

## A Comparative Analysis of Regionalism: R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi and William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County

Dr. B. S. Selina\*

A.P State Council of Higher Education, Mangalagiri, Guntur District, on deputation with the APPSC, Vijayawada

<p><b>Corresponding Author:</b>  <b>Dr.B.S.Selina</b></p> <p>A.P State Council of Higher Education, Mangalagiri, Guntur District, on deputation with the APPSC, Vijayawada</p> <p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: 10 /02/ 2025        Accepted: 23 /02/ 2025        Published: 28 /02/ 2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> The concept of regionalism in literature is referred to as the exploration of the specifics of the characters, dialect, customs, culture, and topography, which belong to a certain region. In this paper, a comparative analysis has been done on two of the most representative fictional geographies of the twentieth-century literature, R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi, and William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. The two authors are both praised for their creation of such creative spaces that form the central setting of most of their literary work. To R.K.Narayan, Malgudi is a fictional South-Indian town, which is a microcosm of the Indian society and which has the differentiation of the traditional society into the influx of the modern western culture. The realism and objectivity with which Narayan describes the middle-class lifestyle characterizes Narayan’s regionalism, the setting often takes the place of a character. Indeed, it has been termed by some as the real hero of the story. In the same way, William Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha County, which is a fictitious area that is based on his own Lafayette County in Mississippi. Faulkner uses this setting to explore the inner world of the American South, questioning both its complex social set up and its tragic racial past and the communal memory that fills the residents. This paper reaffirms that Narayan is a great regional novelist, as it compares his expertise on the local colour tradition to that of Faulkner. The paper examines how the two authors use accurate topographical description and local traditions to base their stories on a touchable reality and at the same time exploring universal human issues. Furthermore, it deals with interdependence of the characters and the surroundings under the premise that these fictional spaces are essential in depicting their cultures as they are. Through the analysis of the chosen works, the study demonstrates how Malgudi and Yoknapatawpha County serve as medium of transition between the specific and the general thus making Narayan and Faulkner, titanic heroes in regional fiction.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Regionalism, Malgudi, Yoknapatawpha County, Microcosm, Indian Society, American South, Tradition, Realism.</i></p>
<p><b>Cite this article:</b> Selina, B. S. (2025). A Comparative Analysis of Regionalism: R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi and William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. <i>MRS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Literature</i>, 2 (2), 41-45.</p>	

### Introduction

Regionalism in literature is a term used to describe literary work that focuses on a region taken out of the centres of power, the special dialect, traditions, culture and geography of the particular spot. In a regional novel the locality is not just a mere background but is part and parcel of the story, it is even a character by itself. The peak of this literary convention is found in the writings of R.K. Narayan and William Faulkner who both created fictional, fantastic worlds that reflected their own native worlds as they sought to deal with the existential dilemma of man in the universe.

R. K. Narayan is one of the pioneers of the Indian literature in English and he is mostly remembered because of his invention of Malgudi. Narayan was born in 1906, and his lifetime was almost a century of transformation in India, and he managed to reproduce this transformation in the imagery of fictitious town colourful and warm through the prism of his camera. The idea of creation of Malgudi came up in 1930 on the day of Vijayadashami when he

imagined a small railway station and the name of Malgudi came to his mind. Since its debut in *Swami and Friends* (1935), Malgudi has become significant in the successive novels, and, after a while, got featured in nearly all of his fifteen books and hundreds of short stories.

Malgudi by Narayan is a miniature India, a reflection of the social and cultural transformation of a country on its way. It is a place of meeting, a place of interconnection of the old and the new, the East and the West. The Sarayu River, the Mempi Hills, the Mango Grove of Nallappa, the Market Road are all permanent old landmarks of the town despite its growth and transformation. To Narayan Malgudi was the place of the desire of his heart, and he depicted its inhabitants - the students and teachers, the financiers and the sweet-vendors in the most detailed and the most realistic manner.

Similarly, William Faulkner is the known regionalist of American literature, who was famous in what he depicted about the American south. Faulkner uses fictional Yoknapatawpha County, near his birthplace region of Lafayette County in Mississippi, as the backdrop of such masterpieces as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Similar to Narayan's Malgudi, the imaginary county of Faulkner is a deep psychological impression of a territory, which dwells on the issues of its social organization and its historical burden. Faulkner is greatly embedded in the Old South, where racism and the tragic history of the black and white Americans are the key motifs. There is also a similarity in that both writers use the humour and their observation of the tragic, using their fictional areas to ground their works within a certain cultural and social context.

