

**The Financial Expertise of Margayya and
Its Consequences in
R. K. Narayan's *The Financial Expert***

D. Prasad, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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Courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R. K. Narayan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._K._Narayan)

Introduction

Indian writing in English has gained academic respect in recent years. There are writers like R.K Narayan, Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandeya, Bhabani Bhattacharya and other Indian novelists who have made the English language flexible for their encounter with Indian social reality.

Indian poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, and Nissim Ezekiel have given immense contribution to the field of poetry.

There are also dramatists like Nissim Ezekiel, Asifcurrimbhoy and Girish Karnad. Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* has proved to be a successful venture.

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Indian Sensibility

The writers of Indian writing in English have tried to express Indian sensibility in their works. Sensibility can be defined as an unconscious yet habitual stance of mind, heart and soul towards men, things, events, nature and God. It is an innate susceptibility to impressions and reactions. It is like 'rasa' in Sanskrit literature. Every distinctly identified mass of mankind entertains such idiosyncrasies of thought and feeling.

English has been studied by the Indians for about a century and a half with the introduction of Macaulay's Educational policy. The study of the English language strengthened and stimulated a new consciousness among the people of India. The intellectuals were not prepared to renounce their history, traditions and culture. At the same time, the diffusion of western thought attracted them.

In the words of C. Paul Verghese,

The encounter between eastern and western thought left a permanent impression of India's cultural history. New movements religious, social and cultural also sprang out of this encounter. The net result of the new system of education thus was that Indian culture without losing its roots received the quick graft of western ideas that it needed to stay alive. In other words there was a synthesis between eastern and western thought in India's leaders and intellectuals right from the days of Ram Mohan Roy to the present.

(Verghese: pp. 173-174)

Indian Social Reality

Poverty, Hunger, Pestilence, Caste, East-West Conflict, Reconciliation, Gandhian principles are some of the major themes that attracted the attention of our Indian writers. These

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themes serve them as the means for exposing the problems of the Indians and thereby suggest suitable solutions for solving them. Like Charles Dickens, Mulraj Anand tries to expose the sufferings of the downtrodden and the miseries of Indian children. Bhabani Bhattacharya exposes the problems of the Indians who are in a dilemma. They do not know whether they have to give up Indian culture or western culture.

William Walsh observes,

The three writers of whom it can be said that they established the assumptions, sketched the main themes, drew the first models of the characters and elaborated the peculiar logic of the Indian novel in English are Mulraj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan.

(Walsh: 4)

R. K. Narayan – Widely Read Novelist

Among the Indian writers, R.K Narayan is the most widely read novelist. He is pre-eminently a story teller. His stories are not only interesting in themselves but very suggestive in the sense that they are a creative comment on contemporary reality, given in the Indian context. His protagonists perform functions which have social and individual significance.

Narayan seems to be the least complex but most consistent in the growth of his art. He employs comic sensibility meticulously controlled by irony and artistic detachment. He uses the comic mode for depicting the little ironies of life in a fascinating manner.

Prof. Walsh holds the view that,

If Anand is the novelist as reformer, Raja Rao the novelist as the metaphysical poet, Narayan is simply the novelist as novelist.

(Walsh: 6)

Command of English

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Narayan has flawless command over English, but it is the translation of his stories in Hindi which made him popular all over India.

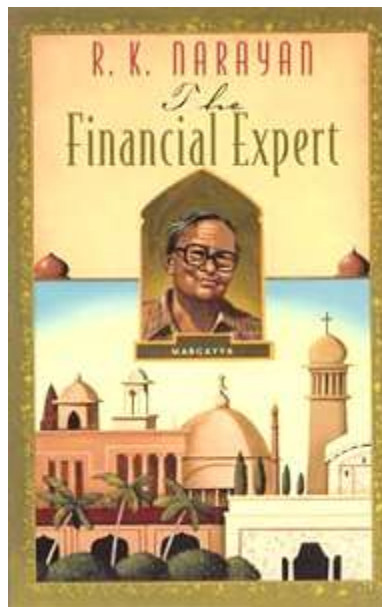
He is the pioneer of regional novel in Indian English. His novels have been translated into several languages Russian and Hebrew. Despite writing in an alien language English, Narayan has not sacrificed his Indianness in style and literary ethos.

