of meaning for the novels of his middle period. Nevertheless, as with all his fiction, these novels are about contemporary secular Hindu society and the ways in which ordinary people react to everyday situations. So, while sometimes seeming to suggest that age-old archetypes and codes underpin modern behavior, the novels are more concerned with demonstrating ways in which discourse on Indian society that may seem very remote from one another co-exist and intersect.

In *India: A Wounded Civilization* Naipaul expresses that Narayan’s fiction appears to deal with a conflict between social action and a quietist renunciation that finds analogues in classic Hindu narrative. Naipaul recounts how re-reading Narayan after a period of years, he came to the realization that his novels were less the purely social comedies he had once taken them to be than chronicle of cultural values and at times religious fables. Talking about the protagonist of *Mr Sampath*, he writes:

[...] For Srinivas nonviolence isn’t a form of action, quickener of social conscience. It is only a means of securing an undisturbed calm;

it is nondoing, noninterference, social indifference. It emerges with the idea of self-realization, truth to one's identity. These modern-sounding words [...] disguise an acceptance of karma, the Hindu killer, the Hindu calm, which tells us that we pay in this life for what we have done in past lives: so that everything we see is just and balanced, and the distress we see is to be relished as religious theatre, a reminder of our duty to ourselves, our future lives. [...] (37).

The extract features native Indian cultural value which is based on Hindu philosophy. It puts stress on the present action for the benefit in the future. The Hindu equilibrium between the present and the future helps to survive the shock of alien culture. Further it appears to welcome the alien culture making them harmless.

However, Naipaul's privileging of the fabulist over the social is inadequate as an account of how the admixture of discursive elements in Narayan's work functions. He constructs a binary opposition between Western social comedy and Hindu fable, but the two are not exclusive in Narayan; they operate together and there is no real suggestion that the presence of the one need involve the erasure of the other. This said classical Hindu intertexts are more prominent in the middle part of Narayan's career.

In contrast, modern western values takes a pessimistic view of the world. Dr. Rann a representative of Western culture, engages in study what he calls it futurology. He claims it to be a proper assessment of all resource and dangers--- human as well as material and insists it to be a scientific view to anticipate the conditions and state of life in A.D.3000. Dr. Rann says:

No one has found a weedicide capable of destroying it. They seem to go down at the first spraying, we tried it in Uganda, but a second generation come up immune to it... I have calculated through

computers that, at the rate of its growth, the entire earth will be covered with it as the sole vegetation by about A.D. 3000. It'll have left no room for any other plant life; and man will starve to death as no food value--- on the contrary, it is a poison. You will notice that cattle don't touch it. In addition to other disservices, it sucks and evaporates all the ground water. We should call it the demon grass (*Talkative Man* 75-76).

A comparison of two cultures--- native Indian culture and modern Western culture--- in terms of their life-affirming, life-preserving capacity makes it clear that native Indian culture is as it holds optimistic view for the future while modern Western culture is inferior as it holds no hope for the future. In this sense, juxtaposition of cultures provides a strategy for the affirmation of native Indian culture.

Affirmation of Indian Culture

R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man* is a call for the affirmation of native Indian culture. His journalistic training has added to his acute observation of life in India. He employs irony and artistic detachment to contribute to the affirmation of native Indian culture. The humorous portrayal of outer and inner conflicts of characters with touches of pathos and irony in the novel demonstrates his insight into the reality. It shows love for values---- the native Indian values for life. The native Indian mores and traditions are embodied in the Malgudi----the setting for this novel .It is basically rooted in Indian soil and way of existence. To the end of cultural affirmation, Narayan makes his characters move from crisis to resolution and then onto self-awareness. The characters in the novel try to break through the intrusions of alien oddities. The situation demands the drastic action if at all Malgudi is to be saved from such knaves who practice the art of deception and desertion. In the novel, Narayan also evokes an ageless rich heritage of Indian mythic culture and tradition.

Lakshmi Holmstrom in his book *The Novels of R.K. Narayan* indicates that Narayan's protagonists' development is usually related to the four ashrams (or stage) of the ideal Hindu life and although the fact that his novels have traveled well attests to their cross-cultural valency, it is as reductive to see them as expressive of universal human characteristics as it is to see them as representing quintessential Indianness. Holmstrom's concise exposition of the commonplaces of Indian [for which one should perhaps read Hindu] though' that inform early Indian novelists representations of character and action identifies beliefs in Narayan's protagonists are men contending with the day-to-day pressures of lived social experience.