Critics often compare Narayan and Faulkner due to the fact that both authors were able to strike the right balance between the regional and the universal. Their narratives are anchored by geography of Malgudi or Yoknapatawpha, but the themes described in it like the human struggle, transformation, moral dilemma, and identity search are familiar to the readers worldwide. Narayan, in his turn, does not resort to didacticism or propaganda, and he prefers to show people as they are with objectivity, which makes his regionalism acceptable to a global market.

Moreover, the two authors use their fictional areas to study social relationships and power relations. In Malgudi Narayan explores the caste system, the colonial forces and gender roles and illustrates how tradition tends to conflict with the modern sensibilities. Faulkner explores racism that is deeply rooted and the historical past of the South in Yoknapatawpha. Although they are situated in different cultural settings, the two authors prove that, human nature is universal, and the Rainbow World of childhood or the complicated transition to the adult world is no more present in an Indian town than in an American county.

Literary regionalism refers to literature which addresses the characters, dialect, habits, culture, and topography, unique to a given and manageable place. A regionalist author willingly chooses a region that is not one of the main centres of power to use as the centre of action of the narrative, which means that the setting is central, not peripheral. In this genre, the setting is not a by-word, but is a part and parcel of the story, and in many cases an actor all on its own. The regional novel deals with life of individuals in a specific milieu and how they follow the custom, their particular personality and nature that surrounds their lives.

In the case of R.K.Narayan and William Faulkner, it is regionalism that narrows them down in their focus in order to attain greatness and a broad appeal. Giving careful description of the finer details of a single place, Narayan wrote about Malgudi and Faulkner wrote about Yoknapatawpha County; these authors constructed the creative places that are symbolic about the universal state of man. Their works prove that only by remaining really loyal to the particularities of a place, a writer is able to hold mirror to the soul of humanity in general.

### Genesis and Evolution of Fictional Universes

The Malgudi creation was a turning point of early Indian literature in English. Malgudi was conceived on Vijaydashami day (1st October 1930) according to the friend and editor of Narayan, N.Ram. During his writing Narayan pictured a small railway station and then he pictured the name of the station which

was suddenly hurled into vision and the name was Malgudi. This fictional South-Indian town, which was first mentioned in *Swami and Friends* (1935), became the setting of virtually all his 15 novels and hundreds of short stories. Malgudi has been regarded as a simile of the Indian society, which showed social-political transformations between the British Raj and the post-independent India.

In the same manner, William Faulkner is the renowned regionalist of the American literature and his masterpieces are located in the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha. As in the case of Malgudi, Yoknapatawpha was based on an actual location: the native Lafayette County in Mississippi, of which Faulkner was native. Faulkner makes this place enter the inner world of the American South, its rich social system, tragic past of the relations between black and white people. The two writers were also dependent on their home settings, Mysore to Narayan and Oxford, Mississippi to Faulkner, as the main places that inspired their fictional maps.

One of the peculiarities of regionalism is the use of certain topographical elements in the fiction. The geography of Narayan's Malgudi the town is just as constant as it is rich in colour. Sarayu River, Mempi Hills, Market Road and the Mango Grove of Nallappa are some of the landmarks that reoccur and offer a touch of consistency in the changing face of the town. In both *Swami and Friends* Narayan describes the development of the town, which was a semi-agricultural village in the early days, and in the *Dark Room*, he mentions modernization of the town with the Railway, the Palace Talkies and other insurance companies.

The Yoknapatawpha of Faulkner is also based on the sense of place to experience the culture and social organization. In both works, the local colour is used by both authors in order to render the regions to be real and living. Whereas Narayan emphasizes the habits, fashions and superstitions of South India, Faulkner touches on the deep roots of racism and historical encumbrances of the Old South. Both authors describe the part of the world as the land of heart desire, and they are particularly precise and objective in their descriptions of the people who live there as schoolboys and sweet peddlers.