Prof. K.R.S Iyengar rightly observes:

He is a master of comedy who is not unaware of the tragedy of the human situation; he is neither an intolerant critic of Indian ways and models nor their fanatic defender; he is on the whole content to snap Malgudi life's little ironies knots of satiric circumstance; and tragic-comedies and mischance of misdirection

(K.R.S Iyengar: 384)

The Financial Expert



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The Financial Expert is a sparkingly written novel of R.K. Narayan and it deals with avarice. It is woven round its central character Margayya, the high priest of Mammon. The real name of the hero is Krishna, but people know him as Margayya or the way shower. In its five parts, the novelist has shown five phases of development of the life of the financial wizard. This character has been taken from real life.

Narayan says in his introduction to the novel:

When I was half way through the book, a financial phenomenon occurred in our province.... He promised fantastic, dozzing scales of interest and dividends on the money entrusted to his care and he became the only subject of conversation until he crushed and landed in jail. About this time the Margayya of my novel was maturing as a financial expert, and I found the new material just what I needed blend into the story - so Margayya is actually a combination of two personalities.

(Narayan, Introduction to *The Financial Expert*: XVI – XVII)

Focus of This Study

The present study aims at analyzing the financial expertise of Margayya and the consequences of earning money in a crooked way. Margayya's nature is realized and analysed by the novelist in the course of the narrative. A middle-class Indian, Margayya is in quest of advancement in life. He is obsessed with the vision of wealth and its infinite growth through interest. By doing some crooked business, Margayya becomes rich in a short span of time. But at last, he is ruined by his friend and his son.

The Financial Expertise of Margayya – It's Consequences

The Financial Expert deals with the story of Margayya, who is obsessed with the thought of money. He begins his career in banking, sitting with a tin box under a banyan tree in front of

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the Malgudi Central Cooperative Land Mortgage Bank. He earns money by helping the peasants in getting their loans.

R.K. Narayan writes,

He was to them a wizard who enabled them to draw unlimited loans from the cooperative bank. If the purpose of cooperative movement was the promotion of thrift and the elimination of middlemen, those two were just the objects that were defeated here under the banyan tree.

(Narayan: 2)

Forty Days Puja to Lakshmi and *Domestic Harmony*

In order to extend his financial frontiers, he performs puja to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth for forty days. As a result, he meets Dr. Pal, a journalist, sociologist and author. His new friend contrives upon a plan for earning more and more money. He forces his script 'Bed life or the Science of Marital Happiness' on Margayya and suggests that he can make millions out of its publication. Margayya purchases the manuscript for twenty five rupees. He publishes it with the aid of Madanlal of Gordon Printery. The amended title of the work is 'Domestic Harmony'. Money begins to flow in for both the partners from the publication of this Sex book. When the profits dwindle, Margayya sells his share to Madanlal and parts company with him.

A New Business

With the aid of Dr. Pal he starts his new business of money lending. But all his money making device fails to equip him with the wisdom to guide the growth of his son Balu.

Margayya's final enterprise is to attract deposits in the bank on twenty percent interest. Dr. Pal functions as his tool. Pal's contact results in sack full of money but he is deftly taken away from Balu, his son. Margayya suspects Pal's hand in ruining his son. He is given a physical thrashing by Margayya who catches him red-handed when he comes to drop Balu at his gate.

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Consequently, Dr. Pal girds up his loins to take vengeance upon him by disclosing his business secrets and persuading people to withdraw their amount from his bank.

The result is disastrous. Margayya's house and office are full of men with shouts for their money. The financial expert is ruined beyond measure. He is reduced to a state of dreadful poverty and finally decides to eke out a living by taking his old profession of small financier under a banyan tree opposite to the Central Cooperative Land Mortgage Bank.