TM can be compared with Narada, the tale-telling sage of classical Hindu discourse, who is burdened with dubious gift of gossip. In the opening page of the novel TM says:

They call me Talkative Man. Some affectionately shorten it to TM: I have earned this title I suppose because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back. I don't care. I'd choke if I didn't talk, perhaps like Sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst. (*Talkative Man* 1)

As such TM would seem to be like Narada, who even today in India is byword for those who love to gossip and carry tales. TM by exposing and narrating the takes of deception and hypocrisy is in favor of retaining moral and cultural values of Malgudi: For TM sharing an experience is a must. Similarly the sage Narada carried a curse that unless he spread a gossip everyday his skull would burst.

Jeremy Howthorne in his book *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* has summarized culture as: First: a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; second: a particular way of life, of either a people, a period or a group third: the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity (63).

The extract makes it clear that culture should not be understood as a monolithic concept. It simply refers to a different way of life and change the life in its light. In this sense culture is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of a society.

R.K. Narayan's fiction is basically rooted in Indian soil and way of existence. His presentation of life is realistic. It is also suggestive of the depth beneath. Without being didactic, he renders a profound moral vision in his novels, which has its root in an ageless rich heritage of our culture and tradition:

Our town has not caught up with modern sanitary arrangements, even this is considered a revolutionary concept. The Modern Sanitaryware man on Market Road is going bankrupt—sitting amidst his unsold porcelain things. Our ancestors bathed and washed and cleansed themselves at the well and the river. With the river running down our door-step, they didn't have to make special arrangements, did not let themselves be obsessed with washing all the time, which is what Western Civilization has taught us. Considering that the river flows almost all the year round, although thinning down a bit in summer---I waxed eloquent and left him no choice (*Talkative Man* 28-29).

Culture is a term which is associated with the ideas, belief and customs that are shared and accepted by people of society. Every society has cultural values. The cultural and moral values present a true perspective of the development of any society or nation. They tell us to what extent a society or nation has developed itself. The cultural and moral values of a particular society or nation serve as its measuring devices. They also help to evaluate the characteristics of the citizens belonging to that particular society or nation. The question may now be asked what these values are which reflect the progress made by the society or the nation in question.

The story of *Talkative Man* begins with the narrator introducing himself as a compulsive raconteur who will tell us one of his best-liked pieces; the book closes with a postscript in which Narayan as author steps forward to say that as he prefers

the short story to the novel, he keeps details to minimum. Mockingly identifying himself with the Talkative Man, he offers a witty alternative ending. Between introduction and postscript lies a curious tale about a well-dressed Indian who suddenly arrives in Malgudi claiming to be a UN expert from Timbuktu and seeking a quiet place to write his report. Unable to find proper lodgings, he is given hospitality by the narrator, who learns that the expert is a philanderer pursued by his former loves, especially by a wife from Delhi. The analogy is to Savitri, who followed the demon Yama, the God of Death, pleading for her husband Satyavan. In the symbolism the UN expert is both husband and demon. After being temporarily reclaimed by his Delhi wife, he leaves for Rome with a young nurse. R.K. Narayan evokes Hindu myth in order to affirm native Indian Culture Under the guise of cultural conflict between the new and the old, eternal idea continues.

Narayan has great faith in the ancient traditions of this valet land. He holds the view that the impact of life, the material and substance of our thought are the same everywhere, in any state. Traditionally, India is '*The Ramayana*', '*The Mahabharat*' and the Puranas. The values remain the same in every village, town or city. In his creative work he often refers to the great repository of knowledge contained in our myths and legends.

Narayan's characters are living and loving characters. They adorn Malgudi like fine fragment flowers. No doubt some of them are westerners but they too find it difficult to desert the Malgudi way of life. In the novel *Talkative Man*, TM narrates:

We were about twenty unrelated families in Kabir Street, each having inherited a huge rambling house stretching from the street to the river at the back. All that one did was to lounge on the pyol, watch the street, and wait for the harvest from our village lands and cash from the

tenants. We were a vanishing race, however, about twenty families in Kabir Street and an equal number in Ellamman Street, two spots where village landlords had settled and built houses nearly a century back in order to seek the comforts of urban life and to educate their children at Albert Mission. Their descendants, so comfortably placed, were mainly occupied in eating, breeding, celebrating festivals, spending the afternoons in a prolonged siesta on the pyol, and playing cards all evening. The women rarely came out, being most of the time in the kitchen or in the safe-room scrutinizing their collection of diamonds and silks (*Talkative Man* 4).