Malgudi and Yoknapatawpha serve as mini-nations of their own countries. Malgudi is an image of transitional India at once standing between the ancient and the modern. Narayan takes the town to discuss the nature of the Indian society, which consists of the caste system, the colonial forces, and the changing gender roles. His characters usually have to walk the line between tradition and modernity, like the tensions between an orthodox father and his son who is bred in the West in *The Vendor of Sweets*.

Faulkner in Yoknapatawpha is able to create a psychology of the South, where racism is embedded in the memories of the people. The image of the South presented by Faulkner is dotted with the peculiar feeling of tragic, which emphasizes the weight of history on the lives of people. Narayan is a less political writer, but has also written about inequalities in society, including the discrimination against those who belong to unprivileged caste and the oppression by the patriarchy, exposes women like Savitri in *The Dark Room* and Rosie in *The Guide*. By means of these accessible areas, both writers conduct an incisive research on human desires and intentions.

Characteristics in regional literature often have a two-fold character; they are both persons and symbolic types of the region. In Narayan's fiction, Malgudi, Margayya, the financial expert and Nataraj, the average printer are entirely personified and still carry the particular characteristics of their group in the society. Malgudi is thronged by local nobodies and local idiosyncrasy, including the mischievous Swami or the complicated Raju, whose lives are the beat and the idioms of South-Indian life.

The characters of Faulkner are also connected with the topography and the history of Yoknapatawpha. In the case of both authors the two are an inseparable entity of the characters and the environment. Professor Iyengar has commented that Narayan has made Malgudi the real hero of her novels since the characters love the town, they live around it and they come back to it whenever they are forced to do so. This interdependence is needed to make sure that the struggles, redemptions and self-realisation of the characters are genuine and based on their particular cultural ethos.

Narayan is successful because of the style that he believes but does not announce, his prose is clear, transparent, and racy to the extent that the setting itself seems completely natural. Narayan purported that the concept should take a centre stage over the style, and that he wanted plain prose, which reflects the laid back lifestyle within Malgudi. The pithy sentences and the sparkling conversation he uses are Indian voice and the Indian rhythm of thought in an English language. This Indianisation of English enables Malgudi to assume the colour of its native land but still be easy to be comprehended by the world audience.

Faulkner on the other hand is known to be a psychologically deep and complicated writer in terms of the plot structure, yet he has the same sense of humour and queerness of human beings as Narayan. The two writers rely on their territories to examine the universal human values, including marital loyalty, man-wife relationships, and identity search. Their regionalism is not restraining but is a control of the art of art as a mastery that is objective and non-biased giving aesthetic fulfilment to the readers.

The balance of the regio-national and the universe is the final success of both Narayan and Faulkner. Although Malgudi is a town in South India, it has human struggle, love, and redemption themes that are not limited to the cultural setting. The rainbow world of childhood or the bewildering experience of moving into the real world of an adult as in Malgudi is as much familiar to the Western reader as the racial and social conflicts of Yoknapatawpha are to the Indian reader.

The literary works of Malgudi and Yoknapatawpha County are literary works that are long lasting and used as reflections of the societies. By reducing their vision to a certain section of the world, they achieved the heights of universal art and demonstrated that the dilemma of the common man is a world story. Both authors are the giants of the regional novel, who have proven that a home-based writer is the very one that has roots on a particular place that make him or her global and relevant.

These fantastic landscapes of R.K. Narayan and William Faulkner become the living historical repositories, the records of the transition of the traditional identities, rooted deep in the past, to the modern, often colonial worlds. In the case of Narayan, Malgudi is set in backdrop of the British Raj of the interactions amidst the Indian people and their colonial masters. Even though Narayan does not always take a direct political stance, his stories show some

underlying power dynamics, cultural clash, and the unavoidable merger of the Indian and Western aspects. In other writings like in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, he simulates the wave of nationalism and how the Gandhian ideology affected the lives of common people like Sriram and Bharati. As a result, Malgudi, which is a semi-agricultural town in *Swami and Friends*, is a busy commercial centre, thus being a micro-cosm of a nation in transition.

Comparatively speaking, the county of Yoknapatawpha by Faulkner is so closely tied into the historical fabric of the American South, where the memory of the Civil War and an ingrained racism become its main landmarks. Narayan uses Malgudi to explore the transitional period in India before it can become modernized, and Faulkner does the same with his county in exploring the innermost part of the soul of a land that has been weighed down by its own history. Both the writers create fictional spaces that allow them to slice up the external historical circumstances, colony principle in the case of Narayan and racial history in the case of Faulkner, which redefine the inner social environment of a community.