Man's Greed

The Financial Expert deals with the theme of man's greed for money and its consequences. Margayya's movement into unaccustomed paths of quick profits and prosperity pushes him again to the starting point.

Margayya is a middle class Indian in quest of advancement in life. He is obsessed with the visions of wealth. He feels that the world treated him with contempt because he had no money. When the Secretary of the Cooperative Bank threatens him for doing such business under the banyan tree, Margayya realizes the importance of money. He tells his wife,

Money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse.

(Narayan: 17)

Imitating the Street

On another occasion, Margayya finds a group of people collecting a lot of money under the pretext of giving a burial to an unclaimed dead body. This makes Margayya reflective. He feels that people do anything for money because money is man's greatest need like air or food. It is at this stage that Margayya comes into contact with a temple priest who initiates him into a propitiation of Goddess Lakshmi. It shows the hero's interest in choosing the means of his venture in accumulating wealth. Therefore he begins to worship Goddess Lakshmi.

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Margayya had the room washed clean chased out the rats and cockroaches and swept off the cobwebs that hung on the wall and corners. He took from a nail in the hall the pictures of Goddess Lakshmi put up a short pedestal and placed the picture on it. A couple of days later, at the full moon, he began his rites. He sat before the image of Lakshmi.

(Narayan: PP: 46-47)

He prints 'Bed Life' under the changed title 'Domestic Harmony'. It is written by Dr. Pal whom he encounters when he makes a trip to the pond beyond the Sarayu. The printed copies of the book are sold like hot cakes. The proceeds enable Margayya to start his money-lending career. This business flourishes beyond measure. However, this proves too good to the end the final crash comes unluckily through Pal when he turns his enemy.

Margayya's Son Balu

No doubt, the book 'Domestic Harmony' paves a smooth financial career for Margayya, but it does not improve his domestic life. Margayya's son Balu appears twice with distinct hurdles in the narrative. Balu, a spoilt boy, throws into the gutter, the red account book of his father which contained various calculations.

Margayya cried shamelessly: "Hold him! Hold him!" At which they tried to encircle the boy. It was evident that by now he had become completely intoxicated with the chase. Presently he found that he was being out numbered and cornered. As a circle of hunters hemmed in he did an entirely unexpected thing – he turned back as if coming into his father's arms, and he was just about to grasp him, darted sideways to the edge of the gutter and flung the red book into it

(Narayan: 40)

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Later on Balu turns into a youth and he asks for fifty percent share in his father's property. Poor fellow, he does not know that Margayya is going to lose the whole.

Dr. Pal and Margayya

Margayya's rise is to a very great extent due to the companionship of Dr. Pal who has been portrayed brilliantly and convincingly in the novel. Margayya encounters this dynamic figure while he is trying to reach the lotus in the middle of the pond. The mature author dexterously builds up his image:

He was a man of thirty or thereabouts, his face still youthful, with a three day stubble on his chin; a tank tall man, with sunken cheeks, and a crop of hair falling on his forehead and nape. He wore a pair of blue shorts and a baniyan

(Narayan: 51)

Living in extreme poverty, Dr. Pal is immensely interested in his job as a writer. He unhesitatingly shows Margayya the manuscript of his book entitled, 'Bed Life or the Science of Marital Happiness'. The book turns out to be a best seller. Money comes pouring in from all sides. Because of Dr. Pal, Margayya becomes one of the richest and most influential persons in Malgudi.

In the words of Harish Raizado:

The creation of Margayya, a tragic-comic and an ambitious financial expert is R.K Narayan's special contribution to Indo-Anglian

(Raizado: 116)

Graham Greene succinctly portrays him as 'the most engaging of Mr. Narayan's characters' (Narayan, Introduction to *The Financial Expert*: VII)

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Margayya's Paternal Dream Shattered

Margayya dreams of his son's advancement in life. As a matter of fact, he wanted Balu to grow into a well educated man probably going for higher studies to Europe or America. He had a dream about his son becoming a great government official or something of that kind.