The extract highlights Narayan's despair at the vanishing race. It maps the geography of Malgudi and its inhabitants. The old inhabitants of the place represent rural life. However, the lure of comforts of urban life at the expense of peace of rural life has jeopardized the native Indian culture. R.K. Narayan has evoked the drama of the conflict between settled older values and a complex of external forces which challenge its capacity to remain insulated from intrusions of modernity with the aim to preserve the native Indian culture. He critiques the life style of village landlords in favour of Malgudi culture and tradition. TM who stands in favor of Malgudi culture under the western influence by saying: "This sort of existence did not appeal to me" (*Talkative Man*, 4).

TM valorizes Malgudi life as he says:

Malgudi climate has something in it which irons out outlandish habits. It was not long before the blue Oxford suit was gone—perhaps embalmed in moth-balls; and the doctor began to appear in shirt-sleeves and grey trousers, almost unrecognizable. In due course even

that seemed odd and out of fashion in a street where everyone was seen in a dhoti from waist down edged with a red border over a bare body, or utmost in a half-sleeve shirt on occasions (*Talkative Man*, 27).

In the extract, TM also accepts that people have turned unrecognizable by leaving behind their original culture and tradition. He makes an appeal for the preservation and affirmation of native Indian culture and customs in order to reserve identity.

In this respect C.D. Narasimhaiah says in *The Swan and The Eagle: Essays on Indian English Literature*: “He has scarcely stirred out of Malgudi nor have his characters; and if by ill-luck they did stray out of the Municipal limits of Malgudi they invariably came back, sadder and wiser –such is the spirit of place, Malgudi the microcosm of traditional Indian society” (136). Narayan operates consistently well within his limited area of experience and achieves substantially.

In his attempt to identify and affirm native Indian culture, Narayan in his novel *Talkative Man* evokes the issue of the issue of identity. He dramatizes the multiple version of identity of Dr. Rann in the novel. In this respect TM narrates:

Dr Rann was actually, as I discovered later, Rangan, a hardy Indian name which he had trimmed and tailored to sound foreign; the double N at the end was a stroke of pure genius. One would take him to be a German, Rumanian or Hungarian—anything but what he was, a pure Indian from a southernmost village named Maniyur, of the usual pattern: tiled homesteads and huts clustering around a gold-crested temple that towered over an expanse of rice fields and coconut grooves; similar to a hundred others, so commonplace that it escapes the notice of map-makers and chroniclers (*Talkative Man* 2).

Rann represents a particular challenge to TM, he represents alterity. A cultivated foreignness informs all the other markers of his assumed identity, particularly his outlandish dress which includes such items as a blue three-piece suit, olive-green shorts, and a Japanese kimono. The statement that he comes from a South Indian village may provide a seemingly authentic account of Rann's identity, but his erasure of this through the assumption of a foreign persona problematizes the notion that identity can be 'pure' and single. In this sense the challenge Rann offers to TM's conservative Malgudi standpoint.

TM is specifically identified as another member of 'the Kabir Street aristocracy' (*Talkative Man* 26) - is not that of actual foreignness, but rather that of a view of identity which, like Grace's in *The Vendor of Sweets*, disputes the validity of ordinary conceptions of self; and his accounts of his travels to far-off places replace such conceptions with a nomadic view of subjectivity.

Rann is originally an Indian who was actually Rangan and he easily compromised with his problems and situations. As a guest in the vast house of TM, he does not mind the lack of attached sanitary arrangements. He is indeed a 'remarkable man'. He adjusts everywhere and changes from his Japanese Kimono to Khadi dress in Malgudi. He goes to the extent of avoiding meals of dinner table. He sits cross-legged and eats his meal with his hands without knife and fork. In the initial stage he leaves a powerful impression on the mind of TM.

Rann is suspected of being a rogue, whose succession of aliases is an index of his duplicity, particularly with regard to women. But even though the evidence that he is a 'lecherous demon' (*Talkative Man*, 79) mounts to a point where the case against him seems overwhelming, Narayan stops just short of making it complete; and

through his use of TM, who is partly fascinated by Rann, as the main focalizer of the novel, he interrogates the very notion that people are totally knowable.