Regionalism offers the means to the writer to study the stratification of the society in a manner that is foreign. Malgudi is a place where social barriers and prejudice is still instilled through the caste system. Narayan brings out the discrimination against people who are not members of the privileged castes through the character of an orthodox Granny in *Waiting for the Mahatma* who denies entry to a scavenger. His novels are a reflection of society and thus it enables readers take a moment to consider these well-established structures.

In a similar fashion, Yoknapatawpha County depicted by Faulkner is a racially inclined area in which racism is entrenched in every citizen of the area. Where Narayan narrows down on the Brahminical stratification and the confrontation between both the colonial and the post colonial, Faulkner concentrates on the tragic character between the Black and the White Americans. Both of the authors show that the local environment is not simply a background but a set of established rules. The identity of an individual in Malgudi is usually linked to the communal affiliations and social conformance to tradition, but the characters in Faulkner are similarly seen to be identified by their location in the ranks of social and racial hierarchy of the South hence depicting that regional fiction is an imperative study of the predicament of man in a given social context.

### **Domesticity and Gender in the Regional Framework**

The experiences of women form an important part of the regionalist project to both authors. The agency of women is often checked by the patriarchal circle as seen in Narayan fiction. The Dark Room serves as a sort of early declaration of independence and a wife is an ideal victim of an orthodox world where men are never-ending tyrants. The traditional Indian womanhood is represented through Savitri, who is the symbol of domestic trauma resulting when the reaction to the marriage is not provided or oppressive.

However, regionalism by Narayan equally leads to new type of women who challenge these norms. Rosie in *The Guide* is a symbol of a change representative who leaves an irresponsible husband to become a dancer and in the process, underscores the changes that take place in society of Malgudi. Faulkner also explores domesticity and in exploring it he is also exploring the

suppressed aspirations of women in the strictures of the Old South. In all the situations, the fictional location is used to define the cultural borders that female characters should overcome, fight, or eventually cross. This way, the authors achieve universal theme of human dignity and the quest of identity in oppressive tradition.

The general theme of the regional fiction by Narayan is the complex transition between the adolescent and adulthood phase. In *Swami and Friends*, the Malgudi background gives the rainbow world of the innocent curiosity and the protest of the traditional virtuousness. The town turns into the location where moral quandaries and self-identification take place as the main characters grow up. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* goes through a rub with life; a stagnant wanderer before deciding to make his own philosophy.

The lovable but not very perfect Raju or the scheming Swami are completely individualized characters but they represent the regional type that exists in Malgudi. The heroes of Faulkner tend to pursue similar lines of self-crisis and rejuvenation, but much more commonly plagued by the tragic part of the local past. To both authors, the locale serves as the land of heart desire and their characters are indistinguishable with their location and tend to go back to the town despite a dismal failure or disappointment in their life.

A lot of credit is due to Narayan and his unobtrusive style through which he writes in a prose that is lucid, transparent, vivid and racy. He also creates a consciously homely prose devoid of needless embellishments, thus anticipating the concept over the stylistic bling. This simplicity makes Malgudi available to people all over the globe, and yet still retains a much needed Indianness. The tone of Narayan is that of the talking voice, that is close to the oral traditions of the Panchatantra and the Mahabharata.

Although quite frequently having a more complicated and psychological narrative format, Faulkner shares the microscopic vision of Narayan and his ability to see human queerness. The two authors are considered pure artists who perceive aesthetic objectivity and neutrality and do not succumb to open propaganda, instead, they provide a realistic image of the current society. Narayan is often compared to Chekhov because of his talent to extract beauty out of the tragic circumstances and his cold manner of observing people around him, who are local nobodies and local eccentrics. Such objectivity makes their regional works to act as true reflections as opposed to idealised caricatures.