By some foul means, Balu progressed steadily. He reached the fourth form. In spite of two unpleasant attempts, Balu has not cleared his S.S.L.C examination. Gradually he spoils himself. His lips turn black with cigarettes. The aggressive Balu deserts home. At last, the son is located in Madras. His discovery makes Margayya very happy. After marriage, Balu is allowed to live separately. Here Dr. Pal enters his life and extracts cash from time to time. Balu thinks that he is entitled to his own share in the property. The financial wizard's dreams are completely broken at the obnoxious behavior of his son. The assessment of Graham Greene is worth quoting. He says:

....Margayya's son Balu whose progress from charming childhood to spoilt frustrated manhood is perhaps the saddest episode Narayan has written.

(Greene: Introduction to *The Financial Expert*: VII)

Margayya's family life is unhappy and unpleasant. He accumulates more and more money and does not care at all for his wife who is morose, sullen and gloomy. Margayya is so much absorbed in earning and accumulating money that he does not even care for his own health.

Secret Life of Balu – Shocking Discovery

One evening Balu comes to Margayya's office smelling of liquor. He is in an aggressive mood. He vehemently demands his lawful share. Margayya fails to guess why Balu needs so much money. The same night he goes to Balu's house. He is shocked to find Balu away. Brinda and the little boy are all alone. Margayya shows utmost sympathy to Brinda and she bursts into tears. With great hesitation she tells him that he comes home everyday after two o'clock. She

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discloses to Margayya how Dr. Pal has spoiled her husband badly. He goes with Dr. Pal every evening to play cards, chew tobacco and even drink. They also enjoy the company of a lot of girls and come back from the spree after two o'clock in the night.

Brinda boldly unravels the real Dr. Pal her husband's most dependable companion:

Dr. Pal was his constant companion. They gathered in the house of a man who called himself a theatrical agent. She had learnt from their servant that there were a lot of girls also in the building. Pal had something or other to do with these people and picked Balu up in his car. They sat there continuously playing cards till mid night. They chewed tobacco and beatal leaves, sometimes they drank also, and men and women were very free, and all of them dropped wherever they sat and slept and became sick when they drank too much....

(Narayan: 171)

Dr. Paul Causing Harm

Margayya understands that Dr. Pal is the cause for the ruin of his son. At his persuasion Balu was asking for a partition in the family. The money-wizard is acutely disturbed. He is in fact torn between caution and an impossible rage. When he is about to leave his house, Dr. Pal's baby Austin arrives. His son got down from the car. Margayya could not check himself. He reached the car and dragged Dr. Pal out. He beat up Dr. Pal with one of his sandals. Somehow the so-called sociologist wriggled himself free, dashed into the car and was off.

Dr. Pal realizes his position quite late in the novel. The sad looking fellow has rightly assessed himself: "I am an academic man, and I should not have associated with a business man"
(Narayan: 174)

He turns an enemy and does incalculable harm to Margayya. He begins to see the depositors and tells them that their deposits are no more safe with Margayya. Soon people begin to crowd Margayya's office demanding their money back. The crowd is so big and restive that the police have to come to protect Margayya.

Margayya's Return to the Former Social Status

At the end of the novel Margayya reverts to the same point of social status. But he is determined and courageous. He has preserved cautiously his old knobby trunk along with its contents – a pen and an inkbottle. He is ready to restart his financial trade in the shade of the banyan tree facing the great building of the Cooperative Bank.

Dr. Pal may be said to be the author of Margayya's rise and fall. Dr. Pal's manuscript 'Bed Life' had opened for Margayya, the door of success. He had rendered all possible help in the deposit scheme. Later on, he ruins his deposit scheme. Finally Margayya is pushed back to the position where he had started his humble business. Thus Dr. Pal proves to be a tremendous force in the novel and he is instrumental in cutting Margayya to size. Like the giant displeased, he disastrously ruins the great lover of money. The movement of the novel may appear to be cyclic but it is parabolic. Margayya does not hesitate to accept life for what it is worth. With his age and experience, he is going to begin his life afresh. There is new vigour in him and the youngster with him is well revealed in the words of Margayya at the end of the novel.