As the story proceeds, TM begins to be suspicious about Rann's background. Before tackling him, he wanted to arm himself with facts:

I quickly examined his briefcase and a portfolio of letters—quite a handful. Envelopes addressed to different names – only two to Rann—and the address was always Poste Restante in different towns and countries. Like our gods, he seemed to have thousand names—Ashok, Naren, D'Cruz, John, Adam, Shankar, Shridhar, Singh and Iqbal and what not. The letters were all from women: imploring, appealing, and accusing and attacking in a forthright manner; some of them were intensely passionate from Mary, Rita, Nancy, Manju, Kamala and so on. One or two had been addressed to Dubai or Kuwait, and forwarded from place to place. And there were some from Roja herself, who somehow managed to reach him. There was a common feature in every letter: the cry of desertion. (*Talkative Man* 85)

The extract makes it clear that TM spies after Dr. Rann as he becomes suspicious of Dr. Rann's background. TM wants to expose the pretensions of Dr. Rann and leaves behind the illusion about him. Dr. Rann is exposed as a notorious deserter to women who is morally low and vile and corrupt at the centre. This act can be read as an attempt to expose the falsehood of foreign culture.

It becomes necessary to win by tricks the intruders and expose their reality to save local Indian culture from being adulterated. Rann might have duped many women but he is duped by the tricks of TM. He is refused to be photographed but TM needed one for onward submission to a newspaper. With great skill TM manages

things in such a way that Rann's photo is caught by Jayraj's efforts and the poor fellow remains innocent of the whole game. His photograph helps the further growth of the intrigue in the novel. He shies away from photographs because he is a crooked a man. Here is an illustration of how TM spies Dr Rann. TM narrates:

These days he kept a door open so that he might not lose glimpse of me; while I moved about he watched me surreptitiously from his chair, which was an excellent position for spying. My forefathers must have used that same strategic position to keep an eye on the household, particularly the army of servants, so that no one could slip out unnoticed. Rann found this advantageous. As I passed in and out he greeted me with casual ease. "Good day to you, TM. Starting on your interesting rounds for the day?" Sometimes he just smiled and nodded, without obviously questioning, feeling perhaps: "If he has anything--- he is bound to tell me—not the sort to keep mum—"(*Talkative Man* 47)

The sad tale of Delhi woman stimulates TM and he secures further evidence of Rann's tinted character. It adds a new dimension to the fictional city of Malgudi. He is full convinced that the man enjoying refuse under his roof is an expert in the art of deception. Hence, drastic action must be taken against him if Malgud's innocents are to be saved from such an imposter. TM come to realization: "No girl will be safe in this country unless we act. Young scamps like him must be taught a lesson" (*Talkative Man* 69).

Commentators on the work of R.K. Narayan have pointed out that he employs his comic sensibility meticulously controlled by irony and artistic detachment. He uses the comic mode for depicting the little ironies of life in fascinating manner. He is essentially a comic ironist who has taken keen interest in Indian life and values in and

around Malgudi. His portrayal of ironic characters and situation demonstrates his insight into reality. Thus, few ironic illustrations become necessary to exhibit its surface comic elements.

A few ironic illustrations become necessary to exhibit its surface comic elements. Rann is really facing hard times in the Railway Waiting Room. He says to TM in the library, "I say, my friends the bugs are eating me up every night". And TM adds to his ironic comment a wave of fine humor when he points out: "May be that is the Railway Board's policy to discourage the occupants from staying too long..." (*Talkative Man*, 19). The worried Mrs. Rann comes to Malgudi with firm determination to find out her slippery husband with the help of the journalist. She stares at the journalist who arouses a healthy humour when he says, "Not in my pocket..." (*Talkative Man*, 20). This is entirely an Indian way of speech and hence it becomes a spicy dish for the curious reader. Irony turns dominant when TM faces a volley of questions regarding his wife. Dr. Rann wants to know, "How far away were you"? The comical irony emerges in the brisk reply of TM. He says, "I forgot to take measuring tape with me". The irony of situation makes TM surrender his title to Talkative Man when he is compelled to become a patient listener to the prattle of Mrs. Rann. He remarks; "It looked as though I'd have to surrender my title of 'Talkative Man' and take a second place in the world of talkers"(20). As a matter of fact the scattered ironies in the novel make it delightful reading. Narayan's comic ironies are very palatable here and they go a long way in sustaining our interest in the book.