Regional fiction often resorts to the use of mythology whereby a moral framework is given to ordinary events. The atmosphere of Hindu traditionalism lays abundantly on Narayan and incorporates the ideas of Dharma, Karma, and self-transcendence, which he introduced. In his works, he is accustomed to using archetypal schemes: like the final victory of the good and annihilation of the evil in the story *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* that reminds the mythological story of Bhasmasura. The process of changing Raju into a pilgrim, as he turns out to be a picaroon in *The Guide*, recalls the myth of Valmiki, thus making a contemporary story based on the knowledge of the ancient. Similarly, the Yoknapatawpha created by Faulkner is infused with a moral vision which is defined by the Christian ethics and southern codes of honour. The two authors show that human nature cuts across all national boundaries and the theme of the search of identity or the spiritual search of the self-realisation is just as

strong in a south Indian town as it is in a Mississippi county. They are able to go as far as philosophy by basing their stories on local traditions and religious beliefs, which cut across geographical lines.

Finally, the example of regionalism of R.K. Narayan and William Faulkner is an illustration of the fact that the magnitude is attained through the control of artistic abilities and concentrated search. Malgudi and Yoknapatawpha County are not settings but creative places that summarize the spirit of the human-being. The fact that Narayan could easily turn the English language to an Indianising form allowed him to share the vibrations of Indian life with the whole world and thus proved that it is the blood which pumps the life in the writer and makes him universal. Through their writings, both writers leave historic fragments of their corresponding areas to the generations to come. They are still titans of the local novel and have proved that the predicament of the common man is the timeless topic of literature; whether it be the township of Malgudi, or the tragedy of Yoknapatawpha. Their works are still being looked upon as a very insightful reflection on the society and are a real world of fiction that is unanimously appreciated by everyone.

## References

1. Annu. "R.K. Narayan's 'Waiting for the Mahatma': A Thematic Analysis." *International Journal of Novel Research and Development (IJNRD)*, 2024.
2. Arunachalam, M. "Human Values in R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide'." *Jamal Mohamed College Research Paper*, 2010.
3. Bala, Madhu, and Suman Devi. "Critical Analysis of R.K. Narayan in His Indian Social Philosophy." *International Journal of Advanced Research (IJAR)*, 2023.
4. Devi, Sunita. "A Complex Transition of Adolescent Mind to Adulthood in R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*." *The Creative Launcher*, 2017.
5. Kahar, Santosh Kumar. "R. K. Narayan: A Literary Genius and His Contribution to Indian Fiction." *The Academic: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2024.
6. Kumar, M. Suresh, and T. Usha Rani. "Traditional Approach in the Select Novels of R.K. Narayan: A Critical Study." *Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)*, 2016.
7. Meena, Mukesh Kumar. "R.K. Narayan as a Regional Novelist: An Analysis." *International Journal of Education, Modern Management, Applied Science & Social Science (IJEMASS)*, 2022.
8. Prasad, Rachna, and Leesa Santosh. "Cultural and Social Ethos Depicted in the Novels of R.K. Narayan." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 2023.
9. Rao, K. S. Narayana. "The Indian Novel in English: A Search for Identity." *Speech at the NCTE Annual Convention*, 1970.
10. Rashid, Jehangir, and Shabina Khan. "Social Consciousness in the Novels of R.K. Narayan with Special Reference to the Novels *The Guide* and *The*

11. Dark Room." Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR), 2021.
12. Sengupta, Aditi. "R. K. Narayan: 'Out of Business'." Azad Hind Fouz Smriti Mahavidyalaya Study Material, 2023.
13. Shelke, Suvarna, and Rafique Khan. "Review Of Social Approaches In The Novel Of R.K. Narayan." Webology, 2021.
14. Siddappa, E. "A Study on R.K. Narayan's Contribution to English Literature in India." International Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences (IJFANS), 2022.
15. Trimurthy, E.S.S. Narayana. "R. K. Narayan's Writing Style." An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations (RSIRJLE), 2014.
16. Trimurthy, Dr. Emani Satya Sai Narayana. "R. K. Narayan's Memoir: My Days a Critical Study." International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR), 2023.
17. Secondary and Foundational References
18. Greene, Graham. Introduction to Swami and Friends. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1935.
19. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivas. Indian Writing in English. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962.
20. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.
21. Naik, M. K. A History of Indian English Literature. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
22. Narasimhaiah, C. D. "The Art of R. K. Narayan." The Literary Criterion, 1970.
23. Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
24. Walsh, William. R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1982.