Very well then, if you are not going, I am going on with it, as soon as I am able to leave this bed. Now get the youngster here. I will play with him, life has been too dull without him in this house.

(Narayan: 178)

Conclusion

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R.K. Narayan is noted for his keen awareness of the problems in society. Malgudi has characters of all professions and dispositions. Of the variety of personages in Malgudi, Graham Greene says,

Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi that is the thought that comes to me when I close a novel of Mr. Narayan's.

(Greene, Introduction to *The Financial Expert*: VII)

If Mulraj Anand is a social reformer as Raja Rao is concerned with the metaphysical problem, Narayan may be subtly be called the novelist of the individual man.

Two major problems of the modern man occupy his attention – money and sex. Dr. Pal, the so-called psychologist voices his feelings when he says to Margayya:

Money....and Sex... You need not look so shocked. It is the truth. Down with your shame and hypocritical self-deception, tell me truthfully, is there any moment of the day when you don't think of the one or the other.

(Narayan: 68)

Narayan's comic creativity has remained unimpaired through the decades. There are beautiful touches of lovely humour here and there in his novels. We are at once reminded of Graham Greene's well known comment in this regard:

A humour strange to our fiction, closer to Chekhov than to any English writer with the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness

(Greene, Introduction to *The Bachelor of Arts*: VII)

The Financial Expert deals with the life of Margayya, an ambitious middle class man who wants to make money. Obviously, Margayya is immeasurably obsessed by the power of

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money and he judges everything in terms of money. On being questioned by the priest if he will propitiate the goddess of wealth or goddess of knowledge, he gives vent to his mind:

A man whom the Goddess of Wealth favours need not worry much. He can buy all the knowledge he requires. He can attend to buy all the gifts that Goddess Saraswathi holds in her palm.

(Narayan: 55)

He becomes more and more interested in accumulating money. The ups and downs in his life make him a great thinker. He is Margayya or the path shower but the irony of fate is that, his lack of cool judgment brings him to the low point where he started his business of making money. Still he is willing to adjust himself and asks Balu to take his old profession in a fresh manner.

The Financial Expert is a well-knit and compact novel. Here the incidents move in a natural sequence and capture the reader's attention delightfully. Margayya's journey from one end of the novel to the other explains the narrative strategy of R.K. Narayan. Margayya's behavior at the end reminds the readers of his behavior in the opening pages of the book. His excessive love for money and immense fondness for his son give the novel somewhat a tragic look.

It is no denying a fact that Margayya ends exactly from where he had started. He has the wisdom to return to the banyan tree with his tin-box. It is only when he meets Dr. Pal that he quickly ascends the ladder of fame and fortune. He exploits Dr. Pal to reach his target. But the benefactor being insulted turns into a monster and brings him ruin.

In short and simple sentences, Margayya describes his predicament in the end of the novel. Although he has been reduced to the position from where he had started his money business, he willingly accepts what is in store for him. The son does not want to begin the business of his father again. Margayya himself decides to start the business of his good old days afresh.

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In conclusion, it can be pointed out that Narayan has created Margayya both as an individual and also a Universal hero. The reference to the mythical river the Sarayu creates an impression that Malgudi is not exactly a place in Mysore, but it is a microcosm of the Universe. The use of myth accounts for a common pattern in the novels of Narayan. The hero may be a Bachelor of Arts or an English Teacher or a Financial Expert, but he reflects the pattern of life. It is such a treatment of Narayan's heroes that makes Graham Greene say,

Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi that is the thought that comes to me when I close a novel of Mr. Narayan's.

(Greene, Introduction to *The Financial Expert*: VII)

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