Rann's views suggest a particular, slanted aspect of modernity. When he gives a lecture to the Malgudi Lotus Club "it is on his specialist subject, 'Futurology', an apocalyptic discourse which predicts 'the collapse of this planet about A.D. 3000'" (*Talkative Man*, 105). It is an occasion that provides Narayan with ample opportunity

to mock small-town pretentiousness, and this satire is particularly directed against the misuse of rhetoric. The speech he gives is a travesty of dated nationalist rhetoric, interlaced with Gandhain and Nehruvian allusions, which finally amount to little more than name-dropping. When he is succeeded by Rana, talk assumes a complexion which, ostensibly at least, looks towards the future rather than past. However, Rann's speech is a bizarre kind of ecological discourse, which revolves around two tropes from the natural world: a 'Cannibal Herb (*Talkative Man 105*) and the threat of a plague of rats. The herb is one of Narayan's most powerful metaphors for the amorphous and ill-defined creeping forces that threaten Malgudi's insulated existence. In his address to the Malgudi Lotus Club, Rann describes it as follows:

This is the future occupant of our planet [...]: This is a weed spreading under various aliases in every part of the earth - known in sonic places as Congress weed, don't know which congress is meant, Mirza Thorn, Chief's Tuft, Voodoo Bloom, the Blighter and so on. Whatever the name, it's an invader, may have originated out of the dust of some other planet left by a crashing meteor. I see it everywhere; it's a nearly indestructible pest. Its empire is insidiously growing [...]. (*Talkative Man 75*)

Although this description suggests a worldwide phenomenon, the references to 'Congress' and 'empire' also evoke meanings that have particular valency in an Indian context, while the 'various aliases' of the weed inevitably remind readers of Rann himself. So his apocalyptic discourse has an affinity with the characteristics that the novel ascribes to him: not just because of his multiple names, but also because of the difficulty of locating him in any single place. There is no suggestion that he is a critic of the phenomenon that he represents but his exploits seem to be a personal

equivalent of the spread of the weed 'in every part of the earth'. The weed comes to signify the complex of ill-defined forces that are supposedly eroding local identity in a harmful way, as it renders everything with which it comes into contact a victim of its homogenizing, global tendencies.

It is one of the most powerful tropes of alien intrusion to be found anywhere in Narayan's fiction - not least because of the suggestion that it may have extra-terrestrial origins - but it is also an image founded on the paranoiac belief that 'pure' cultures are threatened by any form of external incursion. However, the ending of *Talkative Man* fails to offer reaffirmation of the older Malgudi *status quo*, which is at least partly reinstated in the conclusion of most of Narayan's earlier works, and throughout the novel the emphasis on talk makes for a particularly provisional and dialogic investigation of identity. In this respect *Talkative Man* develops and extends debates that inform many earlier Narayan novels. This said, its various narratives are not all accorded the same degree of authority and finally, the garrulous TM's point of view is privileged over the other accounts, not least because he is the main narrator of a text that pays passing homage to the place of the gossip Narada in Hindu discourse, ancient and modern.

Encouraged by the news-editor's telegram, TM now fully devotes his time to taking care of Rann. To entertain Rann's pretensions, TM wants to take him to one Sam's Crafts:

I'll take you at a time when it is quite. I want to see a handicrafts shop—a very small one, managed by chap we call Sam—absolutely a genius, dedicated. He makes lacquer ware and sandalwood stuff which are famous all over the world. So many awards at Leipzig and other international fairs. He has distributors in Africa, Europe, the US and

everywhere. He is well known all over the world; mainly foreigners come in search of him and place orders. He is less known here as usual. No visitor from a foreign land ever misses him. Their first question will always be, “Where’s Sam’s Crafts?” Ten o’clock tomorrow morning we will walk up; spend half an hour at his workshop and then you will be free. He will feel honoured by a visit from an international figure.”(*Talkative Man* 38).

In this way, TM flatters Rann to take different places in order to find out what his actual intentions are. After the article about Rann is published in one of the newspapers, a strange woman comes to Malgudi Railway station looking for TM. From the woman, TM learns more about Rann’s hypocritical life. When she meets TM, she asks him in an undaunted manner, “if you know where this so-called doctor is you will lead me to him” because “I am his wife—perhaps the only one wedded to him in front of the holy fire at a temple”(*Talkative Man* 39).

TM takes Rann to his house and lets him stay in one of the rooms. But Rann is so conceited that he is satisfied with the physical facilities and his house. When Rann sees the flush out latrine he says, “This is impossible. I have no practice—I need a European type—“(28). Rann is completely taken in by European culture. He has totally forgotten Eastern social and moral value which TM reminds Rann of:

Our ancestors bathed and washed and cleaned themselves at the well and the river. With the river running down door-step, they didn’t have to make special arrangements, did not let themselves be obsessed with washing all the time, which is what Western Civilization has taught us. Considering that the river flows almost all the year round, although thinning down a bit in summer....” (*Talkative Man*, 28).

TM's dislike for foreign way of life is evident in the following expression:

...He goes out and when he comes back, he shuts himself in and bolts the door. Once Muni knocked on the door and was reprimanded severely. When he comes out he moves so fast, I can't speak to him at all. That's how they live in foreign countries—they always move fast and won't tolerate any disturbance except by previous appointment (*Talkative Man* 15).

The extract provides an instance of the western way of life that is characterized by personal considerations which markedly differs with native Indian culture is characterized by communal life.

Although TM smells rat in Rann's activities, he does not interfere, rather he helps him so as to further his own journalistic career. He never thinks of reporting anything about Rann to the police. When the station master complains to TM, he gives him the money to buy tickets for Rann so that he would be allowed to stay on in the waiting room. TM says to the station master, holding out twenty rupees, "You will buy him ticket for Kumbum every morning and punch it for ten days and you will say he arrived by 7 Up or something, waiting to catch the 17 Down or whatever it is" (*Talkative Man*, 18). TM is always thinking of creating a good story out of Rann for personal recognition. TM takes him around all over the town. TM helps him immoral activities flourish by supporting Rann. He does it only to expose the ills.

William Walsh in his book *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation* mentions Narayan's Indian authenticity. Walsh writes:

[...] It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian setting, and engages because of the substantial human nature which it implies and embodies. It carries along with it at every point a

kind of humour strange in English writing which mixes the melancholy and the amusing. Perhaps it is in this humour that there [sic] lies its deepest wisdom, which communicates a sense, crisp and unrebelling, of human limitation, and an appreciation, positively amiable but quite without illusion, of human achievement (43).

Perhaps there is no contradiction in saying that humour varies across cultures, but human values transcend this. However, such commentary seems to elide cultural specifics, while wanting to appeal to an undefined notion of ‘difference’, along with Indian authenticity.

Narayan employs the strategy of evoking the culture of humanity, which has its root in an ageless rich heritage of native Indian culture and tradition. In the novel *Talkative Man*, TM posits:

I went about my day feeling that I was on the brink of a mighty career. I don't aspire to become a so-called creative writer, I kept saying to myself, but only a journalist who performs a greater service to society, after all, than a dreamy-eyed poet or a story-teller. The journalist has to be in the thick of it whatever the situation—he acts as the eye for humanity (*Talkative Man* 31).

In a word, TM has a profound respect and belief in the religion of humanity. TM is a great lover of humanity. He extends all possible help to Rann to come out of the Waiting Room. He does not hesitate to provide him with a room at his residence. The Station Master seeks his help to maintain the railway rules regarding the passenger's stay at the Waiting Room. TM's sense of hospitality is superb. He believes SM and Rann both of their troubles.

R.K. Narayan has great reverence for Gandhi, the maker of India. Narayan has knitted Gandhian philosophy in the novel *Talkative Man* to advocate Gandhian philosophy as a way of life. He assimilates Gandhian philosophy to save people from the danger of trivialization and move the mass towards disillusionment:

I was a *batcha*, but serving our motherland in some capacity, however humble, was my only aim in life, inspired by our leaders and encouraged by them. I was always in the presence of Mahatmaji wherever he camped, and of course Jawaharlal was always with him and so were many of our distinguished patriots and leaders (*Talkative Man* 102).

The Gandhi image is sharply brought into focus when TM advises Rann to wear khadi which will declare him a nationalist, a follower of the Mahatma. Gandhi is not an unknown figure to Rann. He claims, “He was a great man”. Again, in the Lotus Club function, the Minister dwells upon Gandhi’s philosophy and recalls his associations with the Mahatma and Jawaharal. He claims that he owes much to them. He also recalls Gandhi’s last days. The reference is very much reminiscent of the description in the novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma*: “Non-violence would be the safest policy with him [Vasu]. Mahatma Gandhi was right in asking people to carry on fight with the weapon of non-violence; the chances of getting hurt were much less (*Talkative Man*, 155). There is obvious irony when Nataraja uses Gandhian rhetoric to justify his inertia. In the novel *Talkative Man*, such comic passages remain poised somewhere between satire and deeper philosophical irony and it is clear that the novel dramatizes an archetypal conflict, while seeing it through cultural lens.

In TM’s view, Malgudi is a great leveler, a locale that neutralizes the intrusions of alien oddities. It is stated:

Malgudi climate has something in it which irons out outlandish habits. It was not long before the blue Oxford suit was gone—perhaps embalmed in moth-balls; and the doctor began to appear in shirt-sleeves and grey trousers, almost unrecognizable. In due course even that seemed odd and out of fashion in a street where everyone was seen in a dhoti from waist down edged with a red border over a bare body, or utmost in a half-sleeve shirt on occasions (*Talkative Man* 27).

The extract raises a strong foundation of Malgudi culture that has its own customs and traditions. Owing to its peculiarities, it has its distinct recognition. The issue of identity clearly highlights a case for the affirmation of the native Indian culture.

The crucial point of the novel *Talkative Man*, is that Narayan chooses to end the novel with Mrs. Rann's constant pursuit to capture her husband unresolved. The ending raises the possibilities that some kind of spiritual transformation may take place in Dr. Rann and he will abandon the art of deception and hypocrisy and he will come back to his legally married wife Mrs. Rann, an act of cultural and moral binding. In short, *Talkative Man* resists any form of closure.

Conclusion

Talkative Man is a complicated cultural novel that attests to the geography of Malgudi, and broader social and personal values of the characters. This research work concludes with the findings that R.K. Narayan shows the supremacy of native Indian culture over the Western culture by juxtaposing and contrasting them. TM, the narrator tries to advance his fledging journalistic career by using a fraud from the southern part of India. This fraud is Rangan who trims his name to Rann to sound foreign so as to deceive people. He even adds Dr. to his self-declared name. It becomes necessary to coin by tricks the intruders and expose their reality to save local Indian culture from being adulterated. Rann might have duped many women but he is duped by the tricks of TM. By exposing and satirizing the deception and hypocrisy of Dr. Rann who represents modern Western culture, R.K. Narayan intends to affirm native India culture against modern Western values.

R.K. Naryan has beautifully created his imaginary town of Malgudi in which the action of the novel *Talkative Man* takes place. The mores and traditions embodied in the Malgudi is basically rooted in Indian soil and way of existence. The fictional world develops a universal hue and it embraces the heart of humanity. In the novel, TM is presented as a great lover of humanity. He extends all possible help to Rann to come out of waiting Room of Railway station. He does not hesitate to provide him with a room at his residence. The station master seeks TM's help to maintain the railway rules regarding the passenger's stay at the waiting room. TM's sense of hospitality is superb.

In addition, the research paper attempts to reassess Malgudi as a product of coming together of social, religious and above all psychic forces which undergo transformations as they interact with one another. The changes being wrought in the

town seem to speak to the tension between tradition and modernity. Attesting to a broader social experience of change, Malgudi is seen a product of Narayan's own personal and professional experience.

In this respect, *Talkative Man* underlines the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. The novel's central tension emerges from the TM/Rann relationship. TM's fictional alter ego in *Talkative Man* is identified as Dr. Rann, an English sounding name, who has come to Malgudi. He is associated with modernity through his involvement in a UN project. He seems to represent a threat to older Malgudi values, as embodied by conservative Kabir lane. Dr. Rann clearly symbolizes the incursion of an outside force into Malgudi cosmos.

The physical incursions into Malgudi space are suggestive of Malgudi as a liminal space where traditional and modern culture encounter.

R.K. Narayan employs irony and artistic detachment to contribute to the affirmation of native Indian culture. The humorous portrayal of outer and inner conflicts of characters with touches of pathos and irony in the novel demonstrates insight into culture. The trope of irony exposes the deception, desertion, trickery, and hypocrisy of Dr. Rann. The situation demands drastic action if at all Malgudi is to be saved from such knaves who practice the art of deception and desertion. It becomes necessary to win by tricks the intruders and expose their reality to save local Indian culture. Narayan evokes peculiar Indian setting, place, mythological references and characters to affirm native Indian culture. All in all, R.K. Narayan's *Talkative Man* is a call for the affirmation of native Indian culture.